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The Understood Author: A hermeneutical exploration of audiences' interpretation of the author as productive practices behind a text

Disertační práce

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Anotace (abstrakt)

Tento projekt staví na tradici výzkumu publik, který teoreticky a empiricky ustavil, že tvorba významu textu je výsledkem vyjednávání mezi textem a čtenářem, že publika mají potenciál odolávat tlaku médií a že jejich interpretace mediálních textů jsou ukotveny v daném historickém a kulturním kontextu. Cílem projektu je rozšířit tento záběr a zdůraznit, že je rovněž důležité zkoumat komu publika naslouchají, proč, a jak. Hlavní otázkou projektu tedy je, jak lidé chápou a vnímají autory, se kterými se setkávají při interpretaci textů faktických médií, a jak je toto chápání zpětně určující v interpretaci textů. Práce se hlásí k filozofické hermeneutice jako zastřešujícímu teoretickému i metodologickému rámci, na jehož základě proponuje koncept *pochopeného autora.* Tvrdí, že, pochopený autor je výsledkem interpretačního aktu, kde se autor, jako čtenářovo předporozumění setkává s autorem vepsaným do textu, který čtenářovu představu autora v daném momentu interpretace aktualizuje. V empirické části bylo provedeno 28 hloubkových osobních rozhovorů s Čechy narozenými mezi lety 1948-1963, s cílem zaznamenat jejich zkušenosti a jejich vztah k médiím a mediálním autorům. Cílem empirické části není zachytit, „co je autor", ale jak se daným autor stává. Z analýzy dat vyplývá, že chápání autora je ze strany publika dvouvrstvé. Je tvořeno esenciálními a potenciálními prvky, které jsou zde pojmenovány jako dimenze. Tyto jsou dále rozlišeny na dimenze produktivních postupů, které ukotvují chápání autora v daném kontextu, a dimenze realizace, v jejichž rámci je pochopený autor čtenáři hodnocen. Toto empirické ukotvení autora následně umožňuje zkoumat, jak se čtenáři k chápanému autorovi vztahují a jakou roli prostřednictvím tohoto porozumění autor ztělesňuje v interpretačním aktu. Z výzkumu vyplývá, že lidé si uvědomují přítomnost autora, ať už ve smyslu situování textu, způsobu vzniku textu, či jako institucionální struktury v pozadí. Tyto realizace autora jsou následně určující v každém jednotlivém setkání mezi textem a čtenářem, jsou zpětně vnášeny do interpretací textů, které kontextuálně ukotvují.

Abstract

This project builds on the tradition of audience research that theoretically and empirically established that meaning is formed in the negotiation between the text and the reader, that the audiences are agentic, their interpretation of media is contextual and situated, and that they have the potential to resist the media. It argues that it is important to explore people's attention to different sources: who is listening, to whom, and why – and asks how people understand the notion of an author that they encounter in the interpretation of factual media texts, and how this interpretation is brought back into the interpretative act. The thesis subscribes to philosophical hermeneutics as an overarching theoretical as well as methodological framework to devise a concept of *an understood author* that is a result of the interpretative act, where the author imagined and anticipated by the reader (in the form of prior knowledge and prejudices) is encountered and actualised by the author inscribed into the text. I carried out 28 in-depth face-to-face interviews with Czechs born between 1948-1963 to explore participants' experiences and relationship with media and media authors. Employing hermeneutical analysis, the focus is not to capture what is an author, but how it happened to be so. The analysis argues that the audiences' understanding of an author has two layers, constituted by essential and potential elements that are referred to here as dimensions. It distinguishes between dimensions of productive practices which constitute and perform the understanding of an author within a particular context, and dimensions of realisation that assess the understood author. It further provides an insight into how readers relate to the understood author and the role that understanding of the author embodies in the interpretative act. It shows that people are aware of an authorial presence behind a text, whether by acknowledging the situatedness of the text, the productive practices, or the institutional structures behind them. They reflect on these in their interpretation of the text, and their relation to the author is informed by this understanding.

Klíčová slova

autor, fakticky obsah, hlas, interpretace, porozumění, rozhovory, utváření smyslu, zprávy

Keywords

Audiences, author, interpretation, factual content, interviews, meaning making, news, understanding, understood author, voice

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem předkládanou práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedené prameny a literaturu.

Souhlasím s tím, aby práce byla zpřístupněna pro studijní a výzkumné účely.

V Londýně, dne 16. února 2024 Tereza Pavlíčková

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The saying goes that it takes a village to raise a child. And that is not so different from finishing a doctoral thesis. As much as it is understood as a demonstration of one person's ability to gain new knowledge and share it – to research and analyse, to employ academic rigour, it is also a performance of individual ownership where in fact collaboration is key and linearity where iteration is essential. My lengthy PhD journey felt often lonely, I was far away from any PhD office, or community, I was far away from my colleagues and my supervisor, and yet at the same time, I was very lucky to meet amazing, inspiring and supportive people all the way along. This thesis is deeply indebted to many great minds that I met on this journey, some briefly, others for most of its length, some intensively, and others in passing, yet all these encounters shaped me and my work on this project.

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And so, my name is on the cover, indicating that I am the sole author of this work, yet I am an intertextually situated being, and so all these people, their skills, abilities, their work, advice, comments, and efforts shaped who I am, how I understand the world, how I think, research and how I write. There are no solitary authors, but always intertextually situated ones.

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I would like to acknowledge that the ideas discussed in the theoretical sections were also explored in a couple of journal articles, namely:

Pavlíčková, T. (2013a) 'Bringing the Author Back into the Audience Research: A Hermeneutical Perspective on the Audience's Understanding of the Author'. *The Communication Review,* 16(1-2), pp.31-39.

Pavlíčková, T. (2013b) 'Trust in the author: Identity, expertise and reputation', *Communication Management Quaterly,* 8(26), pp. 33-50.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Situating the project within the field

An analysis of living cost crises in a national broadsheet, an interview with a famous actor promoting a new film on YouTube, a recommendation for a holiday destination on Instagram, a 'how to' video on TikTok, a voice critical of a government decision on Twitter, and a chat show on one of the television channels. The list could go on and on. People in the Czech Republic are surrounded by news and consume information from different media platforms and channels, from different sources. These media all mediate their social reality, and people decide to engage with different ones at different times for different types of information. They have to go to places for particular types of information and content, while they may be sceptical about other sources or frown on them no matter what. But why?

Audience research significantly shifted the attention paid by academic research to audiences and their role in the communication process. It theoretically and empirically anchored the argument that the meaning is formed in the negotiation between the text and the reader (Hall, 1980), that the audiences are agentic, their interpretation of media is contextual and situated, and that they have the potential to resist the media, as messages as well as organisations with their political and economic interests and agendas (e.g. Fiske, 1990; Ang, 1991; Jenkins, 1992; Morley, 1995; Schrøder, 2011; Livingstone and Das, 2013; Mathieu, 2016; Das, 2019; Zsubori, 2023). The research agenda focuses on the audiences' meaning-making and the role of media in people's everyday lives. It builds on the premise that the interpretative act is between the audiences and texts as messages or media as objects, and pushes aside the question of production, at least from the audience research agenda. The audience-centric interest in media is counterbalanced by the work of media and journalism studies, with its interests in creative industries, or the political economy, or enquiring into the practices of media production (Deuze, 2012), and the power structures of media organisations (Gillespie, 2010; van Dijck, 2013), the monopolisation of the media space and at the same time the omnipresence of media within our social reality and their increasing power to construct it (Zuboff, 2015; Couldry and Hepp, 2017), or critical analysis of content circulating in the media sphere (Enli, 2017).

And so, it seems that the concept of the author, of media, of production, was separated from the research into audiences' practices, but although the encoding and decoding processes are two independent structures of meaning-making (Hall, 1980), they nonetheless form one system of communication and mediation (Livingstone, 2009). With the increasing diversity of media as sources, technologies and organisations, the research agenda needs to better reflect the co-existence and mutual determination of these two processes. I build on the main premise of audience research that the interpretive act (the act of reading) is a contextually situated interplay between the text and the reader. Yet, I argue that by omitting the author from the encounter completely, the context of an act of reading is not being fully explored. In the light of the last decade's rising prominence of digital media – whether in people's everyday practices or in relation to academic interest and the focus of media research – the notion of an author (or producer and production for that matter) has entered the discourse of what can be called audience (or user) studies (Picone, 2017). This shift of focus, however, paradoxically leads to a rearticulation of

audiences' activity by focusing on the audience's productive practices as a form of activity and reception and hence subsequently neglecting the actual interpretative act of meaning-making (Kleut *et al.*, 2018).

The starting point of this thesis, thus, is an argument, that the audience research should not only enquire into how people interpret media messages differently (e.g. Katz and Liebes, 1990; Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington, 2007) or use media technologies in different ways (Rettberg, 2017; Burgess and Green, 2018), but also how people grant their attention to different sources in different measures and in different contexts. And that it does not only matter who is speaking (Foucault, 1979; Spivak, 1993), what they are saying, and how and why (Marwick and boyd, 2011; Abidin, 2020), but even more who is listening, to whom, and why, as Spivak (1993) argues. She questions the equal visibility of different voices, but from the audience research perspective, this question allows us to better understand audiences' diverse interpretative practices, which might indeed be also hybrids of reception and production. I argue that apart from looking at media and people's engagement with them in terms of Silverstone's double articulation (Livingstone, 2007), there is also a need to ask how people understand and engage with media as institutions, producers, and authors – and to enquire how the idea of an author is present in the interpretation, although the producer has no control over the meaning-making process. Exploring how people (audiences) perceive where a text (media content) comes from (who is the author) is crucial in understanding how those voices are being understood, not in terms of their intention over the meaning of the particular text, but rather as a foundation for our subsequent ability to question how audiences relate to these authors, why and how they find them relevant, place trust in them, or grant them authority or challenge it.

I started this research in 2012 and carried out my data collection – qualitative interviews – mainly in 2013, and much has changed since, including the media landscape in the Czech Republic as well as internationally. Some of the media practices that people refer to have become more marginalised (e.g. blogging), while others have become more prominent (e.g. microblogging and use of social media). And yet, the question at the heart of the project is still relevant, now more than ever in the increasingly mediated world (Picone, 2017). And although the early days of the internet led some scholars to conceptualise it as a world of anonymity (Turkle, 2011) and subsequently anticipated greater democratic potential of media (Bruns, 2003; Jenkins, 2006; Rosen, 2006) – decades later, when the internet is no longer conceptualised as a medium but rather as an infrastructure (Plantin *et al.*, 2018), a channel of communication used by different services, organisations and platforms, the perceived anonymity has been (for the most part) replaced by the perception of hyper personification (Marwick and boyd, 2011; Marwick and boyd, 2011).

1.2 The research question

With the focus on factual texts, media forms and genres that are not predominantly understood as artistic but rather as providing information and knowledge about our social reality, I am interested in how the author is interpreted by the audience and how this interpretation is brought back into the interpretative act. By author, I refer to the concept of the productive and creative presence behind a text and its embodiment and realisation in the interpretative act. The research interest is therefore 1) audiences' understanding of the notion of an author (as a productive and creative presence behind the text) and 2) its role in the process of interpretation and meaning-making. It focuses on the author as a

construct and its embodiment in the interpretative act. This leads to the articulation of the main research question and two subsequent questions.

How do people understand an author that they encounter in the interpretation of factual media texts?

- How is a reader's understanding of the author realised and contextually situated?
- What role is attributed to the understood author within an interpretative act?

It is not the author who is at the centre of this project, but the reader's understanding of it. The author here is understood as a signifier, and the interpretation and understanding of its presence, or absence, in a text by a reader is being questioned. Rather than the question 'who is the author' – asking about the reader's ability to (correctly) identify the author, the main research question seeks an answer to audiences' understanding of 'what is an author' – in other words, how is the concept of a productive agency behind a text perceived and understood, and subsequently realised in the interpretation and how the reader understands the text's situatedness. The two subsequent research questions build on the first one, and further unpack the audiences' understanding of the notion of an author. The first sub-question explores how the understanding of an author, as a concept, is further realised in the act of reading. It looks closer at the particularities of the context that are prominent in relation to the understanding of an author within the interpretative act. The second sub-question then seeks to explore the role of the understanding of an author in the interpretative act. It derives from the conceptualisation of the author as resulting from the text-reader encounter, but simultaneously informing the interpretation of the text. Prior to this, a theoretical concept of the author is devised, for use as an analytical tool in the data analysis and to further map the possible variations that the reader's understanding of an author can take on and be realised within.

1.3 The theoretical challenge of understanding the author

The main focal point of the thesis is the readers' understanding of the highly contested notion of the author, loaded with anticipations and expectations across different academic disciplines and fields, from one reader to another, and among authors themselves. Not only is the concept a synonym for a range of diverse and varied practices, but it is also an all-encompassing term for many of them. It is considered as a carrier of different functions, rights and responsibilities. The theoretical section of this thesis provides a necessary overview of the key debates around the notion of the author within the fields of media and communications and literary theory, to identify and anchor its diverse academic conceptualisation. These debates are mostly driven by questions around the production of the meaning and interests in the role of media in society. The author as a focus of this thesis is, however, situated within the audience-centric perspective, seeing it as an object rather than the subject of the empirical enquiry.

The thesis subscribes to philosophical hermeneutics as an overarching theoretical framework to conceptualise and formulate the approach to the notion of the author here. The starting point for the conceptualisation of the author that is brought into the empirical

enquiry is Hans-Georg Gadamer's ontological approach to understanding (Gadamer, 2004)[1]. His approach to understanding enables me to approach understanding as a form of becoming, encompassing the notion of flow and the ever in motion state of our knowledge about the world. Meaning is, thus, not fixed and final, but ever changing, being absorbed and informing our horizon of understanding, which is comprised of systems of values, beliefs and opinions – the tradition into which we are born and the prejudices that we form through our lives. The interpretative act is considered by Gadamer as a dialogue between the text and the reader. Situating this research at the intersection of the two frameworks – philosophical hermeneutics and the audience research tradition – I devise a theoretical concept of *an understood author* that is a result of the encounter between the text and the reader and their respective horizons, where the author inscribed into the text, and hence part of its horizon, is informed and actualised by the image of an anticipated author, the prior expectations, knowledge and prejudices brought into the encounter by the reader.

This conceptualisation enables the empirical enquiry to move beyond the attempt to (correctly) identify the author(s) behind a text and instead enriches the exploration of the interpretative act by contextualising it further, including the reader's perception and understanding of the author as a complex of productive and creative practices behind the text. The concept of the understood author allows us to theoretically address the premise that there is a fore-understanding of a text being 'from somewhere' created by 'someone(s) or something' and explore how is this understanding realised in the act of interpretation.

It raises another relevant question: why the use of the term author, which might for some stand for rather individual and personalised practices, rather than a complex of practices related to the production and creation of a media text. Every potential term comes with its own contestations, for instance producer, media, journalist or even authority. Being interested in the audiences' understandings of the author, the term author, although contested, was opted for as it enables sensitivity and recognition of a wide range of productive practices and appreciation of other more specific terms and notions, and thus can better accommodate the research aim to explore the diverse understandings of that author. The thesis, thus, adopts primarily the terminological triad of literary theory 'author-text-reader' but in places, it is supported with the more media anchored triad 'producer-content-audience'. Although not unproblematic, the former is prioritised as it also aligns with the research enquiry into the questions of meaning, interpretation and thus understanding. The literary theory terminology works better and provides a broader scope for the inclusion of diverse practices at both ends – production and reception. The same applies to the use of the concepts reader/audience which are here used interchangeably although I recognise the different conceptualisations behind these terms and their respective belonging within different scholarly fields.

1.4 Methodological choices and empirical challenges

This thesis is an exploration of people's perception of authors, of processes and practices behind the existence of media texts they encounter and consume as a part of

[1] In this thesis, there are references to scholarly works, whose year of first publication, often in a different language than English, differs from the year of publication of the edition used here. Gadamer's work *Truth and Method* was first published in German in 1960, and in English in 1975. The third English edition from 2004, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall was used for the references in this thesis.

their everyday, casual media practices. To fully grasp the people's various understandings of the author, the research is author-centred, yet not centred around particular media forms. The aim here is to explore how the definition of the author is articulated in the broader context of media consumption and use, and how and what dimensions of 'an author' are brought into the articulations and indeed, how this might vary across different readers. Media are omnipresent, argues Deuze (2012) and they increasingly construct our social reality (Couldry and Hepp, 2017) and thus we can consider as media anything that mediates any part of our social reality – money, language, etc. (Livingstone, 2009). In this thesis, the focus is on media as distributing and circulating information about social reality. Therefore, the research is particularly interested in authors of texts that are, by the readers, considered factual, non-fiction, and informative – that is to say, texts that are consumed to gain information – whether to inform themselves about the far unreachable world or their local community, about the political environment, about a new film just released or the life of their friends and family. In this context, the author might not be seen as a clue to the true meaning, but to the truth (about the world). The author is, thus, conceptualised as a complex of diverse productive practices behind a text and open to interpretations of the research participants.

In order to reach these diverse understandings, in-depth semi-structured interviews were chosen as the research method. I carried out twenty-eight in-depth face-to-face interviews with Czechs born between 1948 and 1963. I recruited the participants using purposive sampling and the snowball method. Audience research over the years has been somewhat discriminatory in its attention toward older media users, such as those at the end of their professional life, the recently retired, who are often not considered as early adopters of new technologies and therefore not of interest to research that is trying to keep up with the technological advancement of contemporary media cultures. I wanted to engage with this demographic that is often neglected by research, but I also wanted to show that their shared age does not translate into the homogeneity of their media uses and media experiences, drawing the easily offered causality between their age and their particular media uses and subsequently their understandings of the author. I used purposive sampling to gather a sample of users with very diverse media experiences, in terms of their interests, but also in terms of their media competencies, literacy and engagement with media. None of them was a media professional, but some of them used media to produce content, while others' media uses were very limited. Through this diversity, I aimed to collect diverse understandings of the author and provide a thick description (Geertz, 1973). Their diverse media uses drove the recruitment and also the actual data collection, as I used their experiences with media as opening questions to learn about them and to situate them for the analysis.

Some participants were (amateur) media producers themselves, having their blogs, or running websites, and inevitably during the interviews they also reflected on these experiences of being an author. As being an author is part of their horizon of understanding, it did inform some of their understandings of other authors. That does not skew the results of the analysis, as being an author, producing content and communicating meaning is an inherent part of being too, and for some people in a more prominent way than for others. The thesis, however, did not pay attention to their perception of self as an author, although some of them during the interviews used their own experiences as authors to relate to the work of others too.

Empirical situatedness of the project

The empirical research is situated in the Czech Republic and focuses on the people born between 1948 and 1963, who were 50-65 years old at the time of the data collection. The Czech Republic is a relatively small country with a complex history when considering the distribution and circulation of information due to its communist past, experiences with state censorship and a complicated relationship with media, where the (in)visibility of certain voices was perhaps more visible than elsewhere (Končelík, Orság and Večeřa, 2010; Bednařík, 2015; Kořínek, 2019). Being Czech myself I was interested in researching the experiences of people from a region that is, to a certain degree, peripheral in international research, yet I was also determined not to research those people through the lens and filter of regionality or belonging to a particular nation or culture only. These reasons also determined the choice of the age of the participants – their age carried a potential of them being able to reflect, or not, on a historical shift, to provide an insight into the (re)negotiation of the concept of an author. Their proximity in age did not mean that they had similar life trajectories and everyday life experiences. However, they share for most of their lives the same national and cultural space, exposed to the same media as technologies and organisations. Despite their various family backgrounds, they grew up in the social context of the same collective societal (communist) values that were disseminated through public institutions, e.g. media and education; mediated information that they inevitably interpreted differently. What they share is the historical and cultural context of the media landscape at their hands. Most of them were born before the introduction of television to the public and for public use in 1953 in Czechoslovakia, but the role that media have in their life, and the reasons for which they turn to media for information or to use it to disseminate their own content are diverse and variable. The demographic situatedness of the participants has an impact on the findings that are specific to them, they are a relevant context of the data collection, not least as they are informed by their prejudices and tradition. But it is first and foremost the choice of participants was a pragmatic one, driven by the need to contain the data collection and opt for a partly homogeneous group of respondents in order to enable diversity in relation to the media experiences and uses, as the aspiration of the research wass to unpack the complexities of understanding, rather than delve into these particularities.

The data were collected during January and November 2013, which unexpectedly happened to be a rather potent year for political change in the history of the Czech Republic. Firstly, in January 2013 the first direct presidential elections were held in the Czech Republic, which was surrounded by extensive public discussion on the relevance of such a vote, and the role of media in it but also it was simply a time of heavy political campaigning presented across a range of media (from audio-visual, electronic, print to outdoor). Later that year, in July the Prime Minster (Petr Nečas) was forced to resign due to connections to organised crime, which led to a month of political instability, and in August the government called on the parliament to initiate a vote of confidence, to reapprove its mandate. They did not receive it, and so early parliamentary elections were then called for October. New political organisations and parties entered the political spectrum, some of them with connections to particular media organisations. This again increased the public discussion about the media's role in political discussions, their role in agenda setting and their objectivity. All these events had a certain impact on the data collection by making the topic of parliamentary and presidential politics and its relationship to media more perhaps prominent than in some other historical moment, however, this is not the focal point of the data analysis and therefore it is important to reflect on it in terms of the context of the data rather than its content.

Critical reflection on the methodological choices

First, this empirical exploration goes beyond the readers' explicit imaginaries of authors and although it is informed by the general understanding – an idea of an author as a part of the reader's horizon – the research is particularly interested in the realisation of an author within the interpretative process. Such an empirical challenge poses a question of how to capture this moment of understanding. An ephemeral moment, as Gadamer (2004) himself argues, the horizon of the present is always in the past. As we make sense of our experience, we absorb it into our horizon and make it intelligible, so what the participants expressed is always already applied understanding.

As the purpose was not to test or categorise the authors, but to capture the diversity of understandings of an author and how these are being brought into the interpretative acts, the point for departure of the interviews with participants was reminiscence on the most recently encountered factual and/or informative text. That ensured that the text discussed was relevant and significant – enabling them to elaborate on the experience. They were not asked to reminisce on the notion of the author; their understandings were analysed from their reflections on those texts and experiences with their media production.

Second, this project's main aim is to critically reflect on and theoretically contribute to the discussion on the role of an author in the process of interpretation. The work sets out the conceptual ground for considering people's relationship with media as complex systems beyond textual codes, but also as productive practices to be understood, interpreted and related to. The theoretical framework of philosophical hermeneutics helps to conceptualise that people's experiences and relationships with media and media authors are fluid, always in motion and only true in the interpretative moment.

Therefore the empirical exploration is not driven by the question of what is an author – which might be more sensitive to historical changes and context, but rather the question "how it happened that it is so" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 4), which seeks to explore the conditions for the understanding of authors, and to provide the conceptual framework within which these can be studied in different historical movements. For this reason, the historical situatedness of the data collection, which might have relevance for the data analysis, is not so limiting for the empirical analysis outlined in this thesis, which is primarily interested in capturing those conditions for understandings of an author in relation to factual texts, rather than the actual embodiment of these understandings.

1.5 Outline of the structure

The structure of this thesis is divided into three main parts. The first explores the theoretical framework and sets out the main discussions and conceptualisations of understanding as interpretation, the audience and the author and proposes its own concept of an understood author located at the intersection of the three. The second part addresses the methodological choices and decisions that were made to devise a research design in which the theoretical concepts of the understood author can be empirically realised. The third analytical section is dedicated to the empirical investigation and the discussion of the participants' diverse understandings of an author.

Chapter 2 situates the project within the broader theoretical framework of philosophical hermeneutics and delves into the work of Gadamer (2004), as it builds on his ontological approach to understanding. It addresses and unpacks the key relevant concepts of

prejudice, tradition, horizon, familiarity, experience and becoming – that provide the theoretical foundation for the further theoretical but also methodological anchoring of the project.

Chapter 3, theoretically contextualises the main focus of this research project – people's understanding of media. It argues for the relevance of the audience-centric approach situating the thesis within the theoretical and empirical agenda of audience research, and maps the key debates around audiences that located the act of meaning-making into the text-reader encounter, and recognises audiences as agentic with the potential to resist media and media messages.

Chapters 4 and 5 unpack the multiple conceptualisations of the notion of the author. Chapter 4 is concerned with the author as a creative force, building on the work of literary theory and discussions within the field of creative industries to encompass the notion of the author as an individual force of genius with a strong authorial intention, to the understanding of authorship as a collaborative and complex cluster of different creative involvements.

Chapter 5 then shifts the attention towards the author within media studies and focuses on the author as a mediator of social reality through factual content. It discusses different conceptualisations of the role of media in society and diverse journalistic practices, as well as journalistic self-identification and self-reflexivity of the media.

The main purpose of Chapter 6, the final theoretical chapter, is to bring all the previous discussions together and provide a conceptualisation of the author from the audience-centric perspective. It devises a theoretical concept of the *understood author* that is a result of the text – reader encounter, and theoretically located at the intersection of audience research and philosophical hermeneutics, and subsequently brought into the empirical exploration.

Chapter 7 discusses the methodological choices behind the research design and data analysis. It situates the empirical exploration within the interpretative framework of philosophical hermeneutics, and it reflects on the highly iterative process employed in the analysis deriving from the notion of the hermeneutical circle, in which analysis and theory are interdependent and mutually informing each other. It also addresses the main methodological and analytical challenges.

The last four chapters present the analytical findings and discuss the commonalities as well as particularities of people's understanding of the author. It discusses the different elements of the understood author that are necessary for the author to be understood, but also those that enable the particular realisations of these understandings.

Chapter 8 captures the elementary characteristics of how and when audiences acknowledge an authorial presence in the text-reader encounter. It explores the essential elements, which are a voice, an intention, and an audience. Chapter 9 discusses dimensions of productive practices, considered as potential elements, within which the notion of the author is positioned. They are not value-laden but rather they capture the spectrum of possible realisations, reflecting the text's as well as the reader's context. Chapter 10 is concerned with the dimensions of realisation, within which the understanding of the author becomes relational. Through the understanding, the author is identified and can be assessed and related to. The final empirical Chapter 11 explores the role of the understood author in the interpretative act, and how the understanding of the author informs the interpretation of the text, and discusses that the perceived voice of the author is assessed against the reader's own voice.

SECTION I: UNDERSTANDING, AUDIENCES AND AUTHORS

> *For it would always remain an understanding of something as something. All understanding-as is an articulation of what is there, in that it looks-away-from, looks-at, sees-together-as. All of this can occupy the centre of an observation or can merely 'accompany' seeing, at its edge or in the background. Thus there is no doubt that, as an articulating reading of what is there, vision disregards much of what is there, so that for sight, it is simply not there anymore. So too expectations lead it to 'read in' what is not there at all. Let us also remember the tendency to invariance operative within vision itself, so that as far as possible one always sees things in the same way.*
>
> *Truth and Method, Gadamer (2004, p. 79)*

This project is theoretically underpinned by the key concepts of understanding, meaning and mediation: exploring and building a foundation not only for how they are conceptualised, but just as importantly exploring the relationship between these concepts. Therefore, at the heart of the theoretical discussion are these three questions: How is the production of meaning understood and where is it located? What is the relationship between production and consumption? and What role does mediation play, if any, in meaning-making?

It is important to clarify, that the three core concepts are not addressed here directly, they are not the focus of the theoretical exploration per se, rather they serve as an underlying logic for the identification and subsequent discussion of the particular theories and concepts instrumental for the enquiry at hand. They also help to identify the three main fields on which this work builds conceptually as well as empirically: *philosophical hermeneutics* which provides the main theoretical framework for the work and conceptualises the notion of understanding; the *audience research tradition* and *literary theory* that situate the project within the audience perspective, exploring and conceptualising the act of meaning making as an audience practice; and *journalism studies* and *media theory* concerned with the production of meaning as a form of mediation and content production, that provide the grounding for capturing the diversity of conceptualisations and definitions of an author.

These discussions will be outlined in detail in the four subsequent chapters, providing a critical overview of the key conceptualisations and questions within these fields as well as identifying gaps and/or overlaps where these discussions, often separated from each other, can be mutually enriching. This leads me to theoretically devise a concept named *the understood author* which sits at the intersections of these theories and concepts, and that is being brought into the empirical enquiry to be realised through the lived encounters between media and people, and embodied by participants' lived experiences and interpretations of media.

The theoretical section is, thus, divided into five chapters where the first, Chapter 2, discusses the broader theoretical framework building on Gadamer's work *Truth and Method* (2004). It situates the thesis within the ontological understanding of interpretation as a way of being and provides a theoretical (as well as methodological) framework within which understanding is conceptualised as a productive act rather than a reproductive one. The second, Chapter 3, theoretically contextualises the main focus of this research project – how audiences interpret media. It outlines key theoretical debates and empirical findings of the audience research tradition (among many others Morley, 1992; Livingstone, 2004; Schrøder, 2011) and cultural studies (e.g. Ang, 1991; Jenkins, 2007) which established that

the meaning of a text is not located only in the production process but also, just as importantly, in the process of consumption (Hall, 1980). It also considers the relevance of the writing of selected scholars from within the field of literary theory and in particular the work of the German literary theorists of the Constance School of Reception Aesthetics (Iser, 1974, 1978; Jauss, 1982) who directly build on the writing of Gadamer, in order to fully contextualise the reader-author relationship from the audience-centric perspective. This body of literature is at the heart of this project as it theoretically and empirically grants to audiences the potential of agency in the interpretative act, and recognises the contextual situatedness of interpretation. It also provides a conceptual understanding of the broadening approach to the notion of media from the audience-centric perspective, from text to be interpreted through media objects to be used, to infrastructures to be imagined. It thus carves an argument for the need to understand how people relate to media and how they read them as systems of productive practices and authority behind the text.

The two subsequent chapters (4 and 5) focus on the notion of an author, a concept theoretically encompassing the system of production (encoding), an arena of diverse practices of realisations of texts. Their aim is to outline the main narratives in relation to the concepts of the author and production, rather than to provide an exhaustive overview of all discussions on the author. Following that, a distinction between the production of fictional and factual texts, and its impact on the conceptualisation of the author, is considered too.

These two key considerations lead to the identification of three relevant bodies of literature concerned with the concept of the author – literary theory, creative industries (with a particular focus on film and television studies) and journalism studies. Debates within each of these fields provide multiple entry points and contesting perspectives on what constitutes an author, and its role in the processes of interpretation/production of factual/fictional content.

Firstly, Chapter 4 discusses how literary theory conceptualises the author and its role in the act of interpretation and then further explores conceptualisations of the author within creative industries. It problematises an author's relation to the text and explores questions of acknowledged and/or performed authorial presence, issues of attribution and appropriation, and explores the debates on the individual versus collective character of the author. Chapter 5 focuses on the notion of a journalist, as a particular embodiment of an author within the realm of the production of factual content; it discusses the roles that authors have in mediating social reality and the diverse practices of production through which these roles are executed and performed.

In the last theoretical chapter, Chapter 6, I devised and proposed the concept of *understood author* as the central concept brought further into the empirical exploration. It provides a bridge between the two processes – production and reception – while honouring their separation at the same time. The objective of the concept is to draw attention to the mutual interdependency of the production and reception processes and how they co-exist in the act of interpretation.

2 Understanding is always interpretation

The enquiry in this thesis is seen through the lens of philosophical hermeneutics and the work of the 20th century German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. Firstly, let me reiterate that my reading of Gadamer not only provides a theoretical framework and conceptualisation that is later brought into the analysis, but by being concerned with understanding, meaning and interpretation, it also underpins the methodological decisions and considerations that are further discussed in the subsequent section II.

Gadamer (2004), in his magnum opus *Truth and Method,* is concerned with hermeneutics – the theory and methodology of interpretation – as he enquires what it means to understand something. Can we arrive at the true meaning? Is there such a thing as a 'correct' understanding? He provides an extensive critique of the scholars of the Enlightenment and their emphasis on reason, rationality and the argument that truth can be uncovered by the implementation of the right methods. He opposes the positivist paradigm and builds on Husserl's phenomenological concept of 'life-world', the world we live in, embodied by our lived experiences which presuppose our understanding of it and therefore that world can never become an object for us, a separated reality.

Although Husserl's phenomenology fully acknowledges the subjectivity of understanding or that of the researcher (interpreter), it is built around the premise that the inner essence of phenomena can be bracketed out to be observed and studied (Rockmore, 2017); through the adoption of particular techniques, an observed phenomenon can be stripped of the debris of one's prejudices and subjectivity. This essentialism of Husserl's phenomenology is where Gadamer departs from him; philosophical hermeneutics stresses the shift from interpretation being an epistemological tool to interpretation being an ontological state of being and that understanding, and for that matter interpretation, cannot be free of our preconceptions, of prejudices and prior knowledge. Gadamer builds on Heidegger's (1996) premise that understanding is a mode of being (Dasein), the understanding in itself is the finitude and historicity of the being and of the experience of the world.

Gadamer (2004, p. 273) argues that not only do we bring prejudices that we have gathered throughout our life into the understanding as a form of fore-understanding, but that we are always born into a certain tradition, we perceive the world through explanations and certain given value systems that contribute to the formation of our fore-understanding. This is in no way to say that these are rigid sets of values and prejudices – on the contrary, they are far from rigid as I will explain further in this chapter. Rather, it is impossible to step out of these prejudices and tradition as he says: "[W]e are given no vantage point that would allow us to see these limits and conditions in themselves or to see ourselves 'from the outside' as limited and conditioned in this way." (Gadamer, 2004, p. 83)

Reading Gadamer, it is clear that he does not argue that these have to be accepted and fully embraced values and meanings, but that they are part of our social reality and thus even an act of opposition or detachment is an act of response to them, albeit in the form of rejection, for example. The given is, thus, not understood as fixed and finite, but rather as omnipresent although constantly in motion and changeable. It is transforming precisely because interpretation is a state of being, and thus a constant source of new inputs contributing to the changing of understanding. Gadamer (2004, pp. 302–305) uses the metaphor of a horizon, which not only allows us to understand that the view (the horizon) changes based on the position from which we are looking, but also reflects on the strength or intensity of the view. That is to say with every new encounter, and every new

interpretation, the horizon changes and shifts, and the point of view does too. Thus, understanding is always contextual, always situated.

In this chapter, I will therefore discuss the theoretical framework, building on my reading of Gadamer's work. I will first outline the logic behind the ontological character of the theory and how Gadamer sees understanding as a response to the unknown, and as one's way to make that which is alien or unknown into something *familiar* and understandable; then I elaborate in further detail on the notions of *prejudice, tradition* and *horizon* as constituting the familiar. I will then focus on the notion of *application* that Gadamer considers as fundamental for understanding, a concept that enables us to conceptualise understanding as the *becoming* of a meaning rather than its acquisition. In the fourth section, I will conclude with a discussion of the concept of *experience*, which is the final core concept significant for the notion of the familiar and the act of understanding as such. Lastly, I will touch on the relevance of reading Gadamer for the study of the author in the act of interpretation, which will be further built on in Chapter 6.

2.1 Understanding – encompassing the unfamiliar

The known, for Gadamer (2004), means the taken for granted, the familiar, something that one does not really notice precisely because it is known. It is the unfamiliar, the alien, that makes itself visible to us as the unexpected, the new, or the unknown. The familiar, thus, fits into the pre-existing patterns of understanding, and it is the unfamiliar that needs to be understood. This means that only the unknown can be a prerequisite for understanding. How do we understand that which is unfamiliar? Yet, is what is known really and always already known? Is it not always a little bit different each time, and likewise with the unknown?

Philosophical hermeneutics does not refer to the known as something external, objective and stable, rather, it is internal and is the sum of what we, as interpretative beings, have accumulated, collected and formed within our horizons, informing our expectations and anticipations, forming our fore-understanding within which every unknown (as well as known) is interpreted and understood anew at any given moment. The known is thus always changing, always different from the moment of understanding that preceded it.

> "[T]he hermeneutical has to do with bridging the gap between the familiar world in which we stand and the strange meaning that resists assimilation into the horizon of our world. It is vitally important to recognize that the hermeneutical phenomenon encompasses both the alien that we strive to understand and the familiar world that we already understand." (Gadamer, 1977, p. xii)

An understanding is prompted by being addressed by something, by the unknown which interrupts the expected. The need to appropriate the unfamiliar means that we enter into conversation (and this can be understood symbolically) with the other (this can be a text, event, or situation) to understand it and their horizon, as only then do the other's ideas become intelligible. This does not imply we must accept it and be in agreement (Gadamer, 2004, p. 302), but rather it refers to engaging in the conversation and wanting to know. The alien becomes familiar and understood through the process of interpretation. Similarly, when studying media audiences and how they resist, or not, the ideological messages circulated by mainstream media, Morley (1992) concludes that acceptance or rejection of a message (the ideology encoded into the media text) cannot be considered on its own, but

must be juxtaposed with other dimensions such as relevance. For example, a message might not be listened to in the first place if not understood as relevant or of interest to the reader (viewer).

This conceptualisation means that prior knowledge is the only means of evaluation as well as the key to understanding. Importantly, Gadamer (2004) distinguishes between the individual, subjective *prejudices* formed by one's own lived experience, and prior interpretations; and the equally subjective, but collective *tradition*, an ensemble of socially shared prejudices, that are deeply rooted in history. Tradition and prejudices form the fundamental understanding of what the world and social reality are; the tradition is knowledge into which we are born, and within which one's prejudices and understanding of the world are being formed. This resonates with the rising academic as well as social awareness and discussion on unconscious bias (Greenwald and Banaji, 1995), which views people's understanding of their social reality as biased in favour of the values and perceptions that dominate within their social context (cultural, social or geographical). Therefore, we can relate to these two concepts of tradition and prejudice that are omnipresent to all our understanding, not as a rigid framework, but as fluid concepts, always in motion, that are being constantly reshaped by our being within social reality.

2.2 Tradition, prejudice and horizon

To explore how understanding is achieved while addressing our situatedness within our social reality that cannot be bypassed, Gadamer (2004, pp. 271–273) introduces the concepts of prejudice and tradition. He acquits these two concepts of their negative connotations. For him, understanding is historically situated and is always related to tradition, which is the previous knowledge existing within a particular community or society. The prejudices brought into the process of interpretation refer to issues and interests that have originated in, and developed within, the historical tradition to which one belongs, rather than being one's individual preoccupations.

Importantly, the fore-understanding, in the form of prejudice and tradition, is continuously actualised and informed through each and every new interpretative act and encounter, forming a horizon (of expectations) from within which one understands the world and oneself, a horizon that "is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further." (Gadamer, 2004, p. 238). And thus opposition, refusal and challenges to ideas are possible, but always only from within one's own tradition to start with (Warnke, 1987, p. 102).

Prejudice refers to subjective knowledge and understanding; for Gadamer (2004, p. 273), it is one's prior knowledge of a particular subject, situation, text or event; it is the personal view, an assumption, a judgement. Yet, this judgement "is rendered before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined" (ibid. 2004, p. 273). It is a projection, a particular expectation that is being, as Gadamer argues, "constantly revised in terms of what emerges as [we enter] into the meaning" (ibid. 2004, p. 269). The judgement is thus not born from an examination, an assessment and/or a close reading, but rather from expectations, an assessment of the known and probable. Prejudice is thus very dynamic, continuously changing and being updated through each act of reading as knowledge is expanded and new prejudices form. Thus, prejudice makes the unknown tangible.

Tradition, then, refers to the broader context, what we are born into, what is being passed onto us from generation to generation, the collective taken for granted of how the world works. It is the fundamental framework of social order within which we operate as

people. We might not necessarily accept it as given – we are able to question it, but always from within the tradition itself. It cannot be looked at or examined from the outside, otherwise, it would be unknown.

> "Rather, we are always situated within traditions, and this is no objectifying process- i.e., we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us, a model or exemplar, a kind of cognizance that our later historical judgment would hardly regard as a kind of knowledge but as the most ingenious affinity with tradition." (Gadamer, 2004, p. 238)

Considering social beings as part of a particular tradition with its interpretations and fore-understanding means that one's understanding always transcends one's subjective prejudices. So, the seemingly subjective character of interpretation is always also a negotiation and mediation between the past and the present, between our subjectivity and the "commonality that binds us to the tradition." (Gadamer, 2004, p. 293). Yet, when considering the notion of tradition, it is also important to recognise that our being within the tradition is also interpretative and therefore what constitutes tradition is far from being rigid and permanent: "rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves." (ibid., 293).

These two concepts – tradition and prejudice – form what Gadamer understands as a *horizon*, which is continually in the process of being formed, and at the same time the horizon informs our prejudices and actualises our tradition in each and every act of understanding. The notion of horizon is also deeply temporal, yet omnipresent, as it "represent[s] that beyond which it is impossible to see" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 305), it is something that moves with us, it is inherent to us, yet as a horizon it hints towards advancement, to move forward. Understanding is therefore always located within a particular horizon, yet this horizon is always and only specific for that given moment as it is constantly in motion, being actualised through the same act of understanding itself.

So, starting from our prejudice, questions are a way to move and expand the horizon and engage in the encounter; we cannot understand if we do not take part in what Gadamer (2004, pp. 360–361) understands as a dialogue; an act of understanding as we engage, listen, and question. Through questioning, we suspend our prejudice and open up possibilities as we experience the other's claim to truth (ibid. 2004, p. 299). Here, the dichotomy of known/unknown yet again reveals itself as problematic as in order to be able to ask questions, there has to be the Cartesian realisation of knowing that one does not know. Yet, the question inevitably poses a limitation on appropriating the alien as the question is asked from the position of known.

A dialogue is a conversation where the horizon of the interpreter meets the horizon of the text. It draws on the classic idea of the hermeneutical circle, where a reader enters the process of reading with certain prejudices, within their horizon of understanding, to interpret and understand the text. Furthermore, the reading of each particular part of the text influences and determines an understanding of the text as a whole, which subsequently influences an understanding of a specific part of the text. Warnke summarizes the process of understanding, as "[w]e do not achieve knowledge about the texts, works or actions with which we are concerned; we simply connect them to our own circumstances" (1987, p. 75). The meaning is thus always located at the moment, not as a universal entity.

2.3 Criticism of philosophical hermeneutics

The notion of tradition can seem restrictive and conservative, not allowing for a (radical) change, which is a criticism opposite to the one of radical subjectivism that arises in relation to the notion of prejudice. In both cases, we can argue that it is the interplay of these two that protects the understanding from these two extremes. Yet, going forward, also with the focus on the next chapter that builds on cultural studies (Chapter 3) it is relevant to address the former rebuke that comes mainly from Jürgen Habermas (Mendelson, 1979), who disagrees with Gadamer for lacking a critical stance on the concept of tradition. They disagree mainly in their understanding of dialogue, which is for Gadamer the main tool of understanding. Gadamer sees an agreement, or an openness toward it, as a primary characteristic of a dialogue or a conversation, while Habermas cautions that the dialogue (or the consensus) may be distorted.

> "[His] claim is that because hermeneutics lacks a 'reference system', that is, a comprehensive theory of society, it may remain on the surface level and fail to penetrate to the deeper level at which the ideological distortion involved in the talk of freedom, equality and property appears." (Warnke, 1987, p. 116)

Habermas arrives at the interpretative encounter from a position of suspicion, not looking to understand what is being said, but what is behind, and what is disguised behind what is being said. Gadamer, on the contrary, presupposes agreement when considering understanding, this agreement for him being listening, one's entering to a conversation to understand, to appropriate the unfamiliar, not necessarily to agree in the literal sense. Paddy Scannell (1998) calls the first 'a being-in-doubt' a philosophy of consciousness and the latter 'the undoubtedness of being'.

This metaphor helps to clarify Habermas' trust in the power of reason (Warnke, 1987; Scannell, 1998; Dostal, 2002; Lawn, 2006), of which Gadamer was highly critical. It would imply that one can help liberate oneself from subordination to tradition, to escape from their prejudices in order to go beyond what we understand; that there is a method, which Habermas believes is Critical theory, to unpick the disguised meaning. From the Gadamerian perspective, this suspicion is, however, our prejudice – and what we interpret as deeper truth, is still our understanding, our application. Further recalling the concept of the fusion of horizons, we can see that one is not imprisoned in an unchanging rigid tradition; on the other hand, tradition is continually changing, precisely because of the fusions of horizons. The past and present are therefore constantly fused and change in society is possible and indeed inevitable because of what Gadamer calls 'historically effected consciousness', the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 305).

The notion of a dialogue helps to address this problem. We cannot understand, or interpret without engaging – entering into a dialogue. Whether we are entering it with faith or suspicion is not a methodological question, but yet again a question of prejudice. But as Weinsheimer argues "if there is to be a dialogue, the relationship must be reciprocal; each must belong to the other, and each prepares to listen to what the other says as something addressed to him" (1985, p. 205). Although we ask questions from within our tradition that we cannot leave behind, we are able to ask behind what is being said, inquiring into its horizon, which is broader than what is being said and "includes other possible answers" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 363).

2.4 Becoming and application

The metaphor of the horizon allows us to further encapsulate the notion of understanding as not only a viewpoint, to which we arrive or an endpoint of acquiring that knowledge, but rather as a process. Gadamer is much more interested in 'how' than 'what', not least because he does not consider understanding as the result, but rather as a productive moment.

Following the previously explored notion of familiar/alien, Gadamer (2004, p. 308) considers understanding not only to be always an interpretation but also an application. As already stated, understanding is by default oriented towards the unknown. We are addressed by the difference, by the alien, and as much as we always understand ourselves through our differences with others, at the same time through the act of interpretation we absorb the alien into our horizons and make it ours. Therefore, the position from which we understand the world is not something we adopted nor a choice, rather it is the horizon formed by our tradition and prejudice. It is also not a result or a destination, but a productive moment, in motion as it is constantly actualised as we expand that horizon through encounters with the unknown.

But the seemingly exciting dichotomy of known/unfamiliar is also problematic. In one way all outside of us is unknown, as we understand ourselves through this differentiation, but at the same time, the notion of the unknown is not that straightforward, and what is considered unknown is in other senses always only known. Gadamer asks: "How can we inquire into anything that one does not already know?" (2004, p. 339) And so our understanding of ourselves and our social reality is derived from the known, which we use to identify the unknown but at the same time to appropriate it, as the known draws into itself everything that is outside it.

The notion of application further emphasises that understanding is a productive moment. Stewart and Zediker further elaborate that "Understanding is an ontological dynamic, the human's way of being-in-the-world, and understanding or interpretation is *always already a practice."* (2000, p. 6 emphasis in original). The process of understanding does not result in uncovering the meaning, but in the transformation of our horizon. We are thus part of the meaning, which is temporally located as well as in a state of indeterminacy (Gadamer, 2004, p. 335). And therefore, a meaning is not in fact acquired, but the understanding is becoming a meaning.

The concept of becoming is an English translation of the German term *Bildung*. Weinsheimer and Marshall, the translators of *Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 2004), explain in the translators' preface that it can be translated as formation or cultivation (2004, p. xii). This concept enables Gadamer to address that in the process of understanding it is the becoming that is more important than the result, the final meaning. In the moment of understanding the horizon changes and, so does the understanding itself. Becoming as a process does not have a final destination, it has no goal outside of itself.

The understanding realises itself in the process and therefore understanding is not only an interpretation but also an application, in which the understanding realises itself. Yet again, we work with the notion of in-between, in between the history and present. Becoming [*Bildung*] reflects and contains the historical knowledge and at the same time its actualisation, that "which we take to be self-evident, contain a wealth of history" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 9). Gadamer illustrates it in words like art, the creative, genius or experience, but this can be applied to any other taken-for-granted notions like the author or media production. "Everything that is received is absorbed, but in Bildung what is absorbed is not

like a means that has lost its function. Rather, in acquired Bildung nothing disappears, but everything is preserved." (Gadamer, 2004, p. 10)

So, the given, the taken for granted is in constant motion and so is the known. The unknown, the alien is and can be only accessed from within the known and therefore it is never fully unknown, as the known is instantly applied, forming the foreground for the understanding. The hermeneutical inquiry goes beyond the immediate experience and uncovers the realm of thoughts and memory (the realm of prejudices that last, for whatever particular significance) and, thus, informs the understanding. This becoming – the cultivation, *Bildung* – is what Gadamer argues human sciences should be studied through; not what phenomena are, but how they come to be, and how are they understood (2004, p. 4). The potential for (social) change arises from the dialogue between ourselves and our tradition.

2.5 Experience

Given that our understanding is situated within the tradition, the life-world, the prejudice, and our lived experience, it is important to further address the concept of an experience itself: how is it conceptualised by Gadamer, and how can we build on it? Gadamer distinguishes between two different notions of experience, not least as these are recognised as different notions in German (or Czech for that matter too).

These are conceptually two different processes of knowledge acquisition, and although Gadamer (2004) does not necessarily provide a very elaborate insight into these two concepts, they underlie how he considers and conceptualises understanding as such. He distinguishes between the experience (*Erfahrung*) as knowledge gathered which contributes to and forms the fore-understanding (Gadamer, 2004, p. 217), and experience (*Erlebnis*) as living through something, the moment of being there and witnessing (ibid. 2004, p. 53). Weinsheimer (1985) further explains the difference that while the former can be also gathered from others, the latter is always first-hand, adding "Erlebnis signifies not only the process of acquisition, moreover, but also the residual content of what is so acquired – that is, both the immediacy of the origin of an experience and its lasting significance." (1985, pp. 86–87).

The experience as *Erfahrung* is not understood as "the discovery of facts, but the peculiar fusion of memory and expectations into a whole." (Gadamer, 2004, p. 217) Therefore, the present is always past, as we make sense of the experience, we absorb it into our horizon and make it familiar, make it intelligible, but through understanding, it also becomes a memory.

Gadamer (2004, p. 350) sees the experience as something unexpected that disrupts the everyday, the uneventful. With a lack of concepts to mediate that experience, it is constituted in memory and through reflection, "it takes time to determine the meaning of an experience because this meaning is not exhausted by what was initially given, what it initially meant." (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 88). The exceptional, unexpected, and the unfamiliar are absorbed into the everyday, ordinary, and familiar, they are understood and immersed into the horizon. Moreover, through the interrogation of the exceptional and exploration of the unknown, a new horizon is acquired. In these instances, the mechanics of the fore-understanding can be observed, as the expectations, the known in the unknown, are called upon and the taken for granted reveals itself.

The idea of the hermeneutical circle that threads through Gadamer's conceptualisation of experience is central to this too – the unfamiliar is absorbed into the familiar, but also

the familiar is reconfirmed through the unfamiliar. The familiar gets itself reconfirmed through the next experience, which is not to be understood as repetition, as experience is never the same (Gadamer, 2004, p. 348), but rather recognition – "to know what we have always known as if we had never really known it before" (Weinsheimer, 1985, pp. 108–109).

Gadamer argues that we cannot have the same experience twice (2004, p. 348), because the horizon is being continuously actualised. The hermeneutical conceptualisation, thus, differs from the inductive experiences as we can see employed for example in Schutz (1962), who argues that we build concepts and reference points for our understanding through re-affirmative experiences that confirm our pre-existing knowledge. For Gadamer, the new experience is inevitably different by including the confirmation. Because experience is something that disrupts the expected, it always involves an element of new knowledge. It also involves a certain degree of disappointment and disconfirmation as Weinsheimer puts it: "We expect regularity and experience irregularity; we expect predictability and experience unpredictability (…) the end of experience consists not in knowledge but in experience itself." (1985, p. 204).

It is *Erlebnis*, that Gadamer is primarily concerned with, and the notion of the immediacy of the experience as we come to understanding. It is interesting to consider how this distinction of different acquisitions translates into the contemporary context, where for many people, the lived experiences are, however, increasingly more and more mediated as the various domains of everyday life fuse with media and are lived through media (Deuze, 2012). Couldry and Hepp (2017) argue that the actual construction of social reality is mediated. How do we understand experience in the mediated world? Schutz starts from the phenomenological tradition, focusing on the life-world, as a semantic universe, which is the "quintessence of a reality that is lived and experienced and endured" (Schutz and Luckmann, 1989, p. 1). From this perspective, the media world being immanent in our life world is taken for granted. It encompasses the everyday reality experienced through "mediated transitions" (Volkmer and Deffner, 2009, p. 220). For Gadamer (2004) experience as *Erlebnis* cannot be mediated, cannot be presumed, or passed on by someone else, as a form of hearsay. It is one's own lived experience, and that is what defines it, the immediacy and the liveliness.

2.6 Gadamer and the concept of an author

Following the hitherto outlined Gadamer's (2004) conceptualisation of understanding, it is clear that he rejects the notion of interpretation as a set of methods employed to uncover the true meaning, and therefore also rejects the relevance of the author's intention, as for traditional hermeneutics the true meaning often equates with the author's intention. He claims that:

> "What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships. Normative concepts such as the author's meaning or the original reader's understanding in fact represent only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding." (Gadamer, 2004, p. 397)

The author is not present in the act of reading, therefore the text talks for itself and the text has its own horizon that is brought into the encounter. The truth of the text is in the

moment, in the experience, as the two horizons – that of the reader and that of the text – fuse.

Saying that, how do we understand the notion of an author within the framework of philosophical hermeneutics, and why should it even matter? By considering conversation as a principal act of communication, Gadamer (2004, pp. 387–389) acknowledges the importance of the presence of a communication partner, of a speaker, to whom he draws attention. He is interested in the actual moment of encounter between the two, the process of interpretation – the understanding.

The demise of the authorial intention in the process of meaning-making refuses to acknowledge the subjectivity of the author. Gadamer, however, does acknowledge the author in some way when he argues that:

> "When we try to understand a text, we do not try to transpose ourselves into the author's mind but, if one wants to use this terminology, we try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he has formed his views. But this simply means that we try to understand how what he is saying could be right. (…) The task of hermeneutics is to clarify this miracle of understanding, which is not a mysterious communion of souls, but sharing in a common meaning." (Gadamer, 2004, p. 292)

He is not providing a conceptualisation of the author itself, but a broad framework that informs the thinking about the concept and its relevance. The question is not whether the author is important for interpretation and meaning-making, but rather how can we think about the author as a part of the interpretative act.

Building on the above outlined concepts we can argue that the definition of the author has no essence, it is a concept, as any other, to be understood and interpreted, and that understanding of it changes with time and context. Yet, it belongs to the tradition that shaped and moulded it to its complex and multiple realisations of the present and those of the future. Gadamer talks about the application as an inherent part of understanding. I argue that the understanding of the author is relational, we relate it to ourselves, and we appropriate it within our horizon. As unpacked earlier, the familiar and alien are not a dichotomy, but rather continuously intertwined processes of experiencing. Understanding can only occur by encountering something else, unknown, as we are addressed by something that is distinct from the known.

The notion of being addressed, not only of being talked at but to actually engage in the conversation, is fundamental to how Gadamer understands meaning-making. Its important pre-condition is a willingness to communicate, a willingness to have a dialogue, to understand. In audience research, similar observations have been made by scholars who empirically employ Hall's (1980) model of encoding/decoding and realised that the act of decoding, of interpretation is only meaningful and relevant when the encounter between the text and the reader is meaningful and of relevance (Morley, 1992).

Gadamer (2004) refers to this willingness to have a conversation as an agreement. But a more appropriate concept might be listening – as in the intention to engage (Lacey, 2013, p. 15). The voice is not only heard, it is listened to. Lacey argues that "listening involves a fundamental openness towards others, listening and the action of an audience is an act that is both political and 'fundamentally ethical'" (2013, p. 14). Here she builds on Gadamer and his notion of dialogue as a fundamental condition of human relationships. Listening implies that what is being said is being considered, and might not be agreed upon but is examined, scrutinised, and contemplated not only as a truth but as an experience, it is becoming of truth, becoming of knowledge, becoming of experience. The concept of listening inevitably acknowledges the presence of a voice.

3 Audiences as a location of meaning rather than the destination

The second theoretical chapter situates the thesis within the discussions and empirical works of the audience and reception research tradition to which it aims to contribute. The audience-centric research agenda of media studies started with the study of people's interpretation of media as messages (Morley, 1980), highlighting the diverse roles of media in people's everyday lives (Ang, 1985; Jenkins, 1992), and expanding its inquiry into the role of media in people's identity construction (Cover, 2012), their uses for self-expression (Bruns, 2008a; De Ridder and Van Bauwel, 2013) or for civic duty (Deuze, Bruns and Neuberger, 2007) among others. The interest of audience research has evolved into a broad and interdisciplinary field of diverse approaches that explore the complexity of contemporary media and their entwining with everyday life practices from the perspective of people who engage with them. As the media increasingly become infrastructures for other social institutions, the need to explore how people navigate and understand these complex media infrastructures that mediate significant parts of their social reality (Bucher, 2017) increases too. Mapping the key theoretical and empirical debates of audience research, this chapter carves out an argument for the study of people's understanding of the media as actors of mediation, and thus expanding the exploration of people's engagement with media beyond their semantic, technological or material dimension.

The early audience research agenda is articulated in opposition to research into media effects, asking the question of what people do with media; it is subsequently explored as a potential for resistance, exploring the power relations between the producers and readers. The ever-changing media environment also brings ever-changing practices of audiences' media consumption and use, resulting from the uses of new media technologies (social media, new media), in relation to different geographies or other demographic characteristics of audiences, as well as different engagement with media use. The extensive empirical research and theoretical contributions of the field discussed in this chapter reaffirms that the audiences are active and critical, and therefore have the potential for resistance and that they perceive the media as complex entities. Yet, the particular roles and meanings of media are not arbitrary nor are they inherent to the medium, but rather they are negotiated in the encounter between the media users and the medium (whether as a message, object, or an infrastructure).

Although it establishes that different meanings can be actualised in a text by different people and that this is due to cultural and social competencies (Morley, 1992), audience research is short in providing a theoretical framework for how these competencies are brought into interpretation vis-à-vis the media text, and how and where to locate this potential of agency and resistance.

Therefore, the chapter starts with a discussion of the writing of literary theorists, in particular the Constance School of Reception Aesthetics (Iser, 1974, 1978; Jauss, 1982). Building on their reading of Gadamer (2004), they are concerned with the readers and their role in the act of interpretation, challenging the widespread approach of literary theory locating the meaning of literary works in the author's intention and considering the literary critic as a guarantor and guardian of the true meaning. Their work, although only theoretical, lacking empirical application, provides valuable concepts for theorising the act of interpretation and thus a conceptual framework to understand how (and where) the audiences' agency can be activated and realised (see Ytre-Arne and Das, 2021 for discussion of the concept of prospecting). The underlying notion that the meaning making process is

located in the text(media)-reader(audience) encounter, which is contextually determined and separate from the process of production of the text (Hall, 1980) is what the two theoretical approaches (audience research and philosophical hermeneutics) have in common.

As this project is interested in the concept of the author and its understanding by the audiences, the chapter also focuses on the rare recognitions or theorising of the author within audience research. However, the need to conceptually recognise the audiences shifted the attention away from the notion of an author, regarding it as less significant for the audience-centric research agendas. The notion of the author within the audience studies is primarily focused on the audiences as producers and conceptualises different realisations of media production by media users. Therefore, the concept of an author is mainly addressed in the subsequent Chapters 4 and 5 on the different conceptualisations of the author. However, in the last part of this chapter, I will explore the potential of the double articulation (Livingstone, 2007) to interrogate the meanings of media in people's everyday lives, not only as material objects but also as cultural institutions and practices, as we can see growing interest in people's understanding of different media infrastructures (Nagy and Neff, 2015; Bucher, 2017; Lomborg and Kapsch, 2020).

3.1 Literary theory – the location of meaning making

The reading of philosophical hermeneutics and its opposition to the author's intention in the act of reading is particularly influential for scholars of literary theory from the Constance School of Reception Aesthetics, namely Wolfgang Iser and Robert Hans Jauss. They are concerned with the text-reader encounter as a location of meaning-making. Although the discussion and explorations are theoretical, their works (Iser, 1974, 1978; Jauss, 1982) provide a valuable conceptualisation of the reader's agentic potential created by the textual structure and realised by the reader through the act of reading. The focus on the interplay between the text and its reader protects the conceptualisation of interpretation from promoting readers' psychologies as clues to particular interpretations.

The root of the theories of reading and readership are in structuralism and phenomenology, but primarily in philosophical hermeneutics. While hermeneutics as such is simply interested in how texts are interpreted (originally religious texts) to uncover their true meaning (c.f. Schleiermacher, 1998; Schmidt, 2016), philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2004) not only departs from this interest but significantly challenges the idea of the existence of procedures that would enable one to uncover what the author intended.

Literary theory offers various contested theoretical concepts of readers that are seen as a place of realisation of the meaning, but also as a potential of the text. However, unlike in media studies, the concept of the reader remains theoretical and is not empirically evidenced. The reader is considered a function of the text, a 'virtual place' where different codes can be localised, a node of intertextuality more than intersubjectivity (Freund, 1987). It is termed and conceptualised differently by different authors – a model reader (Eco, 1979), an ideal reader (Culler, 1975), a super reader (Riffaterre, 1966), or an implied reader (Iser, 1974). Fish (1980) refers to interpretative communities, emphasising the collectivity and sociality of the interpretative act, as communities share and form common norms and reading strategies. And Naumann (1976; cited in Morley, 1992, p. 120) distinguishes between *the recipient* – an actual historical reader, *the addressee* – an author's conception, and *the reader* – a formal textual entity.

The key features as well as differences between those literary concepts of the reader are further described in Figure 1. As distinct theoretical constructs, these concepts offer various understandings of the role of the reader and the text in the process of interpretation, and the reader's positioning inside or outside of the text, and therefore differing understandings of who is in control of whom. As Culler puts it: "A story of the reader structuring the text easily becomes a story of the text provoking certain responses and actively controlling the reader" (Culler, 2007, p. 70). In audience studies' discourse, we can also find the notion of the reader belonging to texts (Moores, 1993), but always as a supplement to the notion of 'a real reader'. For example, Ang (1991) distinguishes between the 'television audience' as a discursive construct and the social world of the actual audience; those readers are always related to empirically tested audiences.

CONCEPT	KEY FEATURES
MODEL READER Umberto Eco (1979, 1984)	• a reader inside of the text • creation of the author – an assumed, potential reader with the ability to deal interpretatively with the text as the author does • the text sets the boundaries of possible interpretations and controls the reader
SUPER-READER Paul Riffaterre (1966)	• a reader outside of the text • a construct rather than a person: a system of intertextuality that can read and interpret everything in the text – a maximal potentiality of the text • The concept was abandoned by Riffaterre (1978) for a semiotic, text-active approach, where the reader's activity became fully controlled by the text
IDEAL READER Jonathan Culler (1975, 2007)	• a reader outside of the text • a reader who would appreciate the text in its wholeness • not a construct of the author in the process of creation, but a hypothesis of the reader brought into the process of interpretation: how would the ideal (rather than empirical) reader interpret it – a place of intertextuality • The concept was abandoned: "to speak of an ideal reader is to forget that reading has a history" (2007, p. 51)
IMPLIED READER Wolfgang Iser (1974, 1978)	• a dialectical concept with a textual as well as an empirical character – the reader is not in the text, nor outside of the text • the meaning does not exist without the reader's consciousness, nor without the existence of the text – it is a result of an encounter between the text and the reader • the text offers some potential meanings (what Iser refers to as gaps, blanks, indeterminacy) and the reader fills them, through the process of reading, a process of concretisation
INTERPRETATIVE COMMUNITIES Stanley Fish (1980)	• a theoretical concept outside/inside the text • the reader is a product of the interpretive community, as that also shapes what is read (or written) • the concept shifts control over the interpretation away from the text as well as from the reader and stresses the importance of the cultural context as a shared set of cultural assumptions between the readers • the meaning is thus neither subjective, as it is not a result of individual interpretation, nor objective as the interpretative community has its own perspectives

Figure 1 Overview of theoretical concepts of the reader

Reception aesthetics introduced a new perspective into literary theory, whose prevailing focus has for centuries centred on authors, their intention, their imagination, and the procedures (interpretative techniques) for how the intended meaning in the text can be accessed. Reception is not conceptualised as readers' response, but rather the process of interpretation itself. Iser distinguishes between two poles of the text – artistic and aesthetic, where the former refers to the text created by the author and the latter to the reader's realisation. Following on from that, he further differentiates between the text, which is the actual text, but also the reader's realisation of the text; and the work, which is neither of these, rather it is the meeting point of the text and the reader in that moment. As he states: "[t]he work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader – though this, in turn, acted upon by the different patterns of the text" (Iser, 1972, p. 279).

He is therefore interested in the act of reading itself, considering interpretation as the process of meaning making, rather than studying the text as a source of meaning. Iser also focuses on the inequality between the reader and the text. He states that a reader has no tools to ensure that their reading of the text is correct, neither can they turn to the context for such support. All there is, is the text itself, with its clues and signalling present in the text. The potential of different interpretations of the text is realised through what he refers to as "gaps" or "blanks" in the text. These indeterminacies are open spaces that invite the reader to fill them; that is to say, the text provides a structure, which needs to be realised by the reader.

For Iser (1978) the text is composed of fixed points; the connections between them can, however, vary. He proposes recognition of the reader as an active meaning-maker who is guided by certain structures within the text. Iser (1993) terms the mutual dynamic between the reader and the text as 'prospecting', commenting that "whenever the flow is interrupted (in the text) and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections – for filling in the gaps left by the text itself." (Iser, 1993, p. 280). This conceptualisation of the act of reading as a dual process resonates with the audience researchers of British cultural studies as it resembles Hall's (1980) concept of preferred reading, and can be recognised even more in Morley's (1992) proposition of genres in place of preferred reading.

Iser's theory was met with various criticisms, among which the strongest was from Fish (1980) who opposes this notion of a restricting structure, a form of determinacy within the text, and calls for the meaning to be fully placed within the realm of the reader. Yet, is it the recognition of the significance of both the text and the reader that makes the theory and its concepts relevant when expanding its application outside of the literary world?

Meanwhile, Jauss (1982) was interested in the act of reception from a historical point of view. He proposed the concept of a horizon of expectations, which is rooted in Gadamer's (2004) philosophical hermeneutics and refers to a set of cultural and aesthetic expectations – prior experiences that are brought by the reader into the act of interpretation in the given moment of the text-reader encounter. This implies that there cannot be two identical readings of the same text as the subsequent reading will always be informed by the preceding ones. For Jauss the horizon of expectations plays a significant role as a "socially *formative* function of literature" (1982, p. 40, emphasis in original), as a social construct encompassing literary norms and values, but also desires, demands, and aspirations (see Holub, 2013, p. 68). Rather than individual experiences, the horizon stands for a cultural set of values, what Gadamer (2004) refers to as a tradition, hence, these values are passed on from generation to generation.

Reception is thus inevitably an evaluation of the text "'against the background of other art forms as well as against the background of the everyday experience of life' (p. 41). In this capacity a work has the possibility of playing an active role in its reception, of calling into question and altering social conventions through both content and form" says Holub (2013, p. 68) quoting Jauss (1982, p. 41). The horizon of expectations is thus composed of prior experiences of norms and conventions of the genre, presumed relationship to the similar works of the literary-historic environment, and the functions of language.

3.2 The history of asking 'why': From 'effect on' to 'meaning for' audiences

Undeniably, audiences (although under different names – listeners, recipients, masses, etc.) were recognised as an integral part of communication in the early linear communication models (e.g. Shannon and Weaver, 1949), but the main focus of these models is on the process – the transmission; it is a technical, mathematical way of conceptualising communication. Lasswell (cited in McQuail, 2010) with his interest in propaganda, methods of persuasion and influencing public opinions, expands the linear model by including the notion of effect, as his model recognises five key elements of communication: who says what to whom, via what channel, and with what effect. His model reflects the scholarly interest of the time and its focus on the effects of media on the masses.

The research on media effects is driven by the questions of whether and how media can change people's behaviour, notionally conflating content together with producers. The research agenda focuses predominantly on the negative effects of either sexual and/or violent content in relation to demographic groups considered vulnerable (e.g. children, youth, women) or on the effects of media in political decision making with a focus on the media's ability to persuade, again primarily in terms of the negative effects of propaganda.

Audiences are considered as homogenous masses and the terminology used of receiving, or being receivers, discursively implies passivity. Although the research agenda distinguishes audiences as belonging to different demographics and hence recognises a certain degree of social positioning, for example by focusing on groups of audiences assumed to be more prone to the media effects, members of audiences are nonetheless objectified and considered passive and powerless recipients, if not victims, of (persuasive and/or harmful) media content, and the reception of media messages is studied in terms of whether the anticipated effects have been successfully instigated. This is a very reductive conceptualisation of communication that brackets out media and separates them from the broader social and cultural environment within which media communication is placed.

McQuail sums it up: "The entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects; yet, there is little agreement on the nature and extent of these assumed effects" (2010, p. 454). Nonetheless, there are some early studies interested in people's engagement with media that are worth mentioning as they disrupt the notion of an audience as a homogenous mass and reveal people's different media practices as well as the significance of the context of media reception.

Hadley Cantril (2009)[2] carried out research into listeners and their reaction to a particular programme, the infamous 1938 radio drama directed and produced by Orson

[2] The edition used here is from 2009, however the work was originally published in 1940. Cantril, Hadley (1940). *The Invasion from Mars. A Study in the Psychology of Panic.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Welles, *The War of the Worlds,* in which a little town in New Jersey is invaded by Martians. Originally, a British sci-fi novel dramatized by Welles for the radio adopts the format of interrupting radio news reels. Although the show was introduced by its author Orson Welles himself, those listeners who missed the introduction were likely to believe that these were real news reels. It led to a great panic among about one fifth of the listeners (approx. 1.2 million people), which Cantril took as an opportunity to study not only how many people panicked but also why (or why not). Carrying out a quantitative survey followed up by a large set of qualitative interviews, his analysis dismissed the direct effect of the media (of the broadcast) emphasising the role of other social factors in the reception of the broadcast. Most importantly, he identified what he terms as "critical ability", which "is not likely to be a simple innate capacity that some people have and others do not have. Its genesis in the individual is the result of a particular environment which has played upon his particular capacities. Whenever critical ability could function we discovered that it was complete insurance against panic behaviour."(Cantril, 2009, p. 127). For Cantril, critical ability is a collection of different elements, as he shows that it did not necessarily correlate with education, but was more contextually determined, in relation to the media experiences (media literacy), but also in relation to other lived experiences (the threat of WW2 etc). At the same time, Herta Herzog (1941) published a research study of female listeners of daytime radio serials. Herzog was interested in the media practices and motivations for listening to these radio programmes. Her analysis focuses on the needs that the particular media use fulfils, a conceptualization later adopted by the uses and gratifications approach to media research. Herzog concludes that the studied radio listeners listened to these particular programmes for emotional release, as a means to remediate one's drudgery and as a recipe for adjustment (Liebes, 2003). Amidst the focus on media effects, empirical works, which show that media reception is determined by particular lived experiences and social identities, start to appear. The interest of the media and communications field in media users starts to further reflect on the context of media consumption (e.g. Gerbner's (1998) cultivation theory).

A conceptual shift in the study of the relationship between audiences and media was provided by the functionalist approach of uses and gratification that inquired into the audiences' media practices and conceptualized audiences' engagement with media as ways of fulfilling particular social needs (Blumler and Katz, 1974). The uses and gratifications approach focuses on individual experiences and searches for socio-psychological motives behind people's media preferences. From the individual needs and lived experiences that are studied, typologies are generalised that provide an insight into people's different motivations for media uses, for example diversion (escapism from daily routine and problems of life), personal relationships (where media act as a social companion), personal identity (personal reassurance and value reinforcement), or surveillance (media overlook social institutions (McQuail and Blumler, 1968). However, these uses are not anchored within their broader socio-cultural contexts.

It was not until the work of scholars around the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) led first by Richard Hoggart and then Stuart Hall in the 1970s that placed the question, originally asked by Katz (1959), 'what do people do with media', into the centre of its research agenda in its complexity. Hall (1980) in his short, now seminal, paper 'Encoding/Decoding' emphasises that both processes – production and consumption of media – are significant, yet independent of each other and situated within their own contexts. He further argues that any (cultural) text is polysemic, yet as a part of the encoding, the text is organised in a way that encourages what he refers to as a preferred reading. The decoding process then allows for three different reading positions – dominant (in line with the preferred reading), negotiated (the preferred reading is interpreted

through the employment of a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements involved) and oppositional (the preferred meaning is resisted and/or rejected) drawing on the reader's own cultural context. Hall's (1980) text, thus, provides an important rearticulation of media reception, from passive receiving to (active) decoding – while simultaneously recognising and emphasising the cultural (and social) context of both encoding and decoding processes.

3.3 Audiences' reception as meaning making

The linguistic switch from the passive to the active tense – from 'what media do to people' to 'what people do with media' – instigated an epistemological (and methodological) shift as a new research agenda was being set, interrogating and inquiring into the social structures, practices and relations between people and media. It is what Schrøder (1994) refers to as an ethnographic turn in media and communications research. It draws on other disciplines, i.e. anthropology, and its early interest in foreign cultures and their systems of beliefs, values and meanings. Couldry sees it as a paradigmatic change in media research as "media came to be seen not as a closed circuit of production-distribution-reception, but as a larger process of 'mediation' stretched out across the space" (2012, p. 13). The media-centric approach focusing on media effects, transmission and seeing media processes as linear became recognised as reductive, as the study of the role of media in people's lives in a more contextual and nuanced way was gaining greater social importance.

With the growing popularity of television within the Western population in the 80s and 90s, media companies (as well as public services and institutions) started to implement and predominantly rely on information gained by quantitative methods and techniques measuring people's engagement with television content in order to inform their programming; the main variable being the time and duration of the media engagement (i.e. peoplemeters monitoring when and how long people spent watching particular programmes as well as TV in general). These methods of studying (television) audiences and their behaviour omitted yet again context and nuances that would enable the research to fully unpack what these measures mean, and what meaning the audiences attribute to these programmes. Given, that the television become a medium strongly embedded in family life (Morley, 1986) often placed in the shared living room, the question is not only who watches when, but in what circumstances, who decides what is being watched and is anyone actually watching (see Ang, 1991 for further discussion)? The new research agenda came with further urgency to consider audiences on their own merits, to go beyond the media processes, practices and effects, and to question the actual, lived role of media in people's everyday lives.

This paradigmatic change led to new research agendas of cultural studies, including an interest in media (especially television) and their audiences. This brought together a political dimension, drawn from the critical theory of continental Marxism and in particular Althusser's (1984) concept of ideology and Barthes' (1977a) semiotics and its critical textual analysis, in order to explore how people interpret texts through the lenses of their social identities.

The political dimension of communication is central to Hall's (1980) three reading positions as he builds on Parkin's (1971) typology that relates class differences to different system values and considers the decoding process in terms of the acceptance/rejection of the dominant ideology only. Morley's (1992) critique of the model informed by his empirical application of it, provides further clarity for the theoretical agenda, rather than its abandonment. His main critique addresses the concept of preferred reading and how to

understand it empirically: as a property of the text, the audience or the researcher? He argues that rather than understanding preferred reading as 'framing', "[the text's] polysemy is already structured and limited by the syntagmatic relations established between the separate signs as they are organised in the text" (Morley, 1992, p. 123). His second major critique of the E/D model addresses the notion of decoding. Morley argues that decoding is a set of processes, some of which precede the acceptance/rejection position and proposes to consider decoding along two dimensions, relevance/irrelevance and comprehension/incomprehension. For that, he suggests as conceptually useful the notion of genre as "a set of rules for the production of meaning – rules governing the combinations of signs into specific patterns to regulate the production of text by authors and the reading of text by audiences," (1992, p. 127), which allows to consider reception in terms of much a broader notion of cultural competences (similar to Bourdieu's (1984) cultural capital). Reception of a particular programme (text) can then be seen in terms of (in)comprehension of the text due to prior knowledge and "familiar[ity] with certain conventions which constitute the ground or framework within/on which particular proposition can be made. (…) without prior access to these codes the particular content/items within the programme will remain incomprehensible." (Morley, 1992, p. 129). The accessibility and relationality to the media text are thus considered in terms of the form as well as the content of the message.

Hall's model is also criticised for its focus on meaning only, leaving out the notion of pleasure or identity construction (D'Acci, 2004). Hall, with his colleagues from the Open University, later proposes a model termed a circuit of culture (Gay *et al.*, 1997), which rather than focusing on the meaning per se and its circulation, focuses on the cultural object (a text). It identifies 5 different cultural processes that contribute, as they overlap and intertwine, to the construction of cultural meaning. Discursively, this model shifts the attention from communication and broadens it to questions of culture and cultural exchange of meanings, "[i]t is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them – how we represent them – that we *give them a meaning*." (Hall, 1997, p. 3 emphasis in original).

The intersection of the scholarly interests in people's lived experiences, the complexity of the everyday and the role of media (cultural artefact) in identity construction, with the recognition of the relevance of the political dimension in the mediation of social reality, brought together different approaches, theories and related methodologies within the umbrella of cultural studies. And so the research interests explored reading and people's interpretation of different content and diverse genres – from news programmes (Morley, 1980) to popular culture content like soap operas (e.g. Hobson, 1982; Ang, 1985; Brunsdon, 1997) or literary romance (Radway, 1984), research drawing on semiotics' discussion of textual polysemy, which includes a notion of active reading and sociology of class and how the social context shapes the interpretation. This was very quickly expanded by feminist scholarship drawing further attention to gender positions as a constituting factor in interpretation (Press, 1991), interest in children's use of media (Buckingham, 2004) as well as comparative, trans-national studies (Katz and Liebes, 1990), the theoretical scope of which was also expanded by postcolonial theories on the significance of race and ethnicity arguing against Eurocentrism (Westcentrics) (Gillespie, 1995).

Although the main focus in the early audience studies is predominantly, but not exclusively, on television texts, the conceptualisation of media reception as an act of interpretation and meaning making is formative for the further conceptualisation of the relationship between people and media. Together these studies empirically demonstrate that media reception is a cultural practice informing and/or managing everyday (family) relationships (Morley, 1986) and constructing identities, especially in relation to gender and

or ethnicity (Ruddock, 2000), as acquired cultural competencies allow audiences to appreciate particular media forms in order to actively negotiate their meanings and appropriate them into their social circumstances.

3.4 The inherently critical audiences and the potential for resistance

The main premise of meaning being realised by audiences' actualisation of textual polysemy becomes one of the most disputed within the field in terms of how open or not the text is to any interpretation. There we can see a theoretical split between those more concerned with the political dimension of the reception and thus more concerned with the message, and those interested in the process of the actualisation of those meanings, which Fiske refers to as audiencing (1992). For Fiske, the openness of the text offers audiences the possibility to creatively engage in its consumption, which he refers to as a producerly text (Fiske, 1989). His work represents what is seen as a radical position of "semiotic democracy", understanding the E/D model as a "shift away from the text and towards the reader as the site of meaning" (Fiske, 1987, p. 63). Fiske further draws on de Certeau, who compares audiences' consumption to poaching, arguing that the main distinction between producers and consumers is not the active production of meaning, but the "lack of land", and the limit of temporality as reading "does not keep what it acquires" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 174).

This metaphor is further advanced and empirically examined by fan studies, especially Jenkins (1992), who is interested in the diverse audiences' practices of engagement with media texts. His focus on fandom broadens the understanding of people's engagement with media content; he draws on the example of people circulating existing media content, or producing and circulating additional materials produced by audiences themselves, as he argues that fans are not just the audience of popular culture, but "active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 24). What we can draw from Jenkins' work is the understanding that the meaning making should not be understood only in terms of textual reception, but it should be studied in terms of media consumption as a social practice.

Fiske's approach celebrating readers' interpretative freedom was by many critics seen as an uncritical endorsement of popular culture, generously finding oppositional readings in all forms of popular culture. For Curran it is cultural relativism, resulting in advocating dominant (neo-liberal) cultural positions as well as dominant media companies and their production (e.g. big Hollywood film studios). From the perspective of the audience research agenda, however, the attention has significantly broadened from Hall's initial interest in "How does mass media serve to secure 'a universal validity and legitimacy for accounts of the world that are partial and particular'" (Hall 1982, 65 in Ruddock 2001, 120-121) to fully an audience-centric research agenda of media consumption as a range of diverse practice of media interpretations and use within a growing rich body of empirical and theoretical work with focus on, but not only, practices of identity construction, and everyday situatedness.

What became clear and well established by the broad range of empirical findings of audience research carried out in the first two decades is that audiences are heterogeneous and their media engagement is socially positioned: that they are active in making sense of media; that they are inherently critical, even in the instance of dominant position (as understood by the E/D model), as they activate their systems of beliefs, values and

judgement to evaluate the relevance of the message; and therefore interpretation always provides potential for resistance to draw different meanings from those intended. In their commentary on Hall's E/D model Gurevitch and Scannell comment: "to decode the text is not simply to produce 'reading' of the message, as if it were in any way transparent. Rather, it invokes a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that regards the form of popular culture (cinema and television in particular) as 'systematically distorted forms of communication'" (2002, p. 237). This is where cultural and audience studies depart from the understanding of meaning making proposed by Gadamer as discussed in Chapter 6, who is interested in the question of how we understand rather than what we understand.

Hence, the concern is not whether the readers interpreted the text successfully or not, but to study the different meanings that they make. Resistance does not equal rejection. As Morley comments: "[t]he power of viewers to reinterpret meanings is hardly equivalent to the discursive power of centralized media institutions to construct the texts which the viewer then interprets; to imagine otherwise is simply foolish" (1992, p. 31). Resistance should be rather understood as a capacity to critically interpret text and to appropriate the meaning through one's social and cultural conditions, not necessarily opposing the dominant ideology but rather drawing alternative meanings from the cultural texts, often through audiences' own media production (Dhaenens, 2012).

3.5 Reception as participation

The recognition of the audiences as interpretative beings by the media industry shifts the consideration of media production from 'about people' to 'with' or even 'by people'. Different formats of what is being referred to as reality TV experienced a great boom from the nineties (Hill, 2014). These formats are seen as presenting diverse audiences' voices, experiences and everydayness. Although reality TV is also criticised as a neoliberal control of the ordinary by dispensing the "guidelines for living" (Ouellette and Hay, 2007, p. 2) to the public and conceptualising citizens as individuals whose responsibility it is to improve themselves, it embodies audiences within the mediated space.

Discussion around media reception in terms of audiences' participation derives from the conceptualisation of media audiences in their civic role as citizens, and as publics. The research interest takes as a departing point an understanding of media as a form of public sphere (Habermas, 1989), a space, where individuals can collectively formulate the shared public discourses – their opinions and values. The publics are considered in terms of whether people have their voices heard in the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2009) and what are their abilities and potential to contribute to and/or transform media production and shift the public discourses (e.g. Jenkins, 2006; Deuze, 2007; Johnson, Kompare and Santo, 2014), or the use of media as objects to contribute to the media production and add their voice to the flow of content or to change it; often referred to as the blurring of boundaries between producers and audiences (Bruns, 2008a).

These ideas bring a new set of questions and discussion about participation as a form of sense making, as it situates the question of audiences' activity within the framework of opportunity (power and access) to contribute to the public discussion. The danger here, as Carpentier (2011) warns, is that this might yet again polarise our understanding of people's engagement with media along an active/passive dimension. He proposes to discuss audiences' engagement by employing an additional dimension of participation/interaction, as he further distinguishes between participation through and in media: "These components are the participation in media production, the participation in society through the media

and the interaction with media content. The first component, participation in media production, is supported by three elements: access to, interaction with and participation in the media organization" (Carpentier, 2011, p. 521). The notion of participation has a political dimension of contributing to the public domain too. Carpentier's conceptualisation, however, provides a helpful distinction between the participation of audiences in the capacity of being a citizen and the rather ontological notion of participation in being a part of the social world.

Through the use of social media, audiences' visibility within the media space became ubiquitous. The growing engagement with media facilitated by increasingly complex media infrastructures (Plantin *et al.*, 2018) has also impacted on consideration of audiences as publics, that boyd (2010) refers to networked publics that structure them not only as technological spaces but also as imagined collectives. Although members of the public have seemingly greater access to the public sphere using media to share and circulate their experiences, views and opinions, research shows that not all audiences are visible and not in the same way as the engagement with the content is often driven by affect (Papacharissi, 2015). Dean argues that this affective attachment to media, however, cannot produce communities, and can only produce "feelings of community" (2010, p. 22).

A further nuanced approach to audiences' engagement and participation is particularly important with regard to the audiences' growing productive uses of media. When media uses are automatically turned into data traces to be processed (van Dijck, 2014), any form of reception can be considered productive, and available for interpretation. The participatory discourse of blurring between audiences and producers (Bruns, 2006) thus needs to be further unpacked and nuanced. The concept of reception as an act of meaning making should assist us in considering which productive acts are primarily acts of reception rather than those of production (Pavlíčková and Kleut, 2016; Picone *et al.*, 2019), yet audiences' production of media content is still rarely discussed and studied from the perspective of interpretation, as an interpretative practice (Picone, 2011; Kleut *et al.*, 2018).

What is interesting is that in the last few years is the increasing focus on technologies that form media infrastructures, rather than media as cultural entities, that are increasingly significant in contemporary mediated communication: "We scarcely notice or question these data-based operations, yet they are not neutral, they shape particular social realities for us and should be debated" (Lomborg and Kapsch, 2020, p. 746). Therefore critical researchers have begun to ask how people understand these media infrastructures and designs (Shaw, 2017; Lomborg and Kapsch, 2020). This need for inquiring into audiences' understanding and meaning making when considering different media structures and infrastructure processes, prompts research into audiences to address further the complexity of media and their role (cultural or political) in people's lives. Silverstone's double articulation contrasts between the media as material/technological objects and the media as texts/symbolic messages, where "[t]he former invites analysis of media use in terms of everyday domestic consumption practices; the latter invites an analysis of the relation between media texts and the interpretive activities of particular audiences. In consequence, the audience or media user is also doubly articulated as the consumer-viewer (or consumer-listener/player/surfer, etc.), for people are simultaneously interpreters of the media-as-text and users of the media-as object." (Livingstone, 2004, pp. 82–83). It opened up the research agenda to questions of how particular technologies are made sense of, adopted and incorporated into people's everyday lives (Bakardjieva, 2005).

Contemporary media are not only defined in terms of their institutional structure and technical materiality; they are systems of infrastructures and complex systems of operations that have a significant impact on the delivery of the content as well as its reception. Research (Mathieu and Pavlíčková, 2017; Lomborg and Kapsch, 2020) shows that audiences

are increasingly aware of some of these infrastructures and bring this understanding into their media reception.

This overview that maps the key theoretical shifts in the approach to audiences shows the inherent separation of the two systems – production and reception – in the consideration of the media and mediation. This conceptualisation of the audiences grants them the potential of agency in the interpretative act, and recognises the contextual situatedness of the interpretation, however, neglects the author as part of that context. The interpretative process although centred on meaning making, is anchored in social reality including the complex system of cultural practices, where people although not professional media producers are communicators and mediators of social reality themselves. It is important to understand how people relate to media and how they read them as systems of productive practices and power structures. Firstly, the concept of an author needs to be theoretically devised.

4 What and who is an author – the defined, given, assumed, expected and ephemeral conceptualisations

The term 'an author' is a broadly understood term within everyday as well as academic discourses, with a generally agreed upon, and mostly taken for granted definition. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (6th edn, 2007) defines an author as "the person who originates, invents, gives rise to, or causes something (now only an abstract thing, a condition an event, exc. of God); a person who authorizes or instigates". In a more particular way, an author is understood to be a writer of a book, article or an editor of a journal, but also "a person on whose authority a statement is made; an informant."

With the focus on the concept of author, it is worth mentioning a related term – authorship, which is defined as either occupation or career of an author, the dignity or position of an author or literary origin and origination of an action or circumstance (6th edn, 2007). It can thus be argued that both notions of being an author and of authorship are associated with the attribution of a certain creative and intellectual relationship between an individual (or collective) and a text[3]. Thus, the term 'author' discursively attains the existence of the text to a particular name, a destination that might exercise certain authority over the text (and for some also a meaning) but which can also be burdened with certain (legal) responsibilities and expectations.

The conceptual distinction between author and authorship needs to be noted, in spite of its proximity by definition. Taking the provided definition as a departure point, I further argue that authorship is a particular embodiment of an author, a tool for identifying and recognising an author's relation to the text – a form of identification of the origin of the text, a way of identifying the originator in order to be able to further consider ownership, intellectual property, creativity, but also authority as well as moral and legal responsibility over the text. In their edited collection, Gray and Johnson draw attention to the complexity of authorship – its discursive, legal and practical construction – considering the concept a "site of struggle between multiple parties claiming authority" (2013, p. 7).

Hence, the term author can be then extended beyond the questions of origination (and attribution) of the text per se, and rather insinuates the process of originating and giving existence to it. It is used to encompass and acknowledge the actual process and practices of production and circulation, as well as mediation, inevitably touching upon questions of authorship too.

However, in the field of media and communications, the theoretical as well as empirical literature rarely uses the term 'author' as such. Rather, more commonly it opts for the general term of a (content) producer; and even more often, each particular field of study being preoccupied with a particular form of content, it refers to its author/producer maintaining this specific focus – whether that be a journalist (news), or a script-writer and a director in the case of creative industries, etc. These might subsequently be further

[3] A text is here considered in its broad cultural definition as anything to be interpreted (Burr, 1995). Yet, the main focus is on literature discussing authors and practices of authoring of media texts with the purpose of providing information about the world and social reality (journalism and its alternatives (Atton and Hamilton, 2008)) – that is to say print media or content produced at least partly by building on practices of print production (television, radio, and relevant online content). For that reason, other, undoubtedly relevant, discussions on the author and authorship from within other fields, e.g. music or architecture, are consciously omitted.

contextualised to acknowledge broader practices, influences and forces of production. Thus, this section is driven by discussions of authors as diverse productive practices.

There is a substantial and diverse body of literature concerned with the relationship between the author and the text: from literature interested in questions of production and origination within the field of media and communications, for example, journalism studies or creative industries (Hartley, 2005); to the relationship between a text and a reader which is concerned with questions of interpretation and meaning making (e.g. literary theory, audience and reception studies). There are a significantly smaller number of studies looking into the relationship between authors and readers (e.g. Nielsen, 2016), which focus on crossing between these two roles and questioning the role of readers as content producers (e.g. Jenkins, 2007; Bruns, 2008a; Park, 2009). Therefore, depending on whether those scholarly perspectives focus on production or interpretation, either the readers or the authors are not fully considered, or conceptualised for that matter.

Following and linking to the previous chapter on audiences and reception, and considering the author within the processes of production, and meaning making, this chapter explores the theoretical and empirical debates on diverse productive practices, diverse forms of authorship and the roles of the author in the process of production, circulation and mediation of social reality. The chapter examines the theoretical and normative expectations of an author and authorship, as well as empirical studies of the performance and self-perceptions of these, to theoretically further address the role of the author in the process of meaning making.

As indicated earlier, the concept of an author is discussed in this and the subsequent chapter. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first one (4.1) outlines various debates from within literary theory in the second half of the 20th century and their main focus on the question of the reader's powers and authority in the process of interpretation and meaning making. This literature from the field of literary theory, with its focus on acts of interpretation, acknowledges and discusses the concept of the author to a greater extent than the audience and reception research tradition within the media and communication field. The concept of author is here, however, considered theoretically and in relation to fictional texts only.

Within literary theory the author is predominantly, if not almost exclusively, considered as an independent, original and creative force. However, the question of an author being inherently collaborative (or not) is much more prominent within the studies of film and television production. The second section (4.2) thus focuses on questions of authorship as a collaborative practice and its sociality, considering the concept of an author as a site of multiple creative involvements (including the readers) shaping the text (continuously). The literature here also provides an additional empirical perspective to the previously only theoretical debates. Thus, in section 4.2, the concept of the author is considered from the perspective of interpretation as well as production, but the focus remains within the scope of fictional text.

4.1 An author in literary theory: the powerful, the dead, the construct

Unlike audience and reception studies, literary theory provides rich historical and theoretical insight into the changing conceptualisation of the author and its relation to the text. The concept of the author evolves from the insignificant author-scribe as a tool of an expressive God (Burke, 1995; Irwin, 2002; Bennett, 2005), to the prominent individualised

author as the gifted creator with authority over the work and its meaning. A theoretical shift in the second half of the 20th century yet again re-conceptualises the author as a textual property – an author-construct.

In the early medieval era, in Europe, when writing was practised by clerics only, scribes were not understood as creative individuals, but rather craftsmen, copying and explaining what otherwise was understood as originating and belonging to God. Hartley (2013) argues that this God-like authority over the text and its interpretation is discursively preserved when the understanding of the origin of the text shifts from God to humans. Then, an author is put into God's place and considered as a divine, exceptional, gifted force of creation. It is the author's absolute authority that is now being promoted and protected by the introduction of the notion of authorship, and ownership in the form of intellectual property. Hartley adds that "an 'author' never was a simple individual, but *one who channels system-level* or *institutional authority into text"* (2013, p. 25 emphasis in original). These origins link the author to the power of creation (to God) which is then appropriated by the liberal market; and the notion of untouchable ownership remains as the divinity is (partly) dropped, it transforms from explicitly godly to more vaguely 'extraordinary', blessed, gifted, and original actions, a transformation that further promotes the notion of individuality and singularity of an author. The prominence of the literary practice of attributing a text to a particular individual(s), and with it the discursively attained expectations of authority and ownership, led to a particular practice of interpretation – to consider the author as the (one and only) source of the meaning (Burke, 1995; Bennett, 2005). The author is the (godly) authority over the meaning, yet access to them is not easy or possible, and mostly they are not present to explain themselves. Thus the delegated expertise, and power of apostles and clerics to explain the author is passed onto critics (and scholars).

When the literary theory of the second half of the 20th century, in particular French post-structuralism, phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics, questions the locus and temporality of meaning, arguing for the meaning to be understood as temporary, contextual and negotiated, inherent to the moment of interpretation as opposed to understanding of meaning as fixed and pre-existing the text that is its carrier, they position themselves against that conceptualisation of the author with its god-like properties. They argue anew that meaning is not something to be uncovered from the text but something to be negotiated, resulting from the act of interpretation as such. This indeed is the same philosophical and theoretical realisation that inspired audience and reception studies, although the concept of the author is neglected and not considered as empirically of interest in these fields, as a result of the prominence of their focus on the text-reader relationship.

Author as a construct, paratext and prejudice

Two works in particular are significant in the early debates on the issue of who has agency over the meaning making with their radical treatment – if not outright dismissal – of the author and their role in interpretation: Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author" (1977b) and Michel Foucault's "What is an Author" (1979).

In his short seminal essay, Barthes argues against the 'tyranny of the author' as a cue to the meaning of the text, acknowledging the absence of the author in the act of reading. The rather extreme or eccentric title of the piece attracts the attention of many, yet also overshadows the actual overall argument Barthes makes. His text is openly aimed against the concept of Author-God, the Author with a capital A; his opposition is thus directed primarily towards the divine conceptualisation of the author. He attacks the tendency to understand the act of writing as a divine activity, to which is attributed the notions of

intentions, agency, and ownership; and to seek an explanation of a work in its author and their biography. Barthes talks about a need to liberate the reader from the author's domination (and that of critics, who claim the ability to uncover the author's intentions, and to guard them by providing explanation and evaluation of the work).

Gallop (2011) analyses the essay in relation to Barthes' other subsequent texts addressing the issue of the author, which are a preface to *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1989) and less prominent mentions in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1990). By considering Barthes' conceptualisation of the author's role in the process of meaning making across his works, she points out certain inconsistencies in the evolution of his argument, and most importantly discusses Barthes' comments on the author in light of his earlier proclamation of the death of the author. Questioning how conclusive that view really was, she argues that the concept of the author as a part of the act of reading returns by the time Barthes wrote *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1989):

> "The pleasure of the Text also includes the amicable return of the author. Of course, the author who returns is not the one identified by our institutions (history and courses in literature, philosophy, church discourse); he is not even the biographical hero." (Barthes, 1989, p. 8)

To stay with Barthes' vocabulary, this allows us to better understand who is dead and who is alive; the authoritative Author-God in full control of the text and meaning, as well as the institutions appropriating the rights and authority to explain and interpret them are now stripped of their importance, insignificant. Barthes elaborates this further in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1990):

> "As institution, the author is dead: his civil status, his biographical person have disappeared; (…) but in the text, in a way, I *desire* the author: I need this figure (which is neither his representation nor his projection), as he needs mine (except to 'prattle')." (Barthes, 1990, p. 27 emphasis in original)

As much as Barthes buries a particular form of author, he acknowledges the presence of an author in the text and in the reader's mind, a property of the text, lost in it (Gallop, 2011, p. 50). Saying "I *desire* the author: I need this figure…", he proposes an author as a figure that the reader brings to life, belonging to the reader although located in the text. Like a meaning, the author comes to life within the interpretation, and is inherent to it. The newly reborn author is an understanding, an interpretative tool contributing to the process of meaning making rather than determining it.

An author-construct is the focal point of Foucault's (1979) text, the second seminal and most prominent work within literary theory on the question of the author's significance in the process of interpretation. Here, Foucault is driven by the premise that polysemic text is/will always be constrained by a certain system, a mode that anchors the text in the broader socio-cultural context, a marker of signification and limitation to the expansion of meaning. Foucault argues that this function is currently with the author, a construct, a figure that he refers to as an author-function. "The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning. (…) the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not proceed the works, he is a certain function principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses." (Foucault, 1979, p. 159).

Borrowing from Beckett a question 'What does it matter who is speaking?' as a departure point, Foucault primarily focuses on the author's name, introducing the author-function as a construct that allows one to not only attribute text in juridical and legal terms, and therefore grant ownership; but also helps discursively unify a body of texts – to establish relationships between them, to classify and hierarchize them, to (reciprocally)

explain those texts including their discrepancies. Simultaneously, the author's name pre-creates a certain context within which texts are perceived and read, it serves as a form of authentication, that is to say, to attribute a cultural value to the texts. "Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others. In addition it establishes a relationship among the texts" (Foucault, 1979, p. 147). It is an instrumental concept inscribed and performed by the text, often embodied by the author's name that creates a certain context, and groups relevant texts together under that name. For Foucault, the author-function indicates the modes of existence, appropriation, attribution, valorisation and circulation of text (and discourses) within the society. And the name of the author is a container for those functions. Yet, the reduction of authorial voice to a textual function is questioned by others, as it poses questions of visibility and hence entitlement to speak in the first place, a question raised and addressed, in particular, by post-colonial theorists. Emphasising that the subaltern cannot speak, Spivak (1993) insists on looking beyond a message being voiced and heard, it is the question of who is and can voice it that is of significance and importance. This is a significant shift in the consideration of the voice in terms of its rights as well as privileges to be listened to. The question of who is speaking is of crucial importance.

Throughout the vast body of literature within the field of literary theory we can find other proposed author-constructs too, in particular Booth's (1991) implied author or Nehamas's (1981) postulated author. The concept of the implied author (Booth, 1991), originally published in 1961, precedes the earlier mentioned conceptualisation of an author by Barthes and Foucault. The implied author is fully a textual property and a creation (not necessarily conscious) of the writer.

> "However impersonal he [the writer] may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner – and of course that official scribe will never be neutral towards all values. Our reaction to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work." (Booth, 1991, p. 71)

The implied author, different from the actual writer, as well as the narrator of or a character in the story that might be considered as the voice of an author, is the author implied by the text: "it includes, in short, the intuitive apprehension of a completed artistic whole" (Booth, 1991, p. 73). Booth continues defining the implied author as, "an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices" [sic] (1991, p. 75). From this premise, Booth carries on to argue that "the author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement" (1991, p. 138). The locus of meaning for Booth is in the agreement between these two – the implied author meets their implied reader[4].

The postulated author is not too dissimilar. Nehamas (1981) makes a distinction between the particularity of the writer and the historical plausible in the form of the author. He builds on Foucault's author-function as a repressive principle imposing pre-existing understanding on the text, and so the act of interpretation is guided by the contextually plausible author – the formal cause.

[4] This is different from Iser's (1974) concept of the implied reader theorised earlier. For Iser, the term 'implied reader' "incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process." (1974, p. xii)

> "[The postulated author is] the agent whose actions account for the text's features; he is a character, a hypothesis which is accepted provisionally, guides the interpretation, and is in turn modified in its light. The author, unlike the writer, is not a text's efficient cause, but, so to speak, its formal cause, manifested in though not identical with it." (Nehamas, 1981, p. 145)

He also builds on a premise that interpretation of literary fiction is a more elaborate form of understanding, indirectly suggesting the superiority of interpretation of literary work to everyday interpretations and understandings. He suggests that interpretation of literary text should also construct the actions that led to the text's production, therefore indirectly promoting one group of readers as more equipped to interpret the author's intentions.

Although both, Booth as well as Nehamas, distinguish the author-construct from the actual writer, they both too consider a text as having intentions that can be interpreted (reached) through the use of these author-constructs; unlike Foucault (or Barthes) where the construct of author is understood as a much broader, albeit repressive, socio-cultural contextualisation of a text, or a body of texts. These author-constructs are interpretative tools employed to interpret the intended meaning.

Other arguments against the author as a singular authority over the meaning include the concept of intertextuality (Kristeva, 1980) proposing the idea that no text is fully original, but rather all texts build on the texts that precede them, as they inform the author in the process of creation, but can also be called upon by the reader in the process of interpretation. Intertextuality should, however, be understood beyond a notion of relations to other major (literary) works. In his work on transtextuality, Genette (1997a, 1997b) proposes the concept of paratext – the textual context accompanying each text. He argues that what constitutes a text should be understood much more broadly than just the content between the opening and the closing line. Paratextual features, thus, are those through which a text presents itself to the reader, through which it is situated into a particular context, whether it is a book cover, a book blurb on the flap, or a film trailer (Gray, 2010). For Genette (1997b), paratexts guide readers on how to read and approach a text, if only as they often contribute to prejudices and expectations preceding the actual act of reading.

Foucault's author-function, and their manifested presence in the unifying name, thus too can be understood as a paratext. It first and foremost also contextualises the text within a greater body of texts, as it serves to unify but also to distinguish and to contrast. The name to which the body of texts is attributed often precedes their reading, constituting prejudices, anticipation, and ready-at-hand judgements that the reader brings with them to the interpretation.

Author's name: attribution, authority and ownership

As a textual property, an author-function is a name to which a text is being attributed (by the actual writer, the publisher, the critics, or the audience for that matter). As such, the institution of the author's name as the author-function is fully appropriated by the marketing and distribution practices of the contemporary literary (and media) world: not to identify the author as such, but to brand the product for a specific market (Hartley, 2013, p. 30). The question of attribution, the author-name, however, is not the same as the practice of signature or the legal attribution of authorship, although they are properties of the author-name.

The literary world is not new to pseudonyms or handle names; various authors choose to publish their works or certain pieces of their works under different name(s) to establish a distinct identity for very different reasons, sometimes to disguise their gender or ethnicity or to avoid repercussions (Burke, 1995). Anonymity is often an author's intentional practice, to separate the content production from their other activities, which means that the same person can be known under more than one or two names and signatures. A writer can choose for the texts not to be attributed to their private, day-to-day name, and opt either for a pseudonym, or to remain anonymous by not signing the text at all. The absence of the author's name is, however, also significant and might often act as a focus for public attention and its pursuit of the 'real' identity of the author, as we have recently seen with the Italian author publishing under the name of Elena Ferrante (e.g. Kirchgaessner, 2016).

It is the question of signature that is discursively linked to the system of accountability and responsibility. What makes some sources less likely to be read and used is therefore not the possible anonymity of the author, but rather a lack of their recognition and accountability. Burke (1995) argues that "the act of signing a text thus carries with it an intricate substructural set of ethical assumptions and opens an enduring channel of enquiry" (1995, p. 289). For him a signature is performative of the responsibilities and accountability discursively attributed to the one who is signing.

By uniting text under a certain author-name, that name precedes the text, but simultaneously the understanding of that name – the prejudice and anticipation – is being transformed (enriched) with every additional text, contributing to building a perception and understanding of the author-name. In their work on the phenomenon of James Bond Bennett and Woollacott (1987) employ Foucault's concept of the author-function, arguing that in order to have the unifying functions (to serve as a system of *classification*, a principle of *explanation*, and an indicator of cultural *value*) the author-function needs a common name. They further show that this common name does not necessarily need to be the name of an author, but rather a unifying indicator standing for some common source (whether an origin of ideas, practices of production or legal attribution). It is the attribution (commonly promoted by other systems/institutions – publisher, marketing, etc.) that undertakes the role of unifier and becomes a marker of significance. It is the name, here, that serves to identify a text (and its belonging to a particular body of texts), further recognition (in assessing the text and assigning a value to it), and continuity (in time in carrying out this function). In the case of James Bond, this role has been undertaken by the name of the character – Bond – itself. Within this body of texts, these are first and foremost marketed, distributed, and read as 'texts of Bond', as opposed to 'texts of Fleming' [the original author of the Bond novels] (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987).

Thus, an attribution to a particular author figure (name) can be independent of the practice of signature, but can also be established through unofficial means of common-knowledge, as pointed out by Genette (1997b). He argues that works often labelled today as classics or masterpieces (*Robinson Crusoe* [1719], *Moll Flanders* [1722], *Tristram Shandy* [1759] or *Sense and Sensibility* [1811]) were first published without the author's name on the cover.

> "This type of anonymity generally had nothing to do with a fiercely protected incognito: quite often the public knew the identity of the author by word of mouth and was not in the least surprised to find no mention of the name on the title page." (Genette, 1997b, pp. 43–44)

Similarly, we can question the authorship of classic texts of Ancient Greece (Foucault, 1979). Who is Homer and who is Socrates? What do these names mean, and whom do

they relate to? Do they identify a single person or a collective? These texts carry for us, in the present day, something about their time, space and culture, rather than about their authors; and they would do so even if we would attribute different names to them. The name is thus unifying but not binding. Therefore, as Mittel (2004) argues: "Authorship is not the process of individuals creating texts, but a culturally activated function of texts that links them to a particular figure and system of knowledge named 'the author' via broader contextual circulation." (2004, p. 15).

Discussing the authorship, and the processes of attribution as practices of text creation, recognises, and questions the prejudice of defining an author as a singularity – "the person who" (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. 6th edn, 2007). Conceptualising authorship as a function or a practice, questions not only who, but also what is an author, further opening up the debate about the plurality of the author as well as different degrees of (creative) involvement. It further poses questions of ownership, in legal terms of intellectual property as the author – the name on the cover is not always the legal entity with the rights and legal authority behind the text. The author-name then serves more as a marketing tool or a commodity to be sold, as well as the text (Gray and Johnson, 2013). The authors' name thus becomes a text for interpretation.

4.2 Creative forces in action: Individual and autonomous, versus the collaborative and collective author

No matter how the role of the author in the process of interpretation is conceptualised, or what destiny is proposed for the author (death, function, rebirth as a concept), the discussion within the field of literary theory almost always considers the author as singular only. "The myth of the author as a single entity," (Stillinger, 1991, p. 193) thus still prevails, and is embedded in the Western culture. The idea of an author-name, thus, further promotes the notion of authorship as an individual practice over a collective one.

The notion of authorial singularity is promoted and preserved through the act of attribution across disciplines, but audiences' involvement (of various kinds) in media production and circulation of media content has become more visible in relation to media texts (extending beyond reading clubs of the literary works (Radway, 1984)). It opened up further debates about what constitutes an author, who are the creative forces, who has the creative authority over the work, who has the right to contribute to the media production, and whether all contributions are of the same value and due the same recognition. These questions asked by audiences (Jenkins, 1992, 2006; Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995; Busse and Gray, 2011), as well as scholars (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985), indicate the need to problematize the issue of the collaborative nature of the concept of an author. For example, when studying audiences' responses to the television production of Star Trek, fans acknowledged that the show is a result of the collaborative involvement of many, yet they still tended to "ascribing primary inspiration to a single author" (Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995, p. 188).

The literary myth of the individual and original author

Taking the culture of medieval manuscripts as a starting point for the discussion on collaborative authorship, we can see that handwriting and rewriting of manuscripts led to

the text being in continuous evolution; every version differing, more or less, from another, where certain passages may be missing or new comments may be added and inscribed into the margins. Burrow (2008, pp. 29–30) refers to a text by the 13th century Franciscan monk St Bonaventure who distinguishes four different types of authors, or rather of producers (people who make a book). Those are *a scriptor, a compilator, a commentator* and *auctor*. These terms distinguish between those who only copy text; those who put texts together, but do not write their own; those who are adding their own commentary to text by others; and lastly, those who put their words in the centre and use other texts as commentary to theirs. Burrow (2008), however, stresses, that even the scriptor makes (little) changes, omitting passages and adding comments on the margins. Oral folk culture is another example of collaborative, in this case also anonymous, authorship, where stories are told and re-told from person to person and from generation to generation; they slowly change and are adapted based on the political and social environment (Murray, 1998).

The categorisation of medieval producers is still relevant and sufficient when considering contemporary practices of content production. Furthermore, the lack of recognition of fully autonomous creation reminds us that such a form of production is highly improbable, if not impossible. Writing (and book publishing) might seem more autonomous, or even straightforward, whereas other involvements might be seen as providing assistance only, including the actual technology of the press that produces a finished, final and fixed version of a text (Ong, 1982). In comparison, audio-visual texts involve much more complex productive practices and might suggest more collaborative involvement of different roles and types of labour (director, script-writer, cameraman, and so on) – each making partial authorial decisions and authoring particular aspects of the overall outcome. Yet, collaborative authorship is inherent to literary practices too. One of the rare studies of various examples of multiple authorship across the history of literature is offered by Stillinger (1991). He argues that the creation of works of literary fiction are highly collaborative practices, drawing on examples of writers and poets, who are nowadays considered gifted, original and autonomous authors, whose work is the result of (substantive) creative involvement and input from their editors or life partners, yet these works are attributed to single authors. Similarly, the introduction by Johnson and Gray (2013) to their *A Companion to Media Authorship* outlines the complexity of creative and decisive practices involved in the creation and production of that particular book – from the authorship of individual chapters, to their editorial involvements, to decisions of (restrictions and conditions set by) the publisher, decisions of the designers, and marketing team: these all contribute to the creation of the book, that is then marketed and promoted by booksellers and so on. That is to say, although production processes and practices are being considered within their complexity and various diverse creative involvements are being acknowledged at different moments, the identification of an author – an attribution – is therefore still crucial and significant, precisely as it allows media companies (including publishers) to promote, market, sell, but also to own creative works (Gray and Johnson, 2013).

Also, the idea of text as a finished object ready for interpretation, which promotes the idea of singular authorship, is challenged by the notion of intertextuality as well as paratextuality. Thus texts are always a version, unfinished, in the process of production as other texts are being added to them, cut off, or newly adjusted or altered versions emerge to replace them or to co-exist with them (Gray, 2013). In relation to digital media, Murray proposes a concept of procedural authorship as "writing the rules by which the texts appear as well as writing the texts themselves" (1998, p. 152). There will always be the cameraman who chooses the angle of the camera, the editor who limits the number of

choices or in the case of computer games, the procedural author who designs the space and boundaries of the game.

In his overview of what practices the concept of the author stands for, Hartley (2013) concludes that with regard to the contemporary media industry (including publishing of literary works as well as of magazines and newspapers) an author as a creative force is long past in terms of their authority, which has been replaced by the system of bosses (CEOs, owners, publishers), who create the narrative within which the text (as a cultural asset) is positioned (2013, p. 31). He continues, affirming the claims of Barthes and Foucault, that "the meaning of a given work – its interpretation in the mind of the reader – is no longer determined by an author; it is an effect of the system, in which both author and reader are agents, and where the system itself imposes the rules of the game." (Hartley, 2013, p. 38).

The multiple authors of contemporary media: the creative practices of entertainment and the reporting routines of facts

In contrast to literary theory, the fields of television and film studies consider production processes as complex involvements of multiple different roles, tasks and practices (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985). Their recognition in academic as well as public discourses is much more complex and varied, depending not only on the context of content production, but also, on medium, genre and economic factors. Television studies, in particular, inquire into the complexity of the collaborative authorship and its sociality (Gray and Johnson, 2013) or problematize particular creative involvements in the overall production processes (Conor, 2013). However, in film studies the narrative of a single creative entity – predominantly located in the role of director, but not always – is prevalent, despite it being increasingly challenged by the expanding literature on the complexity and diversity of artistic, as well as economic, forces that contribute to the production of content (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985). The director is by many considered and recognised as the central and fundamental figure of the creative process to whom authorship is exclusively attributed. Within film studies, the concept of *an auteur* became used to identify directors considered to have a clear personal artistic vision, which is coherent and consistent over time (cf. Staiger, 1985, pp. 11–13). The concept of auteur was originally proposed by French critics around the *Cahier du Cinema* in the 1950s, to recognise and group particular procedures of filmmaking, where "the actual personalities were not as important as a set of complex 'signature' codes suggesting both authorial and cultural significance that existed across a body of feature films produced within the studio factories" (Caldwell, 2008, p. 198). This practice was broadly appropriated by the European film industry with its significant attention to particular directors and their filmmaking vision and style (e.g. Fellini, Pasolini, Godard, or Bergman, Hitchcock or the Czech New Wave in the 60s with names like Forman, Vláčil or Chytilová). Yet, by identifying particular practices and their practitioners as worthy of study, as Staiger (1985) argues, auteurism has been practised as a politics of evaluation, placing:

> "some individuals into an elite group which often takes on religious tones, as if they were members of a spiritual priesthood. Such individuals have an omniscience capable of knowing, yet transcending, the vulgar historical world, an omnipresence of being elected to speak for and to all, and an omnipotence of having been chosen from the beginning. (…) The problem with this is not the religious motif, but the implication that knowledge, righteousness, wisdom, and truth are in the hands of a select group. That select group provides models for behavior and, hence, has the power to provide standards for every culture and individual." (1985, p. 13)

Staiger's (1985) continuous critique of auteurism as a practice of film criticism and film studies thus highlights not only the omission of other (significant) artistic involvements in film production, but also the danger of these practices resulting in a very narrow and limiting understanding of what artistic involvement and visions are. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the artistic superiority of particular individuals, first and foremost the directors, in the process of film production is conveniently adopted and exploited by the marketing and distribution practices of Hollywood (blockbusters). There too it leads to the same results of elitism and an almost religious following, if not worship, of individuals within the community itself, as well as by the critics and audiences. This is further demonstrated by the profoundly disproportionate earnings of those films in comparison to the independent scene, as well as in the earnings of those involved (in particular those with a star status, and established names – directors, actors or cinematographers). Yet, due to increasing recognition of the complexity of decisions and skills involved in film production, Buckland, studying Hollywood production, expands the consideration of auteur from an artistic to an all-encompassing force and involvement when he argues that "mastery of the filmmaking process is no longer a sufficient criteria for authorship status: the director also needs to control external factors such as production, money, and the deal-making process," (Buckland, 2003, p. 86).

The practice of branding films with names of significance, recognisable names that serve as a marker of artistic quality and setter of artistic standards and expectations (Staiger, 1985) extends from the attribution to particular directors to other involvements (promoted by the film industry) – of scriptwriters or producers, or promoted association with the lead actors. Undeniably, the endorsement of particular names in the contemporary film landscape as artistic authorities is primarily a practice of the film distribution and exhibition industry, whether it is Hollywood or national blockbusters, or a practice to promote and distribute European and Asian films distributed beyond their national markets (e.g. Almodóvar, Studio Ghibli). Most recently, it is the name of the fictional worlds, also known as universes (which in fact are names of the publishers of literary works on which these films are based) that serve as the author-function (reminding us of the work of Bennett and Woollacott, 1987). Construction of a strongly recognisable identity of particular filmmakers or artists, or filmmaking styles is used to draw parallels and build on expectations and prior knowledge of audiences and critics. This is not dissimilar in the case of independent cinema (Gerstner and Staiger, 2013) as the independent filmmaker is a social subject, and their social positioning is often used by members of the press and by the audience to frame their work too. It is also used to contextualise the reading of their work (Projansky and Ono, 2013, p. 264), not least as the independent filmmakers are, due to low budgets, often involved in other processes, for example production and/or distribution.

The collaborative practices of filmmaking collected under the name of the director(s) are contrasted with the noticeably less pronounced emphasis on authorship in the discourses on television productions. With regard to the complexity and diversity (in terms of roles, temporality and spatiality) of creative involvements, the concept of authorship has discursively almost disappeared in relation to television production, and Hartley (2013) argues that 'no one is an author'. There are, of course, exceptions to that, as some television shows are associated with a distinct author-function figure (e.g. Twin Peaks by Mark Frost and David Lynch). The central question in terms of authorship remains what and who counts and is considered as an author, and how is authority (over the production process as well as the final text) granted and claimed.

The lack of attribution in relation to television production led Newcomb and Alley (1983) to refer to television as the producer's medium. They argued that television is a highly collaborative medium, a system of industrial processes where an uncountable

number of individuals contributes to the creation of each show and programme, and where the producers are a driving authority. They recognised the producer as the authority that holds not only legal and economic responsibilities, but also a creative vision driving and shaping the whole creation process of the media product. Although they recognise the extent and diversity of skills and individuals involved in the production process, and the need for these people to support and execute any creative vision, as well as the restrictions on the creative process posed by the system, Newcomb and Alley (1983) too subscribe to what can be called the myth of the individual author – ascribing a status of 'exceptionality' to individuals (to producers).

Like Hartley, they see television as a highly anonymous medium, arguing that audiences (as well as critics) commonly use vague terms – such as 'the network', 'broadcasting' – to attribute authorship, "as if it were unmanned, undirected, an airy, invisible layer of technology and business, remote, beyond our inspection. We attribute motive, and assign decision-making ability, but fail to identify human agents" (Newcomb and Alley, 1983, p. xi). Interestingly, in recent years this 'authorial anonymity' of television production has been disrupted by a specific genre of authored comedy-drama series where authors are also main leads or producers (e.g. Greta Gerwig, Michaela Coel or Phoebe Waller-Bridge). These extended authorial involvements in the creation of the television texts lead to a prominent and emphasised attribution to those (script)writers involved.

A growing body of literature empirically examines the working conditions of different roles within film and television production as well as their mutual position within the production process (e.g. Conor, 2013 on screenwriters) or the structural and social relations of labour divisions within the cultural industries (Johnson, 2013) or the impact of convergence culture on the perception of these roles (Deuze, 2009). Focusing on media franchises, Johnson (2013) argues, that the labour divisions within the industry "disarticulate the idea of creativity from ownership and rearticulate it to use within the labor relations of industry." (2013, pp. 111–112). Arguing that more than ever contemporary creative workers are conscious of their audiences, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) consider audiences as an external influence on the creative labour. There is a continuous negotiation between the idea of, and expectations of audiences and the prevailing idea of an autonomous creative work. And as their empirical study shows, although the idea of the audience imposes further restraints on the creative work, creative workers often turn to audiences as markers of the quality of their work.

Ellcessor (2014) borrows the concept of the auteur to address the increasingly significant management of the public image of celebrities, which she calls the celebrity Self. Here, she argues that the seemingly authentic, personal and individual expression of the celebrity Self, is carefully managed to produce a particular public persona, where their identity is being publicly constructed as a text. Using an example of Felicia Day (a creator, a writer, a producer, and a star of the web based series *The Guild*) Ellcessor argues that "what is managed is the precise articulation of themes of individualism, creativity, identity and success to the figure of Day" (2014, p. 194) and by doing so overshadowing, if not denying, recognition of the broader creative team. Leadbeater (1999, pp. 28–36) makes a similar argument in his essay on Delia Smith's cookbooks taking the readers into account; he argues that it is the constructed and promoted personality of Delia Smith herself, not the recipes as such, that make her books so attractive to readers. This is not too different from the argument made earlier about the author-function, where the name of a character stands for the author-function (Bennett and Woollacott, 1987). Whereas in film production, we can see that the creative presence and authority are commonly attributed to directors as well as actors in consideration of their ability to attract attention; in the context of television production this is not such a common and prominent practice.

Nonetheless, creative ownership is often identified and attributed to author-names as part of intentional marketing strategies.

Considering texts as profoundly intertextual and hence always in a process of creation, Gray (2013) challenges the notion of a singular author simply by accepting intertextuality as such, arguing that no text is ever created in absolute independence of any other texts, or other cultural influences, not even in its process of creation or in its interpretation. "In a collaboratively authored version, each contributor to the collaboration has – by definition if for no better reason – an intrinsic rather than an extrinsic place in the text. Removing one or more of the authors (…) simply produces a different version" (Stillinger, 1991, p. 200). Thus, Gray (2013) emphasises the multiple and diverse creative involvements in any textual production, and further promotes this authorial plurality rather than considering that collaboration results in anonymity, in contrast to Hartley (2013). He proposes a concept of authorial clusters in order to study the sociality of authorship, and the power relations between these different clusters; as a tool to theorise different modes of authorship and authorial contributions to a text, they are not to be instructive or to provide a finite typology. The logic driving his conceptualisation is that creation is a continuous process with different (creative) inputs along the way, so that the texts are never finished, fixed or completed, and therefore, the author is always present.

5 Who and what is a journalist – from creativity to technique, self perception and performance

This chapter continues the exploration of the multiple and diverse conceptualisations of the concept of the author, identifying key debates and outlining how these are problematized, recognising possible limitations of these conceptualisations. It builds on the previous discussions on who and what is an author, and focuses specifically on the production of non fiction texts, practices of representation and production and questioning how social reality is mediated. Two fields of particular relevance are journalism studies and media theory.

This body of literature provides an ample overview of how an author is conceptualised, discussed and understood within the industry itself as well as by media-centred scholarship. In comparison, the questions of reception and interpretation are less prominent in these works, and they are primarily concerned with news reception (e.g. Nielsen and Schrøder, 2014; Kalogeropoulos *et al.*, 2017). This chapter draws on this scholarship to discuss the notion of an author in terms of journalists, media, their role in society, the construction of journalistic identity and the productive practices of journalism; that is to say, how is the authorial voice constructed and in which terms it is acknowledged. All these discussions and themes are framed by three main questions: who is and should be setting the agenda, who should be voiced and how; and how should the normatively negotiated journalistic roles be executed and performed through particular practices. Thus, these three discussions are interdependent. Together they constitute not only the understanding of who and what is a journalist, but also what is the concept of an author (as a productive, creative and mediating process) within the context of journalism, outlining the various perspectives, definitions, their boundaries, and who is included and excluded from them.

Thus, section 5.1 focuses on more general questions of mediation and the different roles that academic literature has attributed to journalists (and media), as well as how journalists have been perceived within the industry itself. To theoretically explore these discourses, it is particularly important to consider that when people engage with media, they also inform their understanding of social reality (including the media themselves) through them.

Section 5.2 provides an overview of the diverse and extensive literature of journalism studies, which allows us to explore the question of journalistic identity, and how is it being constructed through the notion of professional status, which further serves as a tool for journalists' self-definition, evaluation and sense of belonging (Zelizer, 1993). The section also explores which practices of production are considered significant in order to be considered a journalist and to fulfil the relevant social role that a journalist should have.

Conceptualising the author as a cluster of practices of production and mediation, going beyond the understanding of the author as an embodied individualised form, allows us to better understand the complexity of involvements and collaborations. It enables us to distinguish between different involvements, but also the power structures of media production: for example, Goffman (1981) distinguishes between animator, author and principal (the one who talks, the one deciding what is being said and the one on whose behalf, for whose benefit it is being said). These discussions provide for consideration of authority (the implications of rights and responsibilities) over a given text, and the study of how readers understand authors and what they pay attention to, while at the same time being sensitive to the public/media discourses that contribute to these understandings.

These discourses form prior judgements and prejudices of what the author is, and ought to be – how being an author should be performed, as well as assessed and judged. This critical overview taking a media-centric stance complements the earlier outlined audience-centric perspective, as they both inform the theoretical conceptualisation of the understood author proposed and elaborated in the subsequent Chapter 6 and employed and empirically studied in this thesis.

5.1 Journalism: the shift from creativity to technique – the producer or distributor of facts?

The concept of mediation will be discussed first, so that in addition to the micro level of journalists as authors and their role in the society, the structural macro level of media as a social institution and their epistemological role in society can be addressed. It needs to be stressed, that although journalism is in this thesis, but also by many scholars of journalism studies, considered as factual as distinct from fictional content production by the use of the term 'factual', Bird and Dardenne importantly point out that "while news is not fiction, it is a story about reality, not reality itself," (1988, p. 82). Any available terminology (journalism, news, factual or informative content production) comes with accompanying concepts and definitions, and narrows down the scope of focus, proposing also very particular practices and their conceptual understanding. The purpose here is to visit and consider a broad spectrum of literature and practices and be open to different and alternative narratives of what content production entails. Therefore the thesis throughout opts for the terms 'factual' and 'informative', to avoid a narrow definition as much as possible, yet acknowledging that factual does not necessarily mean providing facts only, but rather referring to content production that openly recognises and calls upon social reality and its events (see for example concept of service journalism by Eide and Knight, 1999).

Journalism studies are concerned with the conceptualisation of authors referred to by various names e.g. journalists, newsroom (staff), reporters, photographers, or media owners, or more recently amateur producers (citizen journalists etc.). These terms first and foremost embody diverse forms of content production (visual, print, audio, etc.), but more extensive discussions on media production often recognise media's complex structures, acknowledging various managerial decisions, and involvements of the media leadership and owners in the production processes.

Thus the first subsection will reflect on recent, rather prominent debates around media(tiza)tion – the different terminologies and conceptualisations, to further situate the discussion among journalism studies scholars on the different roles of media (and journalists) in the society, outlined subsequently. This allows for further recognition, not only of the significant role of the author (media) in knowledge production (Schudson, 2003; Anderson, 2008), but also of the double hermeneutics of journalistic production – media interpreting social reality, as well as their role in interpreting and mediating it. Therefore, in this section, the discussed literature sets the framework for understanding how media are discussed as mediators of knowledge about social reality, and what further roles are normatively attributed to the media by public and academic discourses, and how these are perceived and performed by journalists themselves.

The author as an agent of mediation

Silverstone (2002) states that "mediation has significant consequences for the way in which the world appears in and to everyday life, and as such this mediated appearance, in turn, provides a framework for the definition and conduct of our relationships to the other, and especially the distant other – the other who only appears to us within the media" (2002, p. 762); inevitably for many people, 'the other' includes media themselves. The notion of mediation (Martin-Barbero, 1993; Silverstone, 1999, 2002; Couldry, 2008; Livingstone, 2009) has been in the past decade related to or contested by the concept of mediatization (Hepp, 2013a; Hjarvard and Petersen, 2013; Lundby, 2014), a term highly contested itself. These two terms – mediation and mediatization – have very different theoretical groundings and origins, conveying not necessarily dissimilar ideas but rather different conceptualisations; not least as both terms are used differently by different authors. This section, thus, explores how and if these different conceptualisations, and their theoretical vocabulary, provide relevant perspectives on conceptualising the author as a media institution and subsequently their role in society as a social actor, mediating social reality.

Taking as a starting point the media's role in providing information about events or conditions that one cannot directly observe for themselves (McQuail, 2010, p. 83), the concept of mediation allows for further contextualisation and consideration of an author beyond the author-text-reader relationship, that is to say beyond the processes of production and reception only. It helps to acknowledge the institutional as well as technological character of communication (Silverstone, 1999, 2002) as a process of relating to social reality (Martin-Barbero, 1993); and reinforces the recognition that mass media communication involves simultaneous involvement of multiple actors at different levels (Siapera, 2010). Martin-Barbero importantly argues that:

> "[c]onsumption is not just the reproduction of forces. It is a production of meanings and the site of a struggle that does not end with the possession of the object but extends to the uses, giving objects a social form in which are registered the demands and forms of action of different cultural competencies." (1993, p. 214)

Mediation thus also implies a certain form of *relationship*, a dialectical process that Silverstone especially stresses in his understanding of mediation, and which is inevitable for the consideration of the author as a producer of a text but also its property.

> "[I]nstitutionalized media of communication (...) are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life. (…) while it is perfectly possible to privilege those mass media as defining and perhaps even determining social meanings, such privileging would miss the continuous and often creative engagement that listeners and viewers have with the products of mass communication." (Silverstone, 2002, p. 762)

Couldry (2008, 2012) builds further on the concept of mediation proposed by Martin-Barbero (1993) and Silverstone (1999, 2002), in his theoretical study of the social role of media institutions, problematizing how media use their institutional strategies to build authority over the construction of social reality. He warns us from underestimating "the active role of media institutions in framing the world *as if* it were a functioning whole and how such an idea gets embedded into everyday interpretations and action." (Couldry, 2012, p. 65 emphasis in original). Although in his earlier works Couldry (2008, 2012) linguistically prefers the term mediation over mediatization (a term for which he opts later (Couldry and Hepp, 2013)), he argues for these two concepts to be considered in terms of

complementing each other rather than comparing and contrasting them to each other.

In the last decade, the term mediation, originally prioritised within the English language context (Couldry, 2008; Livingstone, 2009), is increasingly contested and understood differently by academics as some more commonly opt for the term mediatization. For some this is more a linguistic shift, arguing that mediation is too general a term, and to study the media's role in the transformation of society with the focus on structural implications of media as institutions on everyday life, a more distinct term – mediatization – is needed (Lundby, 2009; Couldry and Hepp, 2013).

However, the terminological shift does not clarify the debates, as the term mediatization is highly contested itself, appropriated by different scholars to conceptualise and capture rather different social processes. Hepp (2013b) identifies two distinct conceptualisations of the term – constructivist and institutionalist. The latter considers media institutions, and thus media logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979) as the driving force of social change, and the other social (non-media) actors as those who accept it as such and adapt their operation to it (Hjarvard, 2008). The former, in contrast, primarily focuses on the changing everyday practices of "the communicative construction of reality" (Hepp, 2013b, p. 618). This conceptual disunity leads Deacon and Stanyer to argue that the imprecision in the use of the term leads to confusion and "can only degrade the analytical value of the term" (2014, p. 1034).

Nevertheless, both approaches, as pointed out by various authors, are limiting and reductionist in their recognition (or lack thereof) of the role and influences of audiences on these societal transformations (e.g. Livingstone, 2009). As the media-centred perspective of mediatization places audiences in a reactive role only, Schrøder argues that there is a need to consider "how this audience activity exerts a formative influence, however small, on media and thereby on the relationship between the media and other societal institutions" (2017, p. 164).

Despite its approach to audiences, the mediation/mediatization debate is instrumental in its emphasis on the broader context and conceptualisation of media as a complex set of diverse productive involvements, as a practice of communication as well as a complex social institution. Such recognition contributes to opening up the conceptualisation of the author from the micro level of an individual's (or collective of individuals') creative force to a more structural and systematic conceptualisation of the author as a productive societal force. The author can thus be considered as an agent of mediation, contextual and politically biased, with its own agenda not only on the micro level of the individual sender, or meso level of the given media organisation, but also on the societal macro level constructing its significance and notion of its social omnipresence. This enables us to further consider the self-perception and self-promotion of media as the essential source of information and knowledge about the world and thus subsequently, the audiences' interpretation of that.

The role of media and journalists in the society – normative, self-perceived and performed

Focusing on authors as mediating social reality opens up questions to what capacity and to what degree and quality are they performing such a role (e.g. Donsbach and Patterson, 2004). The role of media in society and the role of journalists in the production of media are closely linked, as the discussion of the former sets the expectations for the latter and simultaneously the discussions on journalists are often implicitly linked to the broader organisational structure of media organisations (McQuail, 2010). Journalistic roles are thus discussed and theorised normatively in relation to the wider society (Cohen, 1963;

Janowitz, 1975), deriving from particular ideological and political frameworks, outlining the expectations and standards for journalistic practices; as well as studied empirically in terms of performance and achievement (often of these expectations) (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986; Mellado, 2015), or also asking about journalists' self-perceptions of their role (Aldridge and Evetts, 2003). Hence, the normative expectations not only serve externally to evaluate the performance of journalists, but also contribute to the construction of journalistic identity (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018), being used by journalists themselves to legitimise their role within their community (Zelizer, 1993) as well as within the society (Hanitzsch, 2007). These are then realised in everyday practices, which do not necessarily always correspond with the ideologically set expectations; for example, as Mellado (2015) shows in her research on the performance of journalistic roles through an analysis of journalistic outcomes, focusing on different stylistic indicators and use of language. She argues that although journalists have or might have certain beliefs and ideas of standards for their practices to which they aspire or take for granted, in their day-to-day practices there are various constraints (whether economic, organisational, personal, or cultural) that restrict these.

Most of the discussions on the media's and journalists' role in society to date are limiting in their taken for granted consideration of media as having a democratic role. Such a perspective, in fact, derives from a very particular and narrow consideration of audiences as citizens only, taking the Western European and North American democratic model as normatively prescriptive (for a further critique of this, see Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018). The Western perspective, common to many studies on journalistic roles, is emblematic by its promotion of individual freedoms. Hanitzsch and Vos argue that the Western outlook starts from the position that journalism is central "to democratic processes, but democracy is itself not necessarily a prerequisite for journalism" (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018, p. 147). The literature overlooks, as they argue, that other societies might have different priorities and value systems, for example, an emphasis on collective needs over individual freedoms in relation to journalism.

Consequently, there is a strong tendency among scholars to refer to political and news journalism only (e.g. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) leaving other forms of journalism, as well as other areas of reporting and informing that are not concerned with politics and civic society under-studied and under-theorised. It ought to be possible to conceive of journalism in much broader terms – as the production of text with information on everyday life, sometimes called lifestyle journalism (Van Zoonen, 1998; Hanush, 2012) or what Eide and Knight (1999) refer to as service journalism, where "the news media provide their audiences [also] with information, advice and help about the problems of everyday life" (1999, p. 525). Most recently, Hanitzsch and Vos (2018) building on an extensive literature review of empirical as well as normative studies, including research from non-Western countries and non-political (yet significant to everyday life) areas of news, proposed a complex multidimensional model of eighteen roles of journalism within the domain of political and everyday life. In comparison to the political domain, the roles identified as relevant for everyday life are ideal-typical, lacking empirical as well as normative grounding in comparison to the political dimension. However, although the model derives from three assumed interrelated spaces of everyday needs (consumption, identity and emotions), it recognises the role of journalists as mediators of everyday life experiences and acknowledges that journalism also serves purposes other than the political and thus has distinct non-political roles in people's everyday lives.

As empirical research shows, journalists' performance, but also self-perception, of their roles (Cohen, 1963; Janowitz, 1975; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, 1996; Donsbach and Patterson, 2004; Mellado, 2015) derive from normative expectations (Blumler and

Gurevitch, 1995; Christians *et al.*, 2009; Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018) and journalists' understanding of a value system that they ought to have (Schudson, 2003). The centrality of the political domain of social life when considering the journalistic role and its performance, normatively as well as empirically, leads to the construction of particular values as markers of legitimacy for journalists – for instance, with regard to journalists' relation to those in power, their ability to set their own agenda, or the motivations behind their actions – to satisfy or to empower the public (their audience). To consider journalism as a system of values and practices, as well as products, to be studied empirically, Hanitzsch (2007) proposes a multidimensional model of journalistic culture with three main dimensions – interventionism, distance from power, and market orientation – that allows him to consider these values beyond news production only, and to empirically examine the relations, but also discrepancies, between them (2007, p. 369).

Following the extensive literature on journalistic roles and taking Hanitzsch's (2007) model of journalistic culture as a main framework, there are indeed three main dimensions along which the concept of an author as a journalist in relation to society is questioned and problematized. Firstly, the *journalist's voice* and its presence in the content production, referring to the consideration of whether the journalist acknowledges their presence in the reporting, their involvement in the issues or events, and the degree to which the journalist expresses an opinion, or opts for a more neutral, distanced voice, that Donsbach and Patterson refer to as the "journalist's autonomy as a political actor" (2004, p. 265). Different authors use different terminology to distinguish between journalists who perform lesser or greater degrees of autonomy, such as disseminator and mobiliser (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, 1996) or passive and active (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004), or attributing normative functions to media to inform (McQuail, 2010) and be instructive, in contrast to the more active roles of commenting (Christians *et al.*, 2009), surveillance and agenda setting (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) and providing analysis (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018).

Secondly, *the journalist's point of departure (loyalty)* considers whose perspective the journalist takes as a point of departure, and whether they use their voice for political advocacy (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995), or challenges or adopts the perspective of those in question (political elite, government, economic forces and business or other entities of socio-cultural life). Donsbach and Patterson (2004, p. 265) call this dimension the "journalist's positioning as a political actor". Other authors distinguish these two different roles as lapdog or watchdog (Donohue, Tichenor and Olien, 1995; Donsbach, 1995), or loyal facilitator and mouthpiece, in opposition to monitor and adversary (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018). Increasingly, with research from non-European countries, the role of a loyal facilitator is no more seen as simply submissive to those in power, but also having a more empowered role in, for example, nation building (Ettema and Glasser, 1998).

Thirdly, the *journalist's perception of their audience*, which is closely related to the medium's business model; from that, the organisation's priorities, economic purpose and main functions are derived. Within this dimension the journalistic role is derived from an understanding of the capacity in which journalists address the audiences, which allows for recognition of journalism beyond providing political news. Audiences as citizens are addressed by journalists in their civic role, giving journalists the role of political actors informing those in power about the citizens' needs, while simultaneously facilitating citizens' engagement in political life and debates, considered fully within the two previous dimensions. This dimension allows for broader recognition of the role of journalists in people's everyday life, the servicing role of media in providing advice, information and guidelines in relation to quotidian situations and decisions, which is often linked to emotions and emotions management (Peters, 2011), as well as media's market driven role in which audiences are addressed as consumers of provided media products (Hanitzsch,

2007; Mellado, 2015).

Normative theories of media and their prescriptions of the functions that media/journalists ought to have in society, including their relationship to audiences, determine the roles that journalists appropriate as ideals and models to aspire to, and attempt to fulfil through day-to-day practices and routines. Thus, they inform the journalists' narratives of self-perception and the construction of a shared journalistic identity, setting standards of what it means to be a (professional) journalist. Simultaneously, those normalised roles lead to expectations of particular practices and routines as means for achieving those roles.

5.2 Production of factual content: the journalists' self-definitions

With regard to the journalist as the central figure of journalism studies, not only must we ask about the role that journalism has in people's lives as discussed in the previous section – but we now must also turn to ask what is a journalist, how is journalistic identity constructed, and how do journalists legitimize their rights to these roles within society (Zelizer, 1993). These questions are central to the literature on journalism as a profession. Questioning journalists' professionalism is thus instrumental, as it touches on various aspects of what it means to be a (good) journalist; what constitutes a journalist/journalism; whether it can be considered a profession; and what constitutes the divide between journalists and non-journalists (Abbott, 1988; Soloski, 1989). It can be argued that the concept of professionalism serves, within the industry as well as academia, as a tool for journalists' (self)identification, evaluation and sense of belonging (recognition), although there are authors who contest this assumption pointing out its limitations, arguing that "ways of doing journalism are inseparable from ways of understanding journalism" (Carlson, 2015, p. 350).

The first part of the chapter thus addresses the questions concerning the journalistic profession(alism) and identity to further elaborate, in the second part, on journalistic practices – empirical as well as normative, that are identified by the literature as significant in the appropriation of the journalistic identity. These discourses on journalistic identity reveal how journalists as professionals are understood by academics, but also by journalists themselves. One's appropriation of those practices thus not only serves the performance of the journalistic roles, but also serves as a constitutive mechanism in constructing (collective) journalistic identity and belonging to the journalistic community, or the journalistic profession (Zelizer, 1993; e.g. Singer, 2003).

The author as a professional journalist – the construction of journalists' identity

What constitutes a journalist, the discussion on identity construction, and the questions regarding journalism as an occupation and profession have been preoccupying multiple scholars (e.g. Soloski, 1989; Carpentier, 2005; Deuze, 2005; Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018) and researchers, not least as the notions of belonging to a profession and being a professional journalist are often used within the industry as a form of self-identification and legitimization. The status of a professional journalist comes with the notion of entitlement

to particular practices, and justifies a distinction from non-journalists – whether these are citizen journalists, audiences or others.

In sociology, Larson (1977) conceptualises professionalism (and profession) as a way in which certain occupations claim social status, authority and control over a certain economic market. Professionalism is thus an ideological construct (Singer, 2003) that also serves as an instructive body of knowledge and frame of references in relation to the expected performance of particular practices – what to do and what to avoid (Zelizer, 1993). Larson (1977) further argues that by acquiring particular knowledge and skills through formal education, professions construct the boundary of expertise that those outside of the profession do not have. Further, according to Soloski (1989) members of a particular profession are commonly self-regulating, by accepting shared values and norms, providing a specialist service to the public that is not provided by any other occupation, therefore having a monopoly over its expertise. Considering journalism as a profession is, however, also problematic (Soloski, 1989) as it does not meet many of the aforementioned characteristics. There are multiple and varied points of access and entry, as well as vague requirements for the knowledge to be acquired in formal education considered necessary for the profession to be practised. As Abbott states, mobility between journalism and other (writing related) occupations is quite common, and "[w]hile there are schools, associations, degrees, and ethics codes, there is no exclusion of those who lack them" (1988, p. 225).

Although journalism might not meet the sociological definition of a profession, it has established itself as a provider of "current 'factual' information to the public" (Abbott, 1988, p. 225) and the question thus is whether this social status is legitimized by journalists. As empirical research shows, the concept of professionalism is a relevant mechanism employed by journalists themselves in order to construct social recognition (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996); it is the agent of legitimation (Tuchman, 1978b). It is a value to which journalists themselves aspire (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996, p. 125) by "gain[ing] status through their work by acting 'professionally' and exhibiting certain predefined traits of a 'professional' community." For Zelizer (1993, p. 220), the concept of professionalism serves to construct a journalistic collective identity. Soloski (1989) further argues that "[it] is an effective and economical method by which news organizations control the behaviour of reporters and editors" (1989, p. 207). Moreover, journalists' compliance to those standards, partly normalised by the industry as markers of professionalism, can also be understood as reducing journalists' autonomy (Merill, 1974). While autonomy is simultaneously considered as one of the values of the professional ideology in terms of self-governance as well as in relation to the perceived monopoly of expertise (Singer, 2003), Lewis argues that "[j]ournalists have attained this power in part by invoking the occupational norm of objectivity, which itself is structured out of routines and narratives, and which historically has afforded journalists a monopolistic claim on expertise in communicating 'truth' about the world," but often also in relation to the audiences, by considering themselves as "more qualified than their audience to determine the audience's own interests and needs" (2012, p. 840).

Rather than professionalism, other authors propose to discuss this construction of the collective identity of journalists – the system of shared values and strategies of particular practices – as journalistic culture (Hanitzsch, 2007), or the professional ideology of journalism (Deuze, 2005), stressing the evolving and ongoing process of constructing what is journalism. Zelizer (1993) proposes to study journalists as an interpretative community rather than a profession. She recognises that people who work in media and identify themselves as journalists do have a sense of community, sharing certain values, beliefs and expectations of what it means to be a journalist and doing journalism (Deuze, 2005), yet she further argues that these are constructed through "collective interpretations of key

public events" (Zelizer, 1993, p. 219), bringing greater attention to the narrative nature of journalism and its power to construct its own narrative of itself. Carpentier (2005) emphasises that the constructed identity, and thus what it means to be a journalist, is contingent and fluid, and questions how it gains (discursive) stability within social reality.

Zelizer's (1993) theory challenges the reductive conceptualisation of the role of journalism being to inform people as citizens, in order to facilitate and increase their participation in social as well as political life (Gans, 1998). Zelizer argues that this consideration of journalism recognises and promotes particular practices of production as key to the fulfilment of the role (e.g. objectivity, autonomy, immediacy), while leaving other defining dimensions of journalists' practice unaddressed – namely informal networking and a sense of collectivity expressed in "favouring horizontal over vertical management and collegial over hierarchical authority" (1993, p. 221), and practices of narration and storytelling.

The proposed term – interpretative community – used by Fish (1980) in the field of literary theory, denotes how meanings of texts are shared within (different) communities around those texts. Applying the concept to journalism, Zelizer argues that the journalists' sense of belonging to the community is constructed around, and based on shared interpretations of key public events, arising:

> "less through rigid indicators of training or education—as indicated by the frame of the profession—and more through the informal associations that build up around shared interpretations. (…) The shared discourse that they produce is thus a marker of how they see themselves as journalists." (Zelizer, 1993, p. 223)

Furthermore, her consideration of storytelling and narration, including narratives of self, as a significant journalistic practice of construction of social reality, allows her to analyse not only interpretations of current events and how are these shared, negotiated and articulated within the community, but also to consider how these interpretations evolve and inform the understanding of what it means to be a journalist through journalists' reflections on past stories and their original reporting that are "used as a standard for judging contemporary action. By relying on shared interpretations, they [journalists] build authority for practices not emphasized by traditional views of journalism" (Zelizer, 1993, pp. 223–224).

Similarly, Carlson (2015), conceptualising journalism as a cultural practice, proposes that the shared identity is constructed through metajournalistic discourse, which he defines as "the site in which [different] actors publicly engage in processes of establishing definitions, setting boundaries, and rendering judgments about journalism's legitimacy discourse" (2015, p. 350). Journalists as content producers have indeed a prominent position in articulating such a metajournalistic discourse due to their privileged access to the public. However, as Carlson (2015) points out, it would be restraining to focus on journalists as sole actors here, as other non-journalist actors contribute to the formulation of the discourse too – political entities and audiences themselves, for example through their letters to editors (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001) or through online comments (Robinson, 2010).

Within the metajournalistic discourse, the meaning of who is and can be considered a journalist, including the identification of those outside – the non-journalists – is negotiated, as are the understandings of what are the appropriated journalistic practices and their normative expectations. These are inevitably continuously contested, as different actors (journalists, policymakers, audiences) exercise their own interpretations and perspectives. According to Carlson, journalism is "a set of institutionalized practices embedded within a web of sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting discourses that generates social meanings (…) situated within shifting social, economic, and technological contexts," (2015,

pp. 353, 354). Therefore, non-journalistic actors can challenge journalistic definitions and expectations, to the point that it is considered by journalists as a threat to their gained social status and authority over certain domains of social life (i.e. providing information), and are thus addressed as threats. Examples of this are the increasing rivalry between online and traditional journalism (Singer, 2003), as increasing consumption of online media led to more pronounced discussions on the role of citizen journalists in the reporting on current events (e.g. Hänska-Ahy and Shapour, 2013; Deuze, Bruns and Neuberger, 2007; Carpenter, 2010); and the changing dynamics between producers and audiences and their increasing interdependence (e.g. Jenkins, 2006; Bruns, 2008b). The increasing visibility of citizen journalists and producing audiences (referred to as amateurs, audiences, produsers, etc.), thus, challenged the status (and monopoly over expertise) of traditional journalists. As a consequence of this struggle over a domain of expertise, the notion of "professional journalist" within the public as well as journalistic discourse has become more prominently reduced to authors and media producers who are financially rewarded for their work, and/or those employed or working as writers and content (especially news) producers for established media organisations (e.g. Domingo and Heinonen, 2008).

The author as a cluster of productive practices

The final conceptualisation of the author within the field of journalism studies to be discussed here is the notion of the author as productive practices, which builds on the conceptualisation of journalism as a cultural practice (Zelizer, 1993; Carlson, 2015) and further explores questions of journalistic agency and power in the production and distribution of knowledge and information. Productive practices are considered as clusters of practical procedures implemented by journalists (and other media workers) in order to achieve particular journalistic standards, to meet the expected (normative) values.

Both the journalistic identity as well as the role of journalism in society are constructed, sustained and legitimised through shared values and beliefs embodied in particular production practices – a shared (among the practitioners, but also by the broader public) understanding of how journalism should be practised. It is a two-way dynamic: through the negotiation and construction of journalistic identity and the role of journalism, particular productive practices are understood and promoted as significant and constitutive; simultaneously, through the debate on different productive practices and their application and execution, the construction of journalistic identity and role of journalism is being constructed and established normatively. For example, Deuze (2005), building on broader literature, identifies five discursively constructed ideal-typical values composing the ideology of journalism, arguing that these "give legitimacy and credibility to what they [journalists] do" (2005, p. 446). These are public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy and ethics. Carpentier (2016, p. 80) further extends the characteristics on which the identity of the traditional mainstream media professional is being constructed, listing expertise, public service, ethics, autonomy, institutional embedding, and deployment of management and power. These ideal-typical values are expressed through various narrative practices that also simultaneously normalise them as standard journalistic practices (Zelizer, 1993). Therefore, productive practices are here considered first and foremost as cultural practices and narrative strategies, rather than procedures and techniques for production (e.g. quoting or cross-checking).

This section thus considers four particular productive practices that are not always conceptualised or endorsed/dismissed in the same way, or to the same degree, by different authors. However, their prominence in the discourse of journalism studies as well as among journalism practitioners, and the broader public provides a space (location/ground)

for academic as well as public discussions and negotiations over the journalistic identity, role, and legitimacy – the metajournalistic discourse _. These four practices further unpack the questions surrounding journalism as a profession and a social institution and the decisions framing the production of the journalistic texts – what to publish, from which perspective, and how to tell it:

1) *objectivity* questioning journalists' involvement, detachment, fairness and ethics – the practice of mediation, how to mediate others;

2) *autonomy* focusing on the journalists' independence within the broader social structures as well as the internal organisational and institutional structures, touching upon issues of power relations and the question of services to whom – it is the practice of relating to media as a social institution within the broader social context, closely related to questions of media's role in the society;

3) *expertise* further addressing the questions of status and access, and journalism's positioning within the broader social structures – it is the core practice of legitimisation of the social status of journalism;

4) *narration* to appreciate the communicative purpose of journalism – to tell, to inform, to mediate; this last category thus links journalism to earlier discussions on authoring, and to a more general notion of production and creation of a text, not considering journalism only as a "fact-centred discursive practice" (Chalaby, 1998) but also as a storytelling of re-telling and contextualising facts.

Objectivity

Objectivity is considered one of the most prominent practices within journalism, whether among the journalists, in the newsrooms, or among the scholars of journalism studies. When Raeijmaekers and Maeseele (2017) refer to objectivity as a cornerstone of journalism, this does not necessarily mean that objectivity is embraced or desired by all. Many scholars consider objectivity unachievable, a myth (Ward, 2005), or an ideal (Schudson, 2001). Rather, objectivity is an almost omnipresent value in any discussion on journalism, hardly ever omitted: thus, objectivity as a cultural practice co-constitutes the journalistic ideology (Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006). As Soloski argues, the notion of objectivity further determines "more specific aspects of news professionalism such as news judgement, the selection of sources and the structure of news beats" (1989, p. 213).

The idea of objectivity derives from the Western democratic theory of media with its principles such as political pluralism, and it relies on the positivist approach to social reality, building on notions like truth and facts (Raeijmaekers and Maeseele, 2017). Subsequently, these ideas are appropriated by journalists themselves, informing their perception of their role within society (Tuchman, 1972, 1978a; Soloski, 1989; Schudson, 2001). In spite of its centrality in the discussions on journalism, it is a highly contested concept. For some, objectivity equates to impartiality and/or balance, "an adherence to certain norms or standards" (Westerståhl, 1983, p. 403) to ensure factuality and truthfulness of the reporting, an emphasis on journalists' detachment from the object of reporting rather than from the truth as such (McQuail, 2010, p. 200). For example, Westerståhl (1983) proposes a pragmatic functional conceptualisation of objectivity, reflecting as well as reflected in, the discussed questions on journalistic roles. He identifies four components of objectivity: truth and relevance constituting factuality, and balance/non-partisanship and neutral presentation constituting impartiality. Thus abiding by particular principles for the selection of information (selection of information significant to people and society, providing equal or balanced time and space to the opposing parties, or those involved) and their subsequent composition and presentation in the final text (separation of factual reporting from comments, analysis and opinions; and keeping a critical distance from the source of the

news) ensures objectivity "in the sense that the selection becomes more or less independent of the individual newscaster's personal interests" (Westerståhl, 1983, p. 422).

This instructive conceptualisation has been increasingly criticised as a myth (Ward, 2005), not least because the application and understanding of the particular components and practices of objectivity are historically and culturally contextual (Schudson, 1978, 2001). Many of the procedures for selecting the news are subject to decisions that are driven by more fundamental structural inequalities and power asymmetries in society (Raeijmaekers and Maeseele, 2017), leading to questions about: what criteria are used to grant the same/proportional space/time to different voices; or what it means for information to be relevant – relevant because it concerns those in power, or because it is significant for audiences in their civic roles; and most importantly, how are these different considerations compared and balanced against each other? In the end, journalists' understanding of objectivity is already itself biased (Jones, 2013).

In her account, Tuchman (1972) goes beyond questioning the achievability of objectivity and rather considers the role of the concept for the journalistic community, as well as for the wider society. She argues that objectivity is a strategic ritual used by journalists to defend themselves from criticism: "They assume that, if every reporter gathers and structures 'facts' in a detached, unbiased, impersonal manner, deadlines will be met and libel suits avoided" (Tuchman, 1972, p. 664). Presenting opposing or different views – "both sides of the story" – is thus a strategy used by journalists to avoid responsibility for the truthfulness of those statements, leaving it to the reader to make up their mind. Tuchman further argues that for the construction of objectivity, the notion of 'the facts speak for themselves' is instrumental, where reporters speaking for the facts are constituted as biased (Tuchman, 1972), and the news content is identified as analysis or opinion.

The criticism of the 70s and 80s (e.g. Tuchman, 1972; Schudson, 1978), pointing out the positivist understanding of objectivity as idealistic and unachievable, has become more nuanced in the last decade. Although objectivity is still, by its critics, understood as an ideal norm, it is considered a moral ideal (Schudson, 2001) or an ethical norm (Ward, 2005) that should not be fully dismissed as unachievable, but rather should be treated as an ideal guiding journalistic and editorial decisions. Ward argues that although objectivity "is no longer a viable ethical guide" (2005, p. 4) it should nonetheless be an ethical choice. He calls on journalists to adhere to the ethical values of respect and fairness: "To be objective is to favour a rational perspective that follows experience, facts, logic, and public standards. Objectivity is part of our culture's attempt to say what knowledge is and how to pursue truth in the many domains of inquiry" (Ward, 2005, p. 318). In the same vain, McNair (2017) reflects on the role of objectivity in the current political climate, where political elites extensively rely on the use of misinformation and discredit journalists who are pointing out this misinformation, arguing that "objective journalism relies to a large extent on the assumed credibility of sources, much of which is premised on democratically legitimised authority," (McNair, 2017, p. 1330). Thus, the concept of objectivity is attaining a new role in the current journalistic ideology. By considering objectivity as an ethical norm (Ward, 2005) in the time of 'post-truth', it is reconceptualised from the strategic ritual of avoiding responsibility for truthfulness (Tuchman, 1972), to an act of taking on responsibility for the uncovering of misinformation, searching for credible sources and scrutinising them (McNair, 2017):

> "Objectivity will continue to be a key pathway to the mobilisation of trust in journalism, but in the post-factual world where powerful sources brazenly assert the Truth of their demonstrably untruthful versions of events, objectivity must

> include a determination to challenge 'authoritative' sources as never before." (McNair, 2017, p. 1330)

Recognising objectivity as a cultural practice, rather than a rigid positivist norm, the concept opens up to its own limitations, and the journalists' reflection on those limitations becomes a crucial part of aspiring to objectivity as a guiding ethical practice, when deciding what and how is going to be said.

The discussion of objectivity is primarily concerned with news journalism, or what is referred to as serious news reporting only, although entertainment journalism (tabloids) also reports stories considered political or serious journalism (Bird, 1990). This narrow focus contributes to the construction of the notion of quality/good journalism through the dichotomies of rational/emotional, information/entertainment, and hard news/soft news (Peters, 2011) rather than questioning objectivity as a practice of content production.

Autonomy

Carpentier's (2005) analysis of *autonomy* in relation to normative media theories (McQuail, 2010) shows that although the notion of autonomy as "independence or the need to resist different forms of (internal and external) pressures" (Carpentier, 2005, p. 202) is by many critics seen as lacking, the desirability for genuine autonomy and independence of the journalist is shared and promoted by all political models except the authoritarian one. In her theoretical account, Sjøvaag (2013) analyses both the institutional and individual factors limiting and facilitating journalistic autonomy, arguing that journalistic autonomy is understood both as 'a freedom to' select what and how to write (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996), to speak and publish (Deuze, 2005); but also in negative terms as 'a freedom from' interference on the institutional level by other socio-political institutions – the state and the market, as well as on the individual level by the ability of individual journalists to negotiate internal practices and routines of the newsroom (Ryfe, 2009).

Reich and Hanitzsch (2013, p. 137) identify six domains of influence on the journalists' perception of autonomy: political, economic, organisational, procedural, and professional, as well as the influence of reference groups. This consideration of autonomy thus goes beyond the notion of independence from state and market, but further recognises the influential power of ownership, management structures, editorial decisions, newsroom routines, professional conventions and ethical standards, as well as peer pressure, audiences and friends and family. Sjøvaag (2013) points out that the level of autonomy can be also affected by the given media outlet, genre and media system. For example, investigative journalists are often granted greater institutional autonomy to scrutinize those in power (Donohue, Tichenor and Olien, 1995; Pinto, 2008). Therefore, Sjøvaag (2013) distinguishes external and internal factors restricting and enabling autonomy, arguing that on the external level, it is political autonomy (in terms of policies, regulations, and legislations) and on the internal level these are management pressures, economic and editorial processes. McChesney argues that "the corporate/commercial pressure on news often takes place indirectly, and is therefore less likely to be recognised as such by journalists or the public" (2003, p. 311), and when reflecting on their own autonomy, journalists are mainly worried about editorial control (Reich and Hanitzsch, 2013). Sjøvaag argues that the journalists' perception of autonomy is fluid, "continuously adjusted according to what is needed to perform the task of reporting the news" (2013, p. 164).

Therefore, although there are multiple pressures on the institutional level, journalists primarily relate to and enjoy the autonomy negotiated at the editorial level and exercised at the level of practice (Sjøvaag, 2013). This is empirically demonstrated by Ryfe's (2009) ethnographic study of a newsroom, where the incoming editor, in order to increase the

circulation of the paper, asked the staff journalists to change their well-established routines of gathering news and reporting, and abandon their regular sources. Traditionally, he argues, journalists gain status within the community by having access to information that grants them greater freedom to decide which stories to publish: "Those with the best sources of information not only enjoy more autonomy within their newsrooms, they also gain more esteem within the community of journalists" (Ryfe, 2009, p. 202). He concludes that, in being asked to change their day-to-day journalistic practices, the journalists might perceive a loss of autonomy when asked not to follow the taken for granted rules and routines, those collectively considered as standards and norms.

Considering that decisions about what to publish are often made collectively, without any given codified formulas for decision making, Schudson (2005) warns against journalists' absolute autonomy, which he sees as a pathway to conformity, damaging in its own way. Stating that "journalists all breathe the same air of their occupation and develop habits of judgment of great, sometimes stultifying, uniformity. In this respect, when journalists collectively gain autonomy from state and market, they do not individually gain free expression" (2005, p. 218); he stresses the need for continuous scrutiny of journalistic outcomes by the public and by the journalists' sources.

Interested in how journalists across Europe distinguish themselves from citizen journalists, Örnebring (2013) argues that although it is not identified explicitly, autonomy is strongly implied in journalists' claims for legitimacy and their self-perception as professionals. He argues that autonomy among journalists is "most often operationalized as trustworthiness (…) that it [professional journalism] can inherently be trusted, thanks to its institutional legacies and strengths" (2013, p. 47). In comparison to citizen journalists, there is a shift in journalists' perception of autonomy, "the long-established image of the lone, persistent and often idiosyncratic individual journalist as a professional ideal and model" has been replaced by an "emphasis on the collective nature of newswork" (Örnebring, 2013, p. 48). His study also confirms that autonomy is for journalists one of the constituting practices of professionalism, as it is understood as having control over who has access to the profession, and just as importantly, implying a profession's capacity and right to self-regulate that expects the professionals to commit (even if silently) to the internal code of conduct (Larson, 1977; Soloski, 1989; Singer, 2003). Therefore, while in the online environment, journalists can exercise greater autonomy by by-passing the traditional media outlets (and their inner structures), 'too much' autonomy, in the instance of citizen journalists, is perceived negatively by professional journalists as lacking the guarantee of quality provided by various editorial control mechanisms that in fact restrict the journalist's individual autonomy (Örnebring, 2013).

In terms of autonomy, alternative journalism and media need to be considered too, as they position themselves as not only independent from, or resistant to the economic, political and social pressures, but also as providers of a space for counter-hegemonic and critical discourses (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007). As Atton puts it, they are "a site for highlighting the constructed nature of media representations; examining and practising how the world might be represented differently" (2015, p. 4). They do not only produce alternative narratives and promote alternative discourse, but they often also opt for an alternative model of organisation, centring their practices around the notion of diversity and pluralism, in terms of access to the media production and hence providing space for misrepresented, under-represented and marginalised voices (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007, pp. 17–18).

Autonomy further embodies the debate on the journalistic voice and its presence in the public space. That is to say, while objectivity seeks a neutral position providing space for other voices to be heard, autonomy promotes the journalistic presence in multiple public

discourses, asking for its public recognition and relevance. From the above discussed literature, we can see that autonomy is collaborative, but also fluid and contextual.

Expertise

The concept of journalistic expertise is built on the claim that journalists can provide (mediate) the truth, as discussed in the section on objectivity, and the premise that journalists, unlike non-journalists, are able to decide what is news (Zelizer, 1993, p. 220; Vos and Finneman, 2017), and thus hold particular knowledge, if only in the form of shared values and routines. This understanding relates to the already discussed sociology of profession(alism) (Larson, 1977), where possession of specific and formalised knowledge is recognised as one of the entry points to a profession, granting its practitioners authority not only over a specific domain of knowledge, but also over a certain economic market attached to it (see Larson, 1977), and constructing the boundaries of who has access to practising the occupation (inside/outside, journalists/others).

However, in the case of journalism, the field of expertise is not formally codified. Journalistic expertise refers to the legitimisation of shared, but often intuitive (Örnebring, 2013) practices of particular knowledge production about the current social world. And therefore, questions can be asked not only in relation to what journalistic expertise stands for (Reich, 2012), but as importantly how is it legitimised (Anderson, 2008). If expertise, as a possession of specific knowledge acquired by formal education or special training, generates a certain aura of authoritativeness, what does such authoritativeness derive from in the case of journalistic expertise, if there is no formal education or specific codified knowledge needed to practice it? Marchetti (2005) talks about journalistic capital, referring to "the functional influence within the field of the various press outlets, [that] can be measured by indicators linked to the production of the news itself: the number of 'exclusives', rate of articles 'picked up' by other media outlets, size of the staff of specialised journalists, or the editorial space allocated to the topic" (Marchetti, 2005, p. 71). Anderson (2008) argues that to fully encompass the concept of journalistic expertise, we need to consider both – the sociology of profession as well as sociology of knowledge, and then move beyond them. He argues that considering journalistic expertise as a trait of professionalism focuses on how journalists construct reality (e.g. Tuchman, 1972; Schudson, 1978), but does not provide answers to how such expertise in constructing news translates into social and political power – the expert status of journalists (Anderson, 2008, p. 253). And although Zelizer (1993), in comparison, is concerned with questions of how the constructed journalistic expertise is legitimized, and how the authority to construct reality is constructed, Anderson (2008) criticizes her for ignoring practices that are not grounded in narrative. Thus, he places in the centre the intertwined journalistic practices, and journalistic narratives about these practices: "[Ex]pert professionals – in this case, journalists – seek, via professional struggle, to monopolise a form of journalistic expertise, which is itself discursively constructed out of various journalistic practices and narratives" (Anderson, 2008, p. 258). The particular journalistic day to day routines "both concretizes and displays its base of 'abstract knowledge' or, in the peculiar case of journalism, knowledge real and expert but by no means abstract" (Schudson and Anderson, 2009, p. 89).

To address the question of what constitutes journalistic expertise as such, we ought to consider journalists' decisions about what is newsworthy (important, relevant, interesting), but also decisions about whose voices to include, who has the authority to speak on what topic (Donsbach, 2004). Reich (2012) draws on Collins and Evans' (2007) distinction between contributory and interactional expertise. While contributory expertise enables one to actively contribute to the domain of the specialism, interactional expertise "is

expertise in the *language* of a specialism in the absence of expertise in its *practice*" (Collins and Evans, 2007, p. 28). Drawing on this, journalists are seen as interactional experts as they are engaged in conversation with the (contributory) experts, familiarising themselves with the knowledge well enough to pass it on, and thus having "interactional expertise *in another expertise"* (Collins and Evans, 2007, p. 35). Through interactions with multiple (expert) sources, they gather and analyse information in order to produce knowledge. This conceptualisation is then revisited by Reich (2012), who argues that it is not only the interaction with sources but also with audiences, that is crucial for journalistic expertise, identifying such expertise as bipolar interactional. This bipolarity of journalistic expertise, according to Reich (2012, p. 349), means that different roles and practices within the newsroom require different interactional expertise. While investigative journalists are more source laden, focusing on gaining access and developing greater sensitivity towards their sources, editors or commentators also need great sensitivity towards audiences (Reich, 2012).

Ekström's claim that "journalism, in its various forms, is clearly among the most influential knowledge-producing institutions of our time" (2002, p. 259) reminds us that in the case of journalism, the questions of expertise are not only about demonstrating and practising journalistic expertise, but as importantly, journalism should be concerned with the production and mediation of knowledge as such, and the question of mediating other domains of expertise (Boyce, 2006; Albæk, 2011). Including statements from expert sources is an integral part of journalistic practices. In her research, Boyce (2006) questions those practices in terms of how sources are identified as experts, and how journalists distinguish and differentiate between sources with information (interactional experts) and those with expert information (contributory experts). She argues that experts are not only used to provide facts but also, and more increasingly, to add credibility and claim objectivity (Boyce, 2006, p. 890), shifting the dynamics between journalists and experts. Journalists are thus no longer simply mediators of expert knowledge, whose presence in media is less to present their own research and more to comment on issues relevant to their areas of expertise in order to add credibility to journalistic work (see also Albæk, 2011).

With the increased prominence of discussion on non-journalists' or audiences' engagement in production of media content, both the notions of expertise as the possession of expert knowledge to be mediated, as well as the possession of expert knowledge on how to mediate it, are being problematized anew. In both cases, the expertise serves as a legitimising factor not only to speak but also to be heard (Yoon, 2005). Boyce (2006, p. 891) considers a wider definition of an expert, where the notion of expertise can also be attributed to anyone who appears or is presented as someone deserving respect and who can express themselves interestingly. This is valuable when considering the tension between traditional (professional) journalists and alternative (citizen) journalists and bloggers, and disputes concerning journalistic expertise in relation to entitlement to speak and be listened to: Who is legitimised to produce knowledge? Who is and can be journalists?

Narration

Objective or subjective, facts or opinions, journalism is a form of narration – telling and retelling of information and events (Bird and Dardenne, 1988). In this last section of the literature review, the discussions relating to understanding of the author within journalism are linked to the earlier discussions on the author in literary studies, by bringing the narrative strategies and the role of narration as a practice forward. While fictional texts are considered in terms of artistry and aesthetics, questioning the (intended/interpreted) meaning; journalism and content of (news) media are considered in terms of factuality, standardisation and predictability of narrative strategies as "news media tends consistently

to follow a predictable pattern and (…) different organisations behave in a similar way when confronted by the same events and under equivalent conditions" (McQuail, 2010, p. 310). The art of writing fiction becomes the craft of factual content production with its institutionalised and standardised expectations (Singer, 2003), where narrative strategies are discussed as a means to accomplish the other discussed practices (objectivity, autonomy, expertise), thus setting up conventions of "good journalism" (Schudson, 1982). Narrative strategies are not only ways of mediating social reality but also, just as importantly, they are the practice of mediating what it means to practice journalism itself (Zelizer, 1993). Considering the narrative decisions taken by journalists (Schudson, 1982) as a journalistic practice of narration, allows us to question and challenge certain rigid considerations of journalism – for example, the distinction between fiction and journalism using the criteria of factuality (Bird and Dardenne, 1988) and to consider journalism as a practice with its own aesthetics, compliance to which also constitutes the notion of being a journalist:

> "The temporal dimension of the journalistic aesthetics lies in its narrative approach to reality. The press treats events in a primarily episodic manner which follows a characteristic narrative form: an episode or 'story' typically begins with a revelation, introducing a dramatic situation and a series of characters (…) thus the press presents a dynamic image of the world that is curiously both volatile and stable, in which periodic explosions into disorder are always brought somehow back under control. This restoration of order, however, is not simply the subject of journalistic observation and approval; it is also a structural element of narrative representation: the story imposes its own order quite apart from, if supplementary to, the order restored by official action." (Spurr, 1993, pp. 43–44)

Although news tends to be distinguished from fictional texts through the characteristic of factuality, it is still structured along conventional narratives in order to make messages readable as "the power of the media lies not only (and not even primarily) in its power to declare things to be true, but in its power to provide the forms in which the declarations appear" (Schudson, 1982, p. 98). The practice of journalistic narration encompasses decisions taken by journalists on how information is organised and delivered – the decision to opt for an inverted pyramid, or to report on events chronologically (for a historical account of various narrative conventions see Schudson, 1982). The practice is thus shaping understandings of what it means to practice journalism, how it should be practiced, even if only to accomplish the most general definition of journalism – informing about the world and its events (McQuail, 2010, p. 83) – but simultaneously, this is being continuously reshaped through the practice (Bird and Dardenne, 1988, p. 81).

There are different journalistic genres, with their different modes of narration, where each is culturally understood (by journalists as well as readers) as appropriate and legitimate forms of mediation for different content as well as context. These then create a symbolic system:

> "[t]he facts, names, and details change almost daily, but the framework into which they fit – the symbolic system – is more enduring. And it could be argued that the totality of news as an enduring symbolic system 'teaches' audiences more than any of its component parts, no matter whether these parts are intended to inform, irritate, or entertain. (Bird and Dardenne, 1988, p. 69)

The employed narrative strategies, thus, form a system of journalistic conventions that transfigure the world into "a premise of any conversation" rather than "a subject for discussion" (Schudson, 1982, p. 98). Based on his historical analysis, Schudson further

argues, "these conventions help make culturally consonant messages readable and culturally dissonant messages unsayable. Their function is less to increase or decrease the truth value of the messages they convey than to shape and narrow the range of what kinds of truths can be told" (1982, pp. 98–99). The significance of the practice of narration when discussing the author within the field of journalism, is demonstrated that in spite of all the other values already mentioned, the artistry of journalism, and the measure of its quality, is still considered in terms of mastering the narrative, as it "is his or her [the journalist's] function not simply to cherish the facts that do not yet make sense in anybody's story but also to generate candidate narratives that both handle those aberrant facts and generate new ones" (Bruner, 1998, p. 26). These narratives thus provide consistency with the existing overarching narrative of the world, deriving from pre-existing frameworks of understanding and providing chronologies and new anticipations (Bird and Dardenne, 1988, p. 73).

The increasing popularity of online media for production as well as consumption of media content, is accompanied by increasing discussions within academia as well as among the public on the role, significance, legitimacy and practices of online content production in comparison to the other media channels (traditional media). While some endorse online media for their openness and accessibility of journalistic/media production to those outside of institutionalised media organisations, arguing for the potential of online media to facilitate a more open, democratic society (Gillmor, 2006; Bruns, 2008a), others are more sceptical of the capacity of online media to blur the boundaries between journalists and non-journalists (Bergström, 2008; van Dijck, 2009; Bird, 2011; Carpentier, 2011), and to shift the existing power relationships, asking for a more nuanced and contextualised analysis of the uses of online media (by producers as well as users).

Nonetheless, the debates relating to the opening of the journalistic space also touch upon the conventions of narration and the validity and legitimacy of alternative news styles (Atton and Hamilton, 2008). The structural foundations of journalism – what it means to be a journalist, and to do journalism, are still predominantly provided by and associated with institutionalised journalism. Hence this is a reciprocal and simultaneous process, where in order to be opposed or challenged by alternative (citizen) journalists, traditional journalism still needs to recognise those alternative practices of narration as being to some degree legitimate first. This applies to audiences' understanding and recognition of these practices as relevant and legitimate too.

> "[A]lthough traditional (…) and public journalism seek to occupy different social roles, when examined through the prism of narrative theory, public journalism shares much in common with its traditional counterpart. In both cases, narrative strategies effect essentially the same ends, placing the power of telling society's stories in the hands of journalists." (Woodstock, 2002, p. 39)

The practice of narration is not only important in order to legitimize the journalistic work, or to be comprehended, but also to engage the audience. That said, engagement is considered here as a cognitive concept referring to the interpretative act, a conversation between the text and the reader, rather than in terms of quantitative analysis of audiences' activities. The concept of engagement here relates to the text's ability to interest, to invite and to enter into the conversation with the reader. The news values theory (Galtung and Ruge, 1965) notably identifies a set of values that informs journalists' selection of information and events to be reported. Although resulting from the study of journalists and their mechanism of deciding what is 'newsworthy', these mechanisms are not independent of audiences, as they indirectly reflect journalism's understanding and narrative of what is of interest, relevant and important to audiences. Therefore the concept of 'newsworthy' also addresses journalists' intention of being listened to, to engage the audiences in reading the

news, and engagement as a practice of connecting politics and the public (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007). For that, the practice of narration addresses the author-audience relationship, yet the resulting mutual acknowledgement of it is inevitably subjective, if not emotional.

In his analysis of the use of emotions in journalism, Peters (2011) argues for a greater appreciation of emotions being always present in journalistic production (not only tabloid but also what is referred to as serious journalism), in terms of narrative strategies. He demonstrates the importance of considering practices of narration in relation to understanding what and who is a journalist as "divergences from the customary 'cool' style are viewed as 'emotional', and thus 'bad journalism' as opposed to a derivative that accepts many of the same rules of truth but presents and performs them differently" (Peters, 2011, p. 304). Therefore, different narrative strategies are not only associated with different genres but also with different journalistic styles and thus types of journalists in general.

Conceptualising authors as clusters of practices of production and mediation allows us to go beyond the questions of attribution and personalisation, disturbing the promoted notion of authorship when talking about the concept of the author, and to consider the concept in a more complex way. Only then can we be open to understanding how readers understand authors and what it is about authors that readers pay attention to, and at the same time, be sensitive to the public/media discourses that contribute to these understandings, forming prior judgements and prejudices of what the author is, and how being an author should be performed, as well as assessed and judged.

6 The concept of an understood author

The author is conceptualised by media and communication theories as a producer of meaning mediated through a particular text, an entity with agency, intention, employing various productive practices. Yet, its understandings are fluid and contextual, they vary from discipline to discipline and reveal the contestation of the term across as well as within these fields of interest. Locating the concept of the author within the system of production helps us to see it as a mediator of social reality. Whereas the audience studies field considers the audience to be the producer of the meaning, focusing on their interpretative practices, it opposes the author's intention as the location of the true meaning and sees meaning making as a result of the negotiation between the reader and the text, a premise shared with the ontological approach to interpretation proposed by hermeneutical philosophy.

The theoretical overview of the audience research discussed earlier in Chapter 3 shows the evolution of the conceptualisation of the interpretative act, the shift or expansion from the interest in the audiences' ability to resist, to a broader discipline interested in the relationship between the text and its audiences, that is not only understood in terms of power structures and power relations between the media and audiences, but also as practices of identity construction and the role of media in people's everyday lives. When Spivak (1993) argues that it is important who is speaking and questions which voices are not only heard but also listened to, the need to enquire into the audiences' understanding of the author is highlighted. What does the author mean for them – and how is this idea brought into the interpretative act?

The discussed theories and conceptualisations of interpretation, audience, and author, reveal that we can distinguish between three conceptualisations of an author – an author inscribed in and demonstrated by the text, an imaginary author brought into the interpretative act as a reader's fore-understanding, and an *understood author* resulting from the encounter of the first two. This final chapter of the theoretical section, thus, enquires into how the notion of the author can be conceptualised from the audience-centric perspective of the media and communications field, and proposes this conceptualisation of the author as understood, realised in the interpretative act, and located at the intersection of the other two notions – the inscribed and imagined.

The understood author is in the first instance inspired by the different theoretical conceptualisations of a reader within literary theory. Their various reader-constructs independent of the interest in the actual reader provide a blueprint for how to think about a text as an embodiment and expression of these outer-textual features (i.e. a reader or an author for that matter). While some of these concepts discuss a reader as belonging to authors' imaginations, others consider the reader as the property of the text. This is a relevant approach when considering the author from the audiences' perspective by separating the concept of the reader from an actual reader yet identifying a range of different understandings of how the reader can be theorised, it informs and inspires the conceptualisation of an understood author, showing that the author too can be understood as a construct and a textual property.

Therefore, this chapter firstly formulates the two conceptualisations of an author – inscribed and imagined, to propose, in the last section, the concept of an understood author that is subsequently brought into the empirical enquiry as a key concept.

6.1 The author behind the text – the inscribed author

Starting from the audience studies perspective, where the meaning-making is located in the negotiation between the text and the reader, both anchored in their respective context – the context of production and the context of reception (Hall, 1980), the author needs to be conceptualised differently than simply as an owner of meaning and an intentional agent. Building on the argument that as part of the production process, a preferred reading is encoded into the text (Hall, 1980), the notion of an author is also considered as encoded (inscribed) into the text as part of the production of the text.

The text explicitly and implicitly acknowledges that it has been produced, that it comes from somewhere. These hints toward a notion of author(ship) are encoded into the text as a part of the production process and they go way beyond the authors' names on the cover or a by-line. Drawing on the different conceptualisations of an author discussed in Chapter 4, the author as a concept moves beyond the notion of an individual, and it sheds further light onto the multifaceted notion of the author being a cluster of productive practices (e.g. Carlson, 2015), economic interests (e.g. Hartley, 2005) and political agendas (Hanitzsch and Vos, 2018), where the embodiment of the concept might align with these legal, ideological, economic and political interests or not. Conceptualising an author (any author) as a cluster of productive practices, rather than a particular embodied form, also allows us to better understand the complexity of involvements, collaborations, but also the potential implications of rights and responsibilities over a given text. That is to say, the name that represents the author might not, in fact, bear the rights and responsibilities of the role (Gray and Johnson, 2013). Simultaneously, the function of naming might not be fulfilled, which does not necessarily mean that there is not a clear creative force or agenda behind the text.

The author is suggested, and/or performed and promoted by a media text itself as an author-function (Foucault, 1979) and subsequently through its associated paratexts (Genette, 1997b). Therefore, the author, as a concept, is subordinated to the text and it is conceptualised as a textual property, as a paratext (Genette, 1997b) – it is inscribed in and demonstrated by the text through various textual and paratextual features. It is thus important to consider what discourses and notions of author and authorship are being brought and performed by the text. This also enables us to acknowledge the intertextuality of a text, which inevitably involves its creation (Gray, 2010) as well as acknowledging collective authorship, an example of such being a dictionary (Frawley, 1985) that might for some lead to the perception of a text being authorless, or simply part of the historical continuity and contextuality of any creative process.

The literature review and overview of key debates concerned with the different articulations of the notion of an author thus, more than anything else, demonstrates the strong presence if not dominance of the concept within the Western media culture, and that the notion has been historically shaped and evolved. Moreover, the concept belongs to the tradition and despite the complexity of the different involvements in the production and creation of a text – the textual and paratextual features do articulate a particular and self-determined idea and identification of these forces behind the text.

6.2 The imagined author – the reader's fore-understanding

Gadamer (2004) argues that the author doesn't matter, and that the author's intention does not equate to the meaning of a text. However, he acknowledges that "[w]hen we try to understand a text, we do not try to transpose ourselves into the author's mind but (…) we try to transpose ourselves into the perspective within which he has formed his views. But this simply means that we try to understand how what he is saying could be right. (…) we are moving in a dimension of meaning that is intelligible in itself and as such offers no reason for going back to the subjectivity of the author." (2004, p. 292). He opposes the need to uncover the real author, their psychology and subjectivity, however, acknowledges that we reach to our horizon of understanding of what would make sense for an author to say (cf Weberman, 2002, p. 53). The intelligibility of the meaning is thus determined by our horizon of understanding, what we consider plausible and meaningful.

The author as a presence behind the text is part of the prejudice of the reader when entering the act of reading. The horizon of understanding (comprised of prejudices and tradition) is what enables and determines the understanding of the text, that absorbs the unfamiliar into the familiar as already indicated in Chapter 2. The horizon does not only contain what is plausible to say about the subject matter, but also what is plausible as an author of the text – an idea of the author, an imaginary of an author. The notion of author is part of understanding (media) communication. It is a culturally and socially relevant concept, not least as questions of authorship are commonly raised within the public (as well as academic) debates. It becomes prominent with every change in the media landscape and in relation to different technologies and media channels (Gray and Johnson, 2013), and recently we can see this topic gaining prominence in relation to AI and authorship (Thorne, 2020). The notion of questioning the author's intention (agenda) is still significant in the public discourse through questioning the identity of different media creators (e.g. Salim, 2023) or raising concerns about the originality of work if not produced by human agents (e.g. Knight, 2023) as we can see in popular media.

In the past few years, there have been studies that are interested in exploring how media users perceive and imagine the technologies – the infrastructures and logics that increasingly dominate their mediated experiences. For example, Bucher (2017) talks about algorithmic imaginaries, how people imagine algorithms and what they can do; followed by Lomborg and Kapsch (2020) empirically exploring how people decode and evaluate algorithms employing Hall's (1980) model of dominant, negotiated and oppositional reading of algorithms. The concept of imaginary is valuable as it broadens the focus from the design, the intention, and the political agenda of those on the side of production, to those who engage with texts and algorithms, and their use, how they are understood, and the negotiation of their meaning. Various accounts of imaginaries – communities (Anderson, 1983), algorithms (Bucher, 2017) or audiences (Litt, 2012; Coddington, Lewis and Belair-Gagnon, 2021) help us to see that these are what we could also call fore-understandings; these imaginaries provide expectations and inform our understanding and subsequently relation to or identification with the given subject. These are subjective and often collectively shared through the practices of being. The notion of the imagined author is therefore not irrelevant here, in fact the imagined author too is crucial as a conceptual framework. The imagined author, belonging to one's horizon, is the embodiment of one's prejudices and tradition that forms and informs the fore-understanding.

The concept of imaginary might suggest that the idea of an author is random or a fantasy, yet these ideas and imaginaries are deeply anchored in what we already know and

therefore we can borrow and build on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to provide us with the structure for the conceptualisation of the author as understood through the interpretative act.

6.3 Understood author – the becoming of an author within the interpretative act

The concept of an understood author refers to the encounter of these two – inscribed and imagined authors. Conceptually, it builds on Gadamer's notion of understanding as interpretation and becoming. The understood author is thus an actualisation of the imagined author in the encounter with the inscribed author. While the image of an author belongs to one's horizon and forms the context of understanding, the inscribed author belongs to the horizon of the text where a particular preferred idea of the author is being put forward through the textual and paratextual features. The audience research tradition disputes and rejects the authority of authors' intention over the meaning, but at the same time acknowledges the significance of an author in the process of interpretation. This seemingly contradictory argument reflects cultural studies' interest in the power structures over the meaning and the role of media in identity construction, among other research enquiries, that indirectly acknowledge the presence of an agenda behind the text. This location of agenda can be, in broad terms, conceptualised as an author, an authorial presence, which is inevitably part of the communication process. The reader too is aware that the text has been produced by someone, somewhere, somehow: at least in the Western tradition, this is a way that we have been thinking about texts and content for many decades and centuries. It is a prejudice that we bring into the act of reading – the author is there as a paratext. Going back to the audience tradition (Morley, 1992), it does not argue that both sides have equal power, but rather that both sides have a potential for agency and empowerment or resistance (Ytre-Arne and Das, 2021).

The framework of philosophical hermeneutics enables us to encompass the key premise of the concept – its duality and motion. The concept of becoming is instrumental here, as it does not enquire into 'what is an author' but rather "how it happened that it is so" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 4). The understood author is realised through the reader's interpretation of the text as a part of that interpretation, but at the same time it contributes to the reader's understanding of the text itself. The understood author is thus an integral part of the interpretative act. The notion of the hermeneutical circle, where the part contributes to the understanding of the whole and that informs the understanding of its part, further clarifies the mutual inter-dependency between the understanding of the text and that of the author.

When consuming media we are addressed by the message, by the text, argues the audience research tradition, and the unknown (Gadamer, 2004). So how do we comprehend and encompass where the texts are coming from, also a form of the unknown, and are we concerned by it in the first place? It is the notion of dialogue, that speaks to the act of being addressed: we do not interpret something that we do not engage with. The engagement is an expression of willingness, and expression of care – an act of listening (Lacey, 2013), and the beginning of a dialogue (Gadamer, 2004).

Hence, to fully contextualise the understood author, the notion of alien and familiar can serve as a valuable framework. When encountering the unfamiliar, the familiar is called upon to provide a reference framework, to appropriate and adjust: it is the prejudices, prior knowledge and tradition that are brought into the interpretation and therefore the

author might be called upon too. The idea of an author contributes to the familiarisation of the unfamiliar, and can aid the reader to anchor the text within a particular intelligible context.

Anchoring of our understanding in tradition and prejudices means that we reflect on and consider the author as a concept, in terms of authorship, responsibility over the text, productive practices, and agenda. This does not mean that media audiences have an accurate, conscious or exhaustive idea about these forms of author, but rather that these different conceptualisations and aspects of authors as a presence behind the text are part of the understanding of mediation. Simultaneously, the media texts in different measures and in different ways hint or imply that there is a certain authorial presence behind the text, not least through various paratextual features, where the author's name can be considered just one of these, as already mentioned in section 4.1.

The author is being brought into the interpretative act by the text, and realised in the moment of the interpretative act. This is where the theoretical framework is situated and how the author-reader relationship is articulated in this work. Therefore, what matters is the author that the reader recognises in the text, that addresses them and that they listen to (Lacey, 2013). The author is an embodiment of this voice, that is conceptualised as an *understood author*.

SECTION II: RESEARCHING CONDITIONS OF UNDERSTANDING

It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures, which could mean this or that, too many shapes which can never be fully described, too many flavours, in the air or on the tongue, half-colours, too many.

The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood (1986, p. 134)

7 Methodological implications and the research design

This chapter discusses the methodological decisions behind the research design and how the theoretical discussion informs and shapes the empirical investigation. The selected methods for data collection and the subsequent data analysis subscribe to the audience research tradition, employing semi-structured interviews to collect the data and then applying hermeneutical analysis to explore them. In this chapter, I present my methodological decisions and their implications for the research design, its limitations and ethical considerations.

This empirical investigation builds on the substantial canon of the empirical studies and theories of audience and reception studies and their broad interests in people's everyday uses of media, as contextual and cultural meanings of media texts (e.g. Ang, 1985), as well as the meanings of media as objects in people's everyday lives (e.g. Morley, 1986; Silverstone, 1994; Bakardjieva and Smith, 2001). The broad range of research agendas and interests within the field constitutes a very multidisciplinary field where a broad variety of conceptual frameworks and methodologies from interviews (e.g. Das, 2019) to ethnographic observations (Gillespie, 1995), and online ethnographies (Papacharissi, 2015) are used. Being interested in people's interpretations and experiences, the field has broadly subscribed to the paradigm of qualitative methodology as it provides rich and contextualised data (Seale, 1999) allowing the research to offer nuanced and contextualised accounts, critical perspectives and thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973).

The choice of philosophical hermeneutics as a theoretical framework also has implications for the methodological choices made here for gathering and analysing data, as the empirical enquiry in itself is an act of interpretation and a form of understanding. The theoretical and epistemological perspectives of this project result in two focal points of the research enquiry here: the audiences, people engaged with media through their interpretative acts (Livingstone, 1999, 2004); and the interpretative act as such in its ontological terms. A theoretical notion of the understood author is proposed as an analytical tool to be brought into the analysis and in the conversation with the data empirically explored.

The research enquires into people's diverse understandings of an author as the processes and practices associated with the existence of a text, and hence how they understand the process of mediation, and how they relate it to their everyday lives. The question driving the empirical investigation is formulated as follows:

How do people understand an author that they encounter in the interpretation of factual media texts?

And two sub-questions that build on it:

RSQ1: How is a reader's understanding of the author realised and contextually situated?

RSQ2: What roles does the understood author embody within the interpretative act?

7.1 Beyond audiences' interpretation as a methodological tool

Posing the questions of interpretation and understanding into the centre of the empirical enquiry, and theorising these concepts within the ontological framework of philosophical hermeneutics, the methodological approach to the enquiry, and its methods, inevitably stem from the same philosophical ground. This is to further argue, that adopting philosophical hermeneutics as a theoretical framework inevitably promotes its appropriation as a methodological one as well. Gadamer (2004, p. 4) argues that human sciences should not study what phenomena are, but how they come to be, and how are they understood. It opposes the premise that the essence of phenomena can be uncovered through the application of the 'correct' methods.

This raises two questions: 1) how to methodologically anchor such an investigation, if what is of interest is in motion, in the process of becoming; and 2) how can the researching subject, I, reflect on its own situatedness – its own horizon of understanding that inevitably shapes the analytical work and interpretation of the data. How to move beyond one's own taken-for-granted? This can be, at least, partly achieved by questioning and looking at the familiar in an unfamiliar way. The researcher's interpretation thus leads to the delivery of a thick description (Freeman, 2014), or as Warnke states, summarising Gadamer's concept of understanding: "We do not achieve knowledge about the texts, works or actions with which we are concerned; we simply connect them to our own circumstances," (1987, p. 75). The empirical research does not aim to deliver knowledge of the phenomenon that is true, but that is informed. For Gadamer, the best means of communication is a conversation, listening to the other, being in the moment and posing questions, being engaged and willing to understand.

Although philosophical hermeneutics does not offer any clear methodological guidelines of steps to follow, it recognises iteration, referred to as a hermeneutical circle (Gadamer, 2004), as a key principle of understanding, where interpretation of a part leads to an understanding of the whole, and the whole determines the understanding of the part. This means that the analytical process (including empirical analysis) is not viewed as linear advancement, but rather a form of revisiting already passed steps with newly gained knowledge and therefore seeing and understanding what has been already established anew. In terms of this project, the theoretical framework informs the methodological choices and analytical approach; the theory is then confronted anew by the data analysis and revisited in order to provide concepts relevant to the analysis and back and forth.

By arguing against a codified procedural approach to analysis, philosophical hermeneutics does not argue that relevant and valid analysis is not possible, but rather that the selected methods of analysis need to be driven by the research interest and questions, reflective of the researcher's agendas and perspectives, while simultaneously ensuring that the analytical process remains deeply iterative. This means that the analysis does not focus only on a comparison of data in order to identify commonalities (Charmaz, 2006, 2017), but rather

on seeing the particularities and details in the data, as well as the complexity and wholeness of the data set and the research question. And as Freeman (2014, p. 831) adds: "[hermeneutical] analysis is not about finding the truth, the one meaning that holds all together, but of sharing a truth, or many truths as they manifest themselves as the topic of inquiry." This is in line with other qualitative approaches to empirical investigation and recognition of researchers' subjectivity as part of the research approach (Ellis, 1992).

Unlike phenomenology, hermeneutical analysis does not aim to describe the phenomenon (and its essence) but rather to "clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place," (Gadamer, 2004, p. 295) to understand the studied phenomenon's conditions and complexities. That is why hermeneutical analysis lends itself to the key questions of audience research and its thesis of what people do with media and what it means to them.

Interviewing – an approach to listening and engagement

In-depth interviewing was chosen as the method for this work, as it allowed me to enter into dialogues with the research participants and to collect complex contextualised accounts of their media uses and their diverse and contextualised understandings of authors (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). In comparison to focus groups, the other commonly used method in audience research (Katz and Liebes, 1990; Wilson, Hamzah and Khattab, 2003; Tovares, 2006), face to face interviews provide space for participants to more freely elaborate and reminisce upon their interpretations and understandings of authors, and thus allow the researcher to collect people's accounts of their experiences with media in order to contextualise their understandings of authors – their understanding of media practices of production and mediation.

In-depth interviews can be guided, as in this case, by an interview guide, and this allows the researcher to add or abandon various questions in reaction to the respondent's answers, and act with flexibility and reflexivity in response to a participant's narrative (Ellis, 2008). They give the research interview the form of a conversation, while at the same time being led by the researcher's selection of questions (Kvale, 2007). Whereas focus groups better facilitate the process of negotiation of meaning and understanding within a group and map the collectively negotiated meanings. Holstein and Gubrium stress that an interview is "a two-way conversation, (…) always unavoidably interactional and constructive" (2004, p. 143), the final narrative is influenced by the interviewer as well as by the interviewee, not only by the selection of the questions, but by their order, but also by whom she is, as the interviewee's story might change based on who they talk to (e.g. Riessman, 1993; Silverman, 2005). In this thesis, preparing for the fieldwork and data collection, I drew primarily from the guidance provided by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), whose approach to interviews as a research method is philosophically anchored in hermeneutics, phenomenology, pragmatics and postmodernism.

Prior to the interviews, I identified topics and clusters of questions of relevance for my research questions (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004). The interview questions do not serve as a gateway to participants' reality, but are necessarily part of the understanding – on the part of the interviewees as well as the interviewer – as the questions inevitably do not only initiate answers but also reflexivity on the part of the interviewee, which subsequently shapes the following questions and also their understanding of the interviewer. The critics of interviews as a method of obtaining data argue that what people say might not necessarily be what they do (Silverman, 2005), however, as I was not interested in practices of use per se, but rather in conditions of understanding, participants' guided narratives, an invitation for their reflections on their media experiences, allowed me to record diverse and multiple understandings of authors within the context of media and media uses. I

anticipated that the participants' understanding and acknowledgement of an author is likely to be implied in the narratives of their media uses and varied depending on the context rather than openly expressed and pronounced. Thus, the research is interested in the respondent's prior understanding of the author brought into the media consumption, as well as in the interpretation of the author that is simultaneous to and inseparable from the media consumption.

The hermeneutical analysis and its iterative approach to analysing data

Methodologically building on Gadamer and philosophical hermeneutics, it is important to reiterate that acquisition of knowledge is in motion and never finished: the hermeneutical circle as an analytical tool is also never closed, and therefore there is a particular emphasis on the researcher's reflexivity and acknowledgement of bias and prejudices. The previously introduced concept of the horizon is relevant for the analytical enquiry too – as the historical horizon of the prior knowledge (literature review) is fused with the present horizon of the current interpretation (the collected data and data analysis), bridging the gap between the familiar and unfamiliar (Paterson and Higgs, 2005). As discussed in the theoretical part, just as Gadamer identifies questions as a way to suspend prejudice, this too is relevant for the methodological decisions taken here.

> "The logic of question and answer is special to the hermeneutic sciences … they do not build generalizations from particulars in a linear, incremental, and inductive manner, but rather begin with the whole, the general, the prediction and work toward the part and then return to the whole again." (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 22)

The hermeneutical analysis is therefore inherently iterative, moving between the phenomenon as a whole and its aspects as parts, between the theoretical conceptualisation and the empirical findings; this, Bontekoe (1996) shows, helps the researcher to understand and consider the studied phenomenon in its complexity, where the parts are integral to the whole, and at the same time, the whole contextualises the parts. The analytical process therefore resembles a spiral where the analytical work starts from the whole – the attempt to understand a phenomenon at hand, moving onto exploration of the individual components and then reuniting them back to the whole (Bontekoe, 1996; Paterson and Higgs, 2005).

This hermeneutical analysis employed in this thesis subscribes to the iterative idea of the hermeneutical circle (Gadamer, 2004). It is informed by the theoretical framework and literature review of audiences as well as authors – production practices, and journalistic routines (Tuchman, 1978a), diverse conceptualisations of authors throughout history, and more general conceptualisations of media and the Western media environment, and mediation (Livingstone, 2009), as well as increasingly prominent debates on audiences' own productive practices (Bruns, 2008a). Those informed and led to the conceptualisation of the theory-led analytical concept, which is brought into the initial stage of the analysis.

However, the aspiration of the enquiry here is to depart from those descriptions and critiques that are predominantly based on research of media themselves (van Dijk, 1985), or on research of audiences' ability to challenge, disrupt or mimic the mainstream media through their own productive practices (Domingo *et al.*, 2008). The interest here remains within the interpretative practices – the act of reading, of giving meaning – the understanding. The initial stage of analysis is therefore concerned with those implicit

practices of reading, considering, thinking, and understanding media that do not necessarily refer to, or are concerned with the production or mediation of content per se.

Laverty, building on Wilson and Hutchinson (1991) argues that the concern of hermeneutics is "experience as it is lived. The focus is toward illuminating details and seemingly trivial aspects within experiences that may be taken for granted in our lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding." (2003, p. 24) The approach is clearly highly interpretative, situated and reflexive. However, as the focus is on capturing how meaning is constructed – a process in motion – it does not provide any clear analytical guidance as to how to analytically approach the collected data. Not least, the researcher's understanding, even if sharing the moment with the participant, is always applied, understood, and absorbed in one's horizon already. Therefore, the analysis goes beyond providing a description; it does not subscribe to the idea of critical analysis in the promise of revealing the concealed meaning. It is an exercise of listening. It is an account of understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants and shared with me, the researcher. The analytical process is, thus, driven by choices relating to organising, selecting (reducing) and interpreting the gathered data, respecting the diversity of experiences, and at the same time applying a certain analytical lens in their presentation. The inductive approach to analysis is prioritised in the coding process, to devise shared patterns building on the participants' lived experiences and draw more general categories and themes to present the data in their comprehensive unity, while capturing the fluidity and temporality of those meanings and their relevance for the interpretative situation.

These methodological decisions are inspired by exploration of diverse approaches to qualitative methodology and methods especially, among others: Riessman (1993), Miles and Huberman (1994), Strauss and Corbin (1997), Boyatzis (1998), Seale (1999), Ritchie and Lewis (2003), Charmaz (2006), Carpentier and De Cleen (2007), or Saldana (2013); and borrowed research practices relevant for the quest at hand. I appropriated practices that were the best suited in regard to their ability to serve as tools in collecting and analysing the data to subsequently answer the three research questions.

Ensuring quality in qualitative research

The interpretative approach of hermeneutical analysis poses the question of the quality of the analysis: how can the quality of the research results be ensured? Matthews and Ross (2010) identify four key concepts that research should aspire to meet in order to assure quality, these are: reliability; generalisability and transferability; credibility and validity; and ethical aspects. The quality of the research is understood by asking if the research could be carried out and/or repeated by another researcher, and yet arrive at the same results? Are the collected data relevant to the research question posed; can they provide an answer? Is it possible to extend the results collected on a small scale to a larger sample or a whole population? And is there an ethical, respectable approach to data collection as well as data analysis, and more broadly, are the people whose experiences are being gathered and analysed taken into consideration in terms of their humanity?

Some of these aspects are hard to achieve or rather not recognised as relevant when it comes to hermeneutical analysis (Paterson and Higgs, 2005). As Denzin argues: "It is now understood that social scientists are not aloof, objective observers of cultures and their processes. Rather, social scientists write culture; they create culture through the process of writing. Writing is an interpretive act." (2001, p. 98)

By acknowledging the key role of a researcher's prejudices in forming an understanding of a phenomenon, the researcher is an integral part of the analysis. Replicability, thus, should not be understood in terms of reproduction of the same findings, but rather as the

replicability of the outcome of the research design, that is the richness of the collected data and the identification of the same patterns that might be realised through different particularities. The exploratory character of the research lends itself to methodological choices that prioritise diversity and richness of data to achieve thick description (Geertz, 1973) of findings.

The empirical exploration is built around three key principles, described below, that are employed simultaneously through the data collection and data analysis to ensure the quality of the analysis as well as of the findings. These principles enhance the interpretative and contextual character of the data collection and interpretations: iteration, transparency, and reflexivity.

The principle of *iteration* is employed in order to provide a rigorous and systematic approach to data analysis. It is built into the research design to provide for a continuous process of checking, adjusting and confirming theoretical ideas with empirical outcomes. The to-and-fro dynamic of the hermeneutical circle is here employed analytically, in what Glynos and Howarth refer to as a retroductive cycle: "a kind of restless 'spiral'" (2018, p. 114), recognising the iterative relationship between the theory and analysis, as theoretical justifications are needed for results of analytical induction. They explain the concept of the retroductive cycle, providing a methodological framework for "the persuasive aspect of justification [that] extends to the task of convincing the relevant audience about the way a research problem was characterized (or re-characterized) in offering an explanatory account in the first place, pointing us back to the context of discovery" (Glynos and Howarth, 2018, pp. 119–120). The outcome of the analysis is a new conceptualisation of the author from within the audience-centric perspective, illustrated through particular findings and available to be tested in different empirical settings.

The principle of *transparency* is employed to achieve credibility and validity of the findings. The hermeneutical approach seeks to collect authentic experiences and voices of the participants through open-ended questions (Silverman, 2006, p. 10). The embeddedness of questioning as an analytical tool of hermeneutical analysis provides the foundation for the transparency of the analysis, through the use of quotes and their unpacking of the analysis outlined in front of the reader, which makes the dialogue between the researcher and the data accessible and visible to others (Yin, 2016). To achieve transparency of the research, a clear discussion and details of the research design are provided and discussed. Simultaneously, rigorous and extensive theoretical discussion situates the research, as well as the analysis, in a particular perspective that is clearly and openly outlined and discussed.

Reflexivity is demonstrated through methodological practices on the part of the researcher that "comprise reflections on the investigator's own personal experience of the fieldwork" (Lincoln and Cuba, 2002, p. 207). As a concept it is integral to the approach of philosophical hermeneutics – whether in relation to the theoretical embeddedness of the research or its empirical exploration, the ontological premise of understanding as interpretation does not allow for any other notion than the researcher being highly reflexive about every decision that is made through the empirical work (Robinson and Kerr, 2015). It is the situatedness of the sense-making, whether on the part of the participants or the researcher, and their transparency and systematic unpacking on the part of the researcher that is inherently reflexive. As a researcher, I was highly conscious of my subjectivity, not only in data collection and analysis, but also by subscribing to a particular ontological tradition. Every decision taken is a choice prioritised over a range of different possible choices. The subsequent sections will address the particular methodological choices in detail – recruitment, data collection, and analytical work – with my reflexivity being provided in the form of my reasoning behind these choices. Reflexivity also comes with ethical considerations which are addressed in detail in the next section.

Ethical considerations

Wiles (2012, p. 4) argues that research ethics are concerned with moral decisions in research contexts, and further identifies four key ethical imperatives of research: autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice. These refer to the understanding of the research as being voluntary, no one should be forced to take part, the research (and its design) should not cause harm to anyone and should serve a greater good, which should be distributed equally.

Zylinska (2006) sees ethics as ontological and argues that an ethical dimension is integral to any research. Her conceptualisation of ethics goes beyond the rule-based notion of instrumental practices. For her, the researcher's ethical position is already built into the research design informed by the discussion of the data that one has collected and interpreted. A particular choice of theoretical framework implies certain ethical decisions and an understanding of the object of inquiry with an ethical consideration. The ethical reflection considers both the research participants as well as the researcher(s).

This research employed a set of procedures to ensure that participants were treated with respect. All the participants consented to take part in the research and they were able to withdraw their participation at any point of the data collection or prior to it. The collected data were anonymized as the research design sought to gather experiences, and it was not necessary or fundamental for the data to be identifiable (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

As the research seeks to explore people's understanding of the notion of an author, the research participants were invited to take part in research about their relationship with media. The concept of the author was not mentioned at the start, so as not to shape the conversations to start with. However, this information was provided at the end or later throughout the interviews, so the participants were well-informed about the research's main objective.

Concerning the more heightened political context of the data collection, I was particularly considerate in respecting people's different political views and preferences without imposing my political stance on them, as this was not of interest to the data collection but at the same time, it was in multiple cases inseparable from it. The data collection aimed to understand people's encounters with media and different conceptualisations of authors of factual texts, to be open to the diversity of views and experiences and not to alienate participants through political disagreement. At the same time, I was aware of the age difference between me and the respondents which might have led to a bias in the data collection. Therefore the design of the data collection took on the character of an informal chat, to facilitate situations where people felt more at ease to participate in more open discussions as each interview progressed. Personal information shared during the interviews was not shared with others, and the data collection was particularly sensitive to instances where people might have mentioned some traumatic experiences. In one instance, where a participant was harassed by media in the past, I chose not to ask further about this disclosed information, beyond what the participant decided to share themselves. The participants were not in any other potentially risky or harmful situation. The interviews were transcribed, the recordings were deleted, and randomly assigned pseudonyms were used for transcripts and the data analysis. In the instance of participants who were active content producers and could be more easily identified, no recognisable remarks that might identify the content produced by them were used or referenced unless they agreed to it upfront.

7.2 The decisions forming the research design: the what, how and why of data collection

The hermeneutical methodology implies that the initial questions are approached from within a qualitative, interpretative paradigm, arguing that people attach multiple meanings to their experiences, constructing diverse narratives based on the context in which they talk about them, as well as depending on who they talk to (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004; Silverman, 2005). The choice of qualitative methods allowed me to gather multiple and distinct accounts of audiences' understanding of authors, while recording their diverse contexts of different media uses and people's everyday relationships with media that would not be possible to acknowledge if methods with extensive prior instrumentation, e.g. questionnaires, were employed.

This section thus offers a description of the selected methods used to gather the data: how the three research questions informed and shaped the actual process of data collection; how the boundaries of the project were set; how the accounts of people's understandings of authors were provided and how those were recorded; and whose accounts of understanding – whose narratives – were heard.

The boundaries of the study: the non-fiction factual text

To provide a thick description of readers' understandings of the complexities of media texts' creation, formation and existence, earlier conceptualised as an understood author, I consider all the media (McQuail, 2010) at participants' hand, arguing that no medium is consumed in isolation of the media or other context (Bausinger, 1984). Therefore, studying media within the whole media landscape in relation to the use of other media at hand allowed me to explore the complexity and the relationality of the diverse understandings of the author.

As the author is here conceptualised as a form of the context of the text, both author and text are inevitably intertwined, forming the object and locus of the enquiry. With an interest in readers' understandings of authors and the conditions for those understandings, I intended to keep the definition of an author, and thus of text, open and unburdened by prior specifications, i.e. fixing the scope of the work in relation to media technology, genre or topic. Adopting this approach to the concept of text, however, could lead to the opposite challenge of leaving the concept of a media text too broad, vague, and open. That is to say, while trying to keep the understanding free of prior prejudices inspired by a particular definition of text, the research participants still needed some guidance during the interviews regarding what one was asking them about. Therefore, to focus the enquiry here, while maintaining openness to seeing how different contexts of reading, media consumption and uses contributed to different understandings of an author; the research was only interested in texts (and their authors) that fell into the broad category of factual and informative texts – meaning that the texts provided a record of social reality and were consumed with the purpose of gaining information. Importantly, the understanding of what was factual and/or informative was also left with the participants – they needed to perceive them as non-fiction, as opposed to fiction texts. Therefore, if the content of a text was fictional and/or fabricated, but understood by the participant as a 'real account' (i.e. a hoax, fake news), the perception of its author was included in the scope of the study too. The discussed texts were diverse, from newsreels or opinion pieces to reviews and recommendations, from blog posts to posts on discussion forums. They covered a range of genres and were of various journalistic, personal, and emotional value. The readers were

invited and instructed to bring a text of interest with them or to comment on their latest/recent encounter with factual content. This was a methodological decision driven by the aim of ensuring the relevance of the texts to the readers, their engagement and listening. The empirical challenge that arose here was that although the interviews focused on the media uses in general and the discussion of the text at hand in particular, the interviews were not always able to record lived experiences so to speak. People who referred to other (albeit written) texts were not able to bring them and therefore their account was already shaped by their horizons. Saying that, the recollection of these texts brought readers to recall various textual and paratextual features of the text, and as I did not ask them about the authors directly, the remarks that I collected and analysed are still considered experiences of the author, understood in the moment of the interview, when interpreting the text with questions anew.

The participants: Whose understanding are we talking about?

The focus of the research was narrowed down by the selection of participants who were born between 1948 and 1963 and were Czechs living in the Czech Republic. These parameters enabled me to explore the experiences of often marginalised groups of audiences – people outside of the geographical centre of the West (Rupnik, 2000; Schöpflin, 2019) and people above 50 years old.

This thesis does not appropriate the discourse on generations (Prensky, 2001) that tends to distinguish and compare different generations in relation to technological development and focuses on the different abilities of users of different generations, suggesting a generational divide in technological terms. This study does not offer, and neither suggests, that there should be any comparison made towards the articulation of the author, media text interpretation or media devices used in relation to older or younger generations. It is not interested in the question of people's ability to adopt and/or adapt digital media, which are here believed to lead to an unfortunate and misleading technologically determined metaphor of a generational divide between digital natives and digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001).

I decided to research people of this particular age group to in one sense free them from such generalisations, to give them a voice, and approach their media experiences on their own merits rather than in comparison to other age groups. I see them too as variously peripheral in current media research, spoken about but not with. The decision was also motivated by the need for a certain homogeneity among the participants that enabled me to explore their diverse and multiple understandings of an author without assuming causalities (e.g. technological divide due to age). Saying that, however, the analysis is sensitive to the situatedness of the respondent, of which their age is part, and reflects on the commonalities across the sample, which arose from their experiences of shared historical context, rather than from their particular age per se. Therefore, the participants' age range served as an indicator of coherence across the sample rather than as a determinant of particular findings, however, the analysis is sensitive to "the historically effected consciousness" (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 335–337) of their understanding that might lead to a particular understanding of an author relevant to these respondents.

In this work, I am most interested in the process of interpretation, these respondents' experiences of media use, and the practices relating to those uses that they established over the few past decades, leading to the negotiation of their relations to media, media texts and media producers. As I do not refer to the selected group of respondents in relation to their age or in comparison to any other age groups, they are not identified by any age-related adjective – I simply refer to them as research participants.

Criteria for selection of research participants

The respondents were selected using the method of random purposive sampling (Patton, 2002, pp. 240–241), where the selection of participants is driven by particular parameters but within those, the actual selection of research participants is then random. This selection method was determined by a conceptual question rather than by a concern for representativeness (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The selection of research participants was driven by my interest in gathering as diverse a group of participants as possible in terms of their media uses, media literacy, education, or professional status, while also keeping balance in terms of their gender, age and residence (urban/rural). This decision was motivated by the aims of hermeneutical analysis, which is interested in recording diverse accounts rather than creating categories resulting from continuous comparison of data.

The sample did not aspire to reproduce a representative model of society, but rather to collect a diverse spectrum of accounts of the perception of authorial presence that could be further analysed and in which patterns could be sought. The aim was to speak to people who were very different to each other in terms of media use and engagement and who had only two things in common – nationality and age. Therefore, the selection of new informants was determined by the characteristics of those people that had already been selected and interviewed. As the recruitment progressed, the selection and focus on particular parameters changed – intensified or became secondary – in order to introduce new people and different media uses, or interests.

I was primarily interested in identifying respondents according to three basic criteria with regard to maintaining a balance not only in terms of gender and age:

- → different types of media use – e.g. people who saw themselves as 'rare readers', 'readers only', 'media dependent', and 'participants in media production'; I was particularly interested in speaking to people who engaged with media rarely, or on the contrary very intensely on a constant basis, people who were predominantly online as well as people who were keen newspaper readers or those who relied mainly on television or radio as information providers, but just as importantly with people who considered themselves as not interested, not doing anything interesting with media, not significant users or media omitters, so to speak;
- → variations in professional backgrounds as different types of employment and positions within organisational structures imply various degrees of media use and media exposure – therefore I was particularly interested in selecting people who used media for varied professional purposes as well as those that did not;
- → location – whether they lived in big cities, towns or rural areas.

In the course of the fieldwork, learning about people's various social contexts, their political views or their sense of political disengagement in other cases, I added two further criteria into the selection matrix that I observed in terms of diversity:

- → different personal interests, hobbies and circumstances that might be intertwined with particular media use (e.g. relatives living abroad, engagement in a particular community or society, etc.);
- → different political views and different degrees of political and/or civic engagement; these criteria derived from the previous ones as it became visible through the data collection that people with greater political and/or civic engagement were more prone to use media for forming their world views (e.g. to consume more factual and informative content, to search for it), but also they related to media in political terms, attributing political stands to media and forming opinions about media based on their own political views.

As the data collection progressed, further distinctions among the participants emerged, which were not criteria for their selection per se, but rather these distinctions were primarily derived from the first selection criterion of different media uses. The recruited participants had varied degrees of familiarity with using a range of new media objects (i.e. computers, mobile phones, tablets), different degrees of access to an internet connection, diverse experiences with online media platforms and services and with various forms of content transmission (i.e. internet, broadcast and print), as well as experiences with diverse media forms and genres (i.e. varied television formats, print styles as well as online genres like social media, microblogging, online news, blogs, etc.).

Profiles of participants

The final twenty-eight[5] research participants (for an overview see Appendix 1) were identified and recruited using a snowball method, using a network of personal contacts, word of mouth, recommendations, and calls distributed via social media, but also by random search (on blogging platforms). Some people I met through my friends and family and their extended networks (e.g. my mother's hairdresser, my friend's friend's parent, or someone with whom my friend attended a hobby club); others I approached as a result of searching for particular (missing) participant profiles, especially when I searched for media users that intensively engaged with media by producing their own content. In that instance, I carried out a search on blogging platforms to identify bloggers of that particular age from different parts of the country.

The selection was motivated by the diversity of the participants per se, what could be called 'profile saturation'. Further recruitment of participants finished when I was gaining repeating profiles of respondents and "no new information emerges to add to meaning" (O'Connor, Netting and Thomas, 2008, p. 31). The fieldwork was spread over a year, Nov 2012 – Nov 2013, with the first half of the data collected in autumn 2012 and the second half of the fieldwork spread over spring, summer and autumn 2013. I have agreed not to use participants' full names, but rather an alias. Appendix 1 lists them according to the date when the interview was carried out, identifying their gender, year of birth and age at the time of the interview. I also briefly describe their media use, professional status and location/residence.

Data collection: How to ask about the subject?

In-depth interviews allowed me to enter into dialogues with participants and collect complex contextualised accounts of their media uses and their diverse and contextualised understandings of authors. In three instances I spoke to (married) couples in what I would refer to as a double interview (Karla and Alois, Bohuslav and Vlasta, and František and Marie), rather than carrying out individual face-to-face interviews with the partners separately. These double interviews were still characterised by being predominantly in-depth interviews. The partners complemented as well as challenged each other, they introduced new topics and inevitably introduced the interaction favoured by focus groups. At the same time, they reflected the domestic set up (two of those interviews were carried out in the couples' homes, one in a café); and the interviewees took turns to be interviewed, as on some occasions one of the interviewees would depart the interview

[5] I recruited thirty respondents, but failed to meet one of them, who cancelled and we did not manage to re-schedule; one interview failed to record. The data from that interview inevitably informed the analysis, but are not fully acknowledged as it was not possible to transcribe and analyse the data in a same way as the other twenty eight accounts.

situation to respond to their day-to-day duties and return to the interview later to take their turn and have their story heard. Therefore, I have treated those accounts as individual interviews in the analysis, although they were transcribed as one and they included both voices in conversation with me as well as between themselves.

After initial consideration to open the interviews with a certain trigger task – e.g. inviting the interviewees to interpret a particular text, I eventually opted for a particular opening question inviting participants to speak about their most recent media experience that they remembered or found worth talking about. That allowed me to gain more genuine accounts of participants' media experiences and understandings of authors than the considered task, which could potentially be perceived as a form of test with right/wrong answers by the participants, but also predetermining the interview through exposure to the selected text, medium, genre or technology. By leaving the choice of media text/experience to discuss up to the interviewees I was able to gather a broader range of data, in varied contexts. For example, in an interview with Karla and Alois, the television set was on, and the news channel *ČT24* was running. Neither of us could help occasionally reacting and relating to what was being reported or discussed on the screen and by whom.

All the participants were approached in advance of their interview; they were presented with the main purpose and characteristics of the research and the interview process and its conditions. Once they agreed to participate, a meeting was set up with them – mostly in public spaces of their choice (cafes) or in their homes. Before every interview, the participants were asked to read and sign a consent form. The interviews were carried out in Czech, recorded and subsequently transcribed in Czech as part of the analysis (further elaborated in the following section). The interviews were also analysed in Czech; significant quotes used in the empirical part to illustrate the analysis were for this purpose translated by me into English.

As a researcher I am also a social subject and as such I inevitably became part of the social context of the interactions with the research participants even before I asked any questions – through the way they perceived me – e.g. my age, gender, appearance, but also due to the way they were recruited, for instance, if I approached them without any prior knowledge, or contacted them through their blog profile or a shared contact. Simultaneously, the encounters themselves were situated and shaped not only by their and my subjectivity, but also by the uncontrollable circumstances of the moment – what was happening in our immediate surroundings or a broader historical context (societal and/or political events). Some respondents were seeking approval in our conversations of not only their media uses and experiences, but also because broader political events of the time were taking place (as elections were approaching, see below), others pursued a style of engaged conversations, while some approached the interview as an opportunity to educate me. I was perceptive to these needs and expectations and consciously held back any explicit expressions of opinion or judgement. This was obviously much harder in instances where the respondents had encountered me before. In those instances, the setting would be more informal, and due to the age difference the respondent did not feel intimidated by the setting of a research interview and provided very open and engaged accounts of their media experiences. Due to the exploratory character of the investigation, and openness to the diversity of understandings of an author (across different media technologies, genres, topics and media outlets) I was keen and curious to hear their experiences and their understanding of an author. By not asking for a definition or offering one, the collected data provided the respondents' own understandings, themselves diverse and contextual.

Interview guide

The interviews opened with a question to initiate the conversation and introduced the participants to the topic from which the subsequent conversation could depart. They were asked what media or media content they had read/seen/heard on the day before, and invited to comment and reflect upon these experiences. In some instances, they were further encouraged to remark as to why they found it interesting, remarkable, noteworthy, and noticeable, whether in a positive or negative sense. This opening task was not framed by the limitation of factual/informative text, yet all participants started by referring to some form of news content and its consumption. This opening question allowed me to gain an account of particular lived experiences of media, and to further explore it by subsequent questions. That is, the author here is not hypothetical or pre-selected by the researcher.

The main research question was *How do people understand an author that they encounter in the interpretation of factual media texts?* I did not ask the research participants that exact question directly. The purpose of the enquiry was to map and describe accounts of experiences, and through them, reveal meanings and understandings. The interview was structured around a theory-led interview guide that was prepared in advance and identified key topics relevant to the research subjects, and the aim of the research and its questions. It helped to orientate the conversation during the interview without ignoring or dismissing the unexpected, unanticipated topics (and hence meanings) of relevance and interest brought up by interviewees.

Throughout the fieldwork, the interview guide was modified to reflect the previous interview situations and allow those to inform the interviews to come. Therefore, this research method and the open structure of the interviews allowed me to be highly flexible during the data collection. It allowed me not only to bring in new questions that proved themselves to be more significant than anticipated, or to omit others that did not resonate with the participants, as they might not understand them or misunderstand them, but also to learn within the interview process as such, improving the actual formulation of questions and ability to set out the frame of conversation without necessarily asking about the production of media (content) using particular roles or labels (i.e. author/journalist/presenter, etc.).

I was conscious that asking people directly about authors of particular texts was an invitation to their reminiscing on the authorship of the text, but not necessarily an account of their understanding of an author. I identified that asking people about their media use in general, tapping into their recent as well as less recent media uses, reflecting on current news, the political situation or discussing their personal interests and passions was more likely to invite them to talk about the role of media in their lives, and through that about their understanding of media and therefore authors in their wholeness as well as particularities.

It became quickly apparent that people did not tend to comment on, or openly discuss authors (as individuals) of texts, although they might be slightly more explicit and inspired in relation to media as organisations or technologies. After a few initial interviews, I realised that what people discussed more spontaneously and in a rather taken-for-granted way, were productive practices, and how the content was made. This realisation heavily informed the evolution of the interview guide (as well as of the subsequent analysis) and allowed me to even more pronouncedly conceptualise the understood author through the understood productive practices and understood roles in mediation.

Although I tended to avoid using the term 'author' where possible, the various contexts and directions of the interviews brought up situations where participants were asked about their experiences with journalists, presenters, media in general, other media users producing content, and their experiences and understandings of them. These are indeed,

particular types and examples of authors, and it can be argued that by using those particular terms I am suggesting a particular understanding. However, I used these terms only in relation to what was discussed previously (except for the term media, which served to me as a broad concept, that I used to open the interviews with in general).

The interviews thus developed around the following clusters of themes:

I. Asking for various media experiences:

- What is your recent media experience (What have you read/heard/seen recently)?
- What is your regular media experience/use and why?
- What content did you notice and why?
- Do you use media to seek particular information? - How do you do so?
- Do you use social media? For what purposes and how?
- Do you read comments under articles or online discussions? – Do you contribute?

II. Using the previous conversation for further enquiry into the understanding of the complexity of the conceptualised author:

- Do you think about how it has been prepared?
- How do you think it has been prepared?
- How do you think it works in that medium (particular media organisation or media type)?

III. Question focused on particular experiences, inviting respondents to expand on those experiences using questions asking more directly about the author/source:

- Do you/do you not usually pay attention to who wrote the piece? What news anchor is presenting the news?
- Is it important who wrote it? Why?
- Do you follow, or look for a particular journalist/author/name?
- What makes their work significant, and worth reading? / Why does it not matter?
- Do you consume media from different sources?
- Is the origin/source of the content important? Why?
- What makes the source/author significant?
- What is important about who wrote/made/published the text? Why?
- Why do the selected characteristics matter, what do they mean, and what are the implications?
- What does it mean to be a journalist?
- What are the qualities – benefits/negatives of reading content produced by other media users (online)?

IV. Question for those participants that are producing media content themselves:

- Why did you start? What initiated this activity?
- What does it bring to you?
- What is the purpose of your activity?
- How do you understand yourself within the media out there? How do you relate to the other media?
- How do you work with your audiences? (do you read their comments, do you discuss it with them)?

Many more or variously amended questions were asked during the actual interviews, as they were led by respondents' previous answers and interests rather than strictly by the interview guide. As Freeman says: "The point of hermeneutic analysis is not whether these are the right questions to ask, but how these questions enable the opening-up of the thick description inherent in their being expressed in the first place" (2014, p. 830).

It is also important to mention the context of the data collection, which inevitably impacts the specificity of any data. Most of the interviews were conducted in a politically charged time for the Czech Republic – the first round of interviews was carried out shortly after parliamentary elections at the end of October 2013 and at the beginning of the first public campaign for presidential elections in the country's history; the second set of interviews was conducted right between the first and second round of the presidential campaign in January 2014. While the parliamentary elections were being called early (due to the resignation of the previous government following a political scandal centred on prime minister Nečas) the presidential campaign and election were particularly significant for the society as it was preceded by a change in the constitution in favour of the direct election of the president, as the president had been previously elected by parliament. This constitutional change was communicated and accompanied by the discourse of passing the power directly to the people, and the campaign was highly watched as there was no precedent. There was a significant discursive polarisation of the society, characterised by many media/commentators as between urban intellectuals and a rural working class, made more significant by the two candidates with the most votes in the first round only being separated by less than 1% of the votes. This political happening in many cases did influence the direction of the interviews when discussing media and their role in people's lives: the political examples within those campaigns and reporting were often used, and also, people who may have been less politically involved or engaged otherwise, were much more prone to refer to politics without any external nudge.

7.3 Data analysis: the theoretical and empirical concepts

The analysis here is exploratory in its aspiration to critically map the conditions of readers' understanding of authors (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). By focusing primarily on the conditions of understanding, the analysis does not seek to create rigid hierarchies of categories or their intensities, but rather to identify themes – patterns of meaning (Boyatzis, 1998) significant for the description of the studied phenomenon and to contextualise those within the object of the enquiry. The aim is to identify relevant categories and subcategories and explore their potential and fluid relationality and intensities. This means the analysis is looking not only for data that explicitly relates to the phenomenon of readers' understanding of an author, i.e. mentions of the author in the interviews but more of the implicit and latent content.

Making sense of the understood author

Traditional media platforms – television, radio and national/regional press – or at least some of them (some interviewees did not watch television or listen to radio, others did not read a daily newspaper or other periodicals focusing on news features) were integral to the interviewees' everyday lives; their own history of using them contributed to the taken for granted discourse about their role and processes perceived as common knowledge, which is mostly mediated itself. Going through the data set repeatedly, there were only a few instances when the participants openly talked about author(s) using the term itself. When used, it is often in its narrow and limiting definition, informed by and derived from the literary and/or film discourse (strong author figure, author genius – for further discussion see e.g. Caughie, 1981; Gerstner and Staiger, 2013). It was therefore commonly used to

evoke a journalistic role, understood in terms of a physical, singular person with a full (ideally remembered by the reader) name that works on their own on a text, expressing their own ideas, opinions, judgements, pieces of advice, going through a creative process – or even possible intellectual suffering – that was strongly linked to a particular (artistic) gift, such as the gift of being able to write (well), rather than being associated with the use of acquired skills.

In the instance of audio-visual content, the interviewees were more likely to reflect upon various audio-visual clues (gestures, intonation, fashion, facial expression, etc.); and to recognise and remark on certain television personalities (presenters, journalists) to whose voices and appearances they had been exposed repeatedly over the course of time. This was unlike in the case of written texts (whether press or online media) in which cases they were more prone to comment on the author's use of language (in grammar as well as style). Of course, these aspects contribute to an understanding of an author; they relate to an understanding of how the author performs their expected role of being an author. Yet, they were for the most part also characteristics of recognition together with the author's name and hence conditions shaping one's understanding.

The participants primarily referred to media organisations or media technologies. In general terms, traditional mainstream media – television and radio channels, print – were associated with big media organisations, while online was primarily seen as the world of individuals. However, this superficial and general distinction was promptly challenged by the interviewees themselves once they further commented on different online texts and their authors – e.g. content associated with names known from traditional media outlets (e.g. online news websites associated with established media organisations), or different bloggers. Taking the very diverse understandings of authors and readers' various relations to them as a departure point for this analysis, I argue that it is a broader pool of qualities (expected, as well as noticed and commented on as unexpected) and their multiple interrelations that allow us to see the complexity of readers' understanding of authors and how these are further brought into the interpretative act, further co-determining the interpretation and meaning of the text.

The opening questions attempted to be general and inviting by posing a question about media (some grounding is inevitable) use, and the common answers were in all cases opting for the impersonal other 'them'. This can signify either people as individuals who are further referred to as journalists, commentators, or presenters – hence in relation to their perceived roles within the media content production; or in more general terms as 'the media', but more likely in relation to their formal (technical features), i.e. 'television', 'radio', 'papers', or 'on the internet'; or through the collective name of the actual media outlet, for example, *Česká televize* [Czech television][6] or *MF Dnes*[7].

To illustrate this, an excerpt from an interview with Soňa can be instructive. She is a regular reader of a particular broadsheet (*MF Dnes*); she watches the main evening news programme *Události* broadcast by *Česká televize* at 7 pm on the main channel *ČT1*; and throughout the day she irregularly checks the particular news websites *centrum.cz* and novinky.cz. She comments on her daily routine use of media as follows:

> SOŇA: During the day I check the news on the internet, and from there, I know all these brief news snapshots. On *ČT* [Czech Television], well I also criticise them, but

[6]*Česká televize* is the national television public broadcaster – it has two (originally analogue) nationwide broadcasting channels – *ČT1* and *ČT2*. With the transition to digital broadasting the television also introduced specialised channels: *ČT24* (an all day news channel), *ČT Sport* and *ČTD/ČTart* – a channel for children that is dedicated to art programmes from 8pm onwards.

[7] In 2013, *MF Dnes* was the national leading broadsheet newspaper.

> I like if they tell me, I don't know what is the correct expression, but when they sort of comment on it for me, and that's what they do on *ČT*, but not on the other [TV channels' news programmes], where are all the news we've read throughout the day on the internet, so they just tell them in a different order.

In this example, we can see the participant using the general 'them' as journalists, but also as more encompassing those who are involved in the news production – the medium and its brand as such. She does not need to distinguish between particular individuals, to refer to particular names of presenters; for her, the brand of the particular programme stands here for the understood author – the productive routines that lead to the particular result. The programme here stands for the collective and she uses this perception of the understood author in her relating to the content.

Talking about media, the research participants quite comfortably related their answers to what might seem to be their preference for traditional media – print, radio and television broadcasting – over online media. In fact, they were more likely to refer to established media organisations, for them these were well-known, no matter what media platform they accessed them on (for example, the already mentioned *MF Dnes* and its website *www.idnes.cz*), commenting on their perception of institutionalised structures, practices and routines. This is likely to be because people consider news media as more worthy of mention than other media. When asked about their media uses, the participants primarily perceived traditional, mass media as the object of the question. Mostly, they needed to be prompted to talk about other less institutionalised media channels like blogs or vlogs, online forums etc. Yet, their narratives about media suggested their complex ideas of practices and relationships within those institutions – ownership, leadership and journalistic routines, although those ideas do not necessarily correspond with reality.

Lastly, it needs to be remarked that some respondents, especially those with low media use and consumption experience, struggled to verbally address some of the questions, to refer to significant media experiences as those practices are simply not significant for them in their daily routines, yet even these participants interpret text when faced with it, even if it is taking it at face value. The media practices of one of the participants were strongly determined by his overall attitude and understanding of the world and social reality, and his relating to politics. As he was very sceptical of the political system, suggesting various conspiracy theories, this strongly determined his relationship to media in general, and therefore also his understanding of authors.

The analytical approach: how to understand understanding

I employ an approach to the data analysis driven by principles of iteration and reflexivity. As the purpose of the hermeneutical analysis is to capture the process of becoming a meaning, the analysis is driven by the principle of listening and agreement (Gadamer, 2004), by the engagement and willingness on my part to understand – what Ricoeur (1974) refers to as the hermeneutics of hope. A need for reduction of data was inevitable and a coding process inspired by the constructivist grounded theory was employed for the first rough round of analysis, to identify the central key categories and to suggest relationships between them within the process of understanding and therefore to begin identifying the various reader- understood author relationships. The limitation of Charmaz's (2006) coding is that here too, the central mechanism of reduction is driven by constant comparison (Freeman, 2014), focusing primarily on the commonalities. Coding is commonly understood as an analytical method for reducing data to a manageable volume, "to fix meaning, constructing a particular vision of the world that excludes other possible viewpoints"

(Seale, 1999, p. 154), but also to organise them "into categories and families, because they share characteristics," (Saldana, 2013, p. 8). As hermeneutics does not seek to provide an overall universal meaning or to draft a unified account of understanding, the coding here aims to identify themes, while in a parallel analytical process, "the multiple particularities along with their multiple competing meaning frames are reconsidered and examined in light of the human problem under investigation" (Freeman, 2014, p. 829). Here, questioning those particularities, while at the same time seeing them within the complexity of the whole phenomenon leads to the emergence of new meanings.

In the realised coding process, I identified themes of significance for the participants as well as themes in relation to the theory driven concept of understood author. I was interested in the relationships between these themes in each of the interview accounts, but simultaneously I was looking to identify the key themes through comparison of the data as a whole (Charmaz, 2017). This allowed me great flexibility in seeing the data hermeneutically – as individual experiences that inform the overarching structure of devised categories as well as the complex account with an eye on detail and wider parts at the same time. Charmaz argues that "constructivist grounded theory systematically brings doubt into the analytic process" (2017, p. 35); as hermeneutical analysis, the process here is deeply iterative, and the researcher's role is to be critical and raise questions throughout the whole process from data collection, through the analysis, to the writing (Freeman, 2014) – it is this constant back and forth movement that leads to the identification of the accounts of conditions of understanding.

The analysis was divided into four steps, mixing inductive and deductive, and theory and data driven approaches to analysis. The interview transcripts were firstly read with consideration of the theory driven concept of the understood author, focusing not only on the explicit mentions of the author but rather on detecting various references to the context of the text. It shortly became obvious that these were predominantly mentions and statements about productive practices and the mediation process as such. Going through accounts of the individual participants, more overarching themes were being identified going back to the data, and looking for further confirmation, or not, of these categories and patterns. The theory driven concepts brought into the analysis are experience and familiarity, apart from the understood author. While the theory-driven concepts are important for understanding the collected data in a hermeneutical way, serving as a starting point for the analytical process, the data-driven analytical concepts allow us to conceptualise the results of the analysis and provide the sought thick description of conditions for understanding the author (Freeman, 2014). I will first summarise the theory driven concepts, and then elaborate in detail on the concepts that emerged from the second stage of analysis that help to further structure and organise the empirical part of the thesis.

The first stage was informed by the theoretical concept of the understood author that was brought into the analysis. It focused on the general understanding of an author and the conditions for its understanding. I looked for any explicit or implicit mentions of an agentic presence behind the text and/or productive practices and powers behind the text. These were coded to identify common themes, which led to the identification of elements that the audiences considered as essential when understanding the author behind the text. Therefore, the initial stage of analysis was deductive, and theory driven, and data were approached with the theoretical concept of the understood author in mind. Through the iterative process, the analysis in the subsequent stages shifted toward the inductive process and data driven codes.

The next stage was data driven inductive analysis, focusing on the previously identified understanding of the author. Here, the coding process was focused on the context and

themes within which the understanding was expressed or to which it was associated. The coding process of this stage identified references to particular characteristics or lack thereof, revealing that the understood author is primarily reflected in terms of different productive practices. It also became obvious through the second stage of the coding process that although these categories could be identified across the data set, their perception varied from participant to participant, and from text to text. The data were then coded again, bringing the productive practices as an analytical tool and focusing on how they are perceived and used for the realisation of the understood author. This brought a set of categories that were value laden that the participants used to express their assessment of the understood author.

The last part of the analysis was data driven, yet informed by the previously carried out analysis of the understanding of an author. The coding here was informed also by the concept of familiarity that was employed to identify how participants related to the author, understood from within the interpretative act.

SECTION III: UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE AUTHOR

The other one called Borges, is the one things happen to. (…) I live, let myself go on living, so that Borges may contrive his literature, and his literature justifies me. (…) Besides, I am destined to perish, definitively, and only some instant of myself can survive in him. (…) Years ago I tried to free myself from him and went from the mythologies of the suburbs to the games with time and infinity, but those games belong to Borges now and I shall have to imagine other things. Thus my life is a flight and I lose everything and everything belongs to oblivion, or to him. I do not know which of us has written this page.

Borges and I, Borges, (1970, pp. 282–283)

The previously theorised concept of the understood author is empirically embodied and explored in the four analytical chapters of this section. Driven by the research question *How do people understand an author that they encounter in the interpretation of factual media texts?* the four chapters that follow unpack the interpretative process of the notion of an author as a part of the interpretation of a text. The analytical section provides a model of an author, as understood by the participants, which consists of two key categories – essential and potential elements.

I first identified all the instances where some notion of author and/or productive practices of mediation are being discussed or touched upon. Further analysis of those served to identify what I call the *essential elements* of an understood author, as opposed to the essence of the understood author. Philosophical hermeneutics, and thus hermeneutical analysis, distanced itself from essentialism. In fact, essence is not a fixed property, as van Manen (1997, p. xv) explains: "The term essence derives from the verb to be – by definition a profoundly existential notion. It asks what something 'is' for the one who asks the question. Essence asks for what something is, and without which it would no longer be what it is."

The chapter, hence, does not aim to unpack the correct decoding of the author(s) behind the read text, but their understanding, the becoming of an author as a part of the interpretative act. As the understanding is a fusion of horizons of the past (the reader's fore-understanding) and the present (the encountered text and the author inscribed in it) the *essential elements* of the author reflect the familiar, the reader's moment of recognition, which is then informed and realised through the encounter with a particular text and its author, and its *potential elements* and aspects, that are here referred to as dimensions. I further distinguish between dimensions of productive practices within which the understanding of an author is performed within the text and constituted through a particular context, and dimensions of realisation that assess the understood author. These are the contextual embodiment of the understood author, resulting from the particular interpretative act.

Therefore, although the first cluster of categories is referred to as essential elements, these do not attempt to delineate the concept, but rather they explore the boundaries of the concept of the understood author, for without such characteristics, there is no consideration of an author. The analysis thus devises an empirically realised model of the understood author (see Figure 2). This is a model of how audiences understand an author: therefore, it does not comment on or aspire to provide any normative definition, it maps the concepts that enable us to discuss how the understood author is realised (in each interpretative act).

The analytical part is divided into four chapters: the first three unpack the elements of the understood author described above; and the last analytical chapter builds on this model and explores how is it brought by the reader back into the interpretation of the text. The focus here is on relationality between the two voices – that of the reader and that which is understood by the reader as that of the author. The exploration of the dialogue between these two voices, conceptualised earlier as listening, provides insight into how readers relate to the understood author and the role that understanding of the author embodies in the interpretative act.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS		
voice	**audience**	**intention**

POTENTIAL ELEMENTS			
dimensions of productive practice		**dimensions of realisation**	
performed dimensions	**constituted dimensions**	**dimensions of assessment**	**dimensions of recognition**
bias access originality	structure expertise alternative	skills professionalism	name

Figure 2 Model of the understood author

In detail, Chapter 8 explores the essential elements of the understood author which are a voice – who talks or on whose behalf; an intention – the motivations and purpose of why something is being said; and an audience – at whom the talk is primarily aimed. These are the preconditions of audiences' understanding of authors. At the same time, they are realised in the interpretative act and thus, they constitute the understood author as the productive entity behind the text. They are always, consciously or not, assumed on the part of a reader when perceiving an author as well as a text. Despite the recognition often being unconscious and implied only, there is simply no understanding of an author without these preconditions, so to speak.

These essential elements of the understood author might be understood by the reader as missing or they might raise questions or confusion on the part of a reader, but the notion of an author always consists of them. To further explain this, if we take as an example a text perceived by a reader as authorless, the lack of an author is still an embodiment of the analytical category. The notion of essence does not refer to an essence of the author, but the understood essence, what is essential for the participants to be able to articulate the notion of an author or authorial presence behind the text. It captures the elementary characteristics of how and when audiences acknowledge an authorial presence in the text-reader encounter.

While the understanding of the essential elements is fluid and changeable, the actual consideration of the author remains tied to these three elements. It is the potential elements, explored in Chapters 9 and 10 that actualise the essential elements in the interpretative act. Their presence, or absence, in the readers' understanding is not significant for becoming an author. Their relevance might not only vary from reader to

reader, but even more importantly from one interpretative act to another. Their understandings are fluid, and multiple, they are changing, changeable, and contextual. They are evolving and intertwined, and they are episodes in the continuous understanding of an author as an overarching category as well as each and every particular encountered author. The labels of these characteristics are derived from the data rather than being theoretically articulated prior to the analysis.

Chapter 9 focuses on dimensions of productive practices to capture the spectrum of possible realisations, reflecting the text's as well as the reader's context – various journalistic and media production practices, reflecting the content, its topical grounding and hence the reader's prior understanding of those. They are mutually related; they are not by definition parallel, superior or subordinate to each other. Certain dimensions are more closely linked together than others – in some instances there might be direct relationships but these are the expressions of diversity as well; relations among the dimensions that are for one reader's definition inseparable and even causal are for another reader insignificant. Yet, some of these dimensions might remain insignificant, and thus invisible or lacking, for some readers in their understanding of an author entirely.

This relationality is addressed in Chapter 10 that focuses on the dimensions of realisation. While the dimensions of productive practices in themselves are not judgement laden, it is through the dimensions of realisation that these understandings become relational and the reader brings into their understanding of the author a certain judgement of quality of the author – good/bad, positive/negative etc. The realisation of the author is also expressed through naming as a form of recognition, as the author is realised in the understanding.

Lastly, Chapter 11 shifts the attention of the analysis from what is an author, to how the author is brought into the interpretative act, and the role that is embodied by the understood author within the interpretative act in that particular act of interpretation. The focus here is on exploring the realisation of an author as a voice addressing an audience with an intention, and what that means for the reader in navigating the interpretative act. The analysis here also shows how these roles – their anticipation as well as their realisation – build on the previously discussed elements and dimensions.

8 Essential elements of an understood author: voice, audience and intention

The people interviewed for this project do not, primarily, interpret the media texts that they encounter in their everyday life to discover a hidden meaning; foremost they would argue that they "just" read them, watch them or listen to them. Some texts are sought, while most of them are being encountered as part of their routine of daily media consumption, some cross the readers' path by chance. Whether enjoyed, liked, agreed with, or not, the readers are indeed primarily open to what the texts are telling them. For one or another reason, they want to know what the text is attempting to tell them, because if not, then the text is not being read in the first place.

Sometimes they knew what the authors they encountered looked like, but had mostly never met them personally. In many other instances they may not even have known, or at least remembered, their names, or for that matter care what their names, faces and biographies are. But they might be interested in their opinions and taste, and if not interested, they might assume what these are and relate to these assumptions. Indeed, as previous decades of audience research argued, the author is secondary. When the participants formulate their opinions about the diverse media texts that they encounter in their everyday lives, they mostly refer to the content. They link their judgements and opinions on the text primarily to the subject matter of those texts in question – "Am I interested in this or not?".

Yet still, in those narratives of their regular as well as random media uses, more implicit than explicit, are hidden remarks that do not refer to the content and subject matter only, but also relate to those who talk, those in whose interest this has been written. Inevitably, the readers here question the *voices* talking to them, their *intentions* and why they are being talked to, but also being addressed or not i.e. the identification with or not with the intended *audiences*, those being talked to.

These are the three essential elements of the understood author omnipresent in each and every text-reader encounter. Indeed, it might be argued that this is a simplistic (one-way) model of communication (someone saying something to someone) denying or at least neglecting the readers' reception and response; or at least that it is a perception of such a communication model, rather than a model of an understood author. In fact, the realisation that when readers encounter a text they perceive it primarily as an act of communication from the position of the sender (or to say an author) – who, to whom and why, allows us to encompass the readers' understanding of the author in its complexity and broadness, and thus to explore the rich definition that lies behind the understood author and goes beyond the notion of authorship itself. Whereas the particular realisation of the definition varies depending on the particular text, and thus its author, the elements to which one is relating remain the same across different readers, media technologies and platforms, and every and each interpretative act.

In the following three parts I will discuss each of the three individual essential elements of the understood author: understood voice (who), audience (to whom), and intention (why) that I argue embody the reader's understanding of an author; they are interrelated and conditioning each other's existence. Rather than being actively sought by the readers, they are omnipresent, yet not necessarily conscious, in readers' thinking about any media text.

8.1 Who talks and tells: an understood voice

The term voice stands here for the embodiment of the telling that a reader relates to: her perception of being talked to by a text, or rather somebody behind the text; understanding that there is someone telling something. This category reflects on the reader's active listening, being addressed (see Lacey, 2013). The voice here stands for the multiplicity and diversity of understanding of this presence of someone – an individual, a collective, an institution, a machine, a PR company, a user, etc. These understandings might be implicit, conscious or articulated; who the voice is might not be clear at all, or one might not even be interested in it, but there is always the understanding that what is being told cannot be told without a voice.

The category of voice encompasses diverse realisations and understandings on the part of the readers. Interestingly, many participants reflected on the voices that they encounter as structured, further elaborating that the voices that address them are often collectives of voices who are part of complex power structures. Drawing on the interviews, three particularly dominant subcategories were identified in participants' consideration of the voice, these are in some instances intertwined and in no way exhaustive. These are the diversity and multiplicity of a voice, the power structures of a voice, and the relationality of a voice.

The most present articulation of a voice within the data was participants' reflections on diversity and multiplicity. The materialisation of an opinion in the voice of an individual (e.g. journalist, writer, presenter) was not unconditionally perceived by the readers as a sign of ownership of that opinion. Rather, there was a well perceived complexity of (collective) production practices that led to a more cautious positioning of the voice – more in line with Goffman's (1981) distinction between animator, author and principal (the one who talks, the one deciding what is being said and the one on whose behalf, for whose benefit it is being said).

Thus, the category of multiplicity refers to instances where participants reflected on the complex structures and involvement of different voices behind the voice that is talking – in some instances, inability to identify who that voice is, and in others arguing that those who talk are not those who seem to be or declare that they are talking. This was particularly clear in instances, where interviewees predominantly talked about institutionalised media (whether referring to individual journalists or particular media outlets). Also, the perception of collective production was more commonly perceived in relation to audiovisual content, among the interviewees. That is also very likely due to readers' awareness of the technological requirements and more complex production processes in relation to audiovisual content, and hence more likely the involvement of other (skilled) people. The respondents' perceptions of voice as a collection of multiple voices rather than a singular one, perhaps paradoxically, led in many cases to a perception of limited diversity of voices at hand.

The example from the interview with Martin illustrates the perception of (the author's) voice present in the text. He presupposes a distinction between different involvements in text production – between different voices – their potential existence, presence in a text and relationship, evoking Goffman's (1981) triad mentioned earlier. Martin does not relate to a particular author-name, rather for him, the understood author is the medium outlet – the Czech tabloid *Blesk*. He clearly perceives a discrepancy between those who talk – journalists, and the voices that determine what he hears. Hence, without confronting the idea of a journalist as a presenter of the content, it is not supposedly their voice he hears, but the voice of the media owner [West Germans], and implicitly the governing parties.

This distinction unravels the perceived complexity of saying/speaking, and that those who are speaking do not necessarily equate to those who are saying something. While Martin trusts that journalists do have a personal ability to say – to voice – things, he perceived that within the system, it is not in their personal capacity to do so, and so they are just speaking – resonating other, more powerful, voices.

> INTERVIEWER: Earlier, you said that many [Czech] dailies are owned by West Germans. What does it mean for you?
>
> MARTIN: Well, it is still the same, they just change their coat. There is still an order from the top.
>
> INTERVIEWER: You think they interfere in the production of the papers?
>
> MARTIN: I do think, that it is, well, not exactly censorship, but kind of shaping, there are orders, there. As I have never read anything positive about communists in *Blesk*.
>
> (…)
>
> MARTIN: Some 60, 70, 80% of them, they always talk on behalf of the parties that govern, when it comes to politics, don't they?
>
> INTERVIEWER: So the journalists work for the governing parties?
>
> MARTIN: No, they [journalists] would dig it out, but they [media owners] won't allow them… In them [journalists] I believe.

He does not refer to any particular content, but his answer suggests that when considering content that he encounters across media, he perceived that these stories are being told by someone; in his case mostly someone he does not identify with, someone whom he finds as an oppressor of the voice of others. He does not try to argue that he knows who is talking, but he assumes that someone is talking and that someone's voice is being made prominent and expressed. This allows us to further explore how the broader concept of the understood author is realised in the interpretative act, far beyond the singular concept of the author as a face-name-biography, but rather the recognition of authors as clusters of elements (a voice being one of them).

When Magda laments that the "news is still the same" it resonates with Vladimír's comment that "it seems that everything goes in a circle, I am not finding out anything new, the interpretations of the events are still the same." They both imply not only a lack of diversity in the topics they encounter, but more importantly a lack of diversity of voices and hence of "interpretations of the events". They reflect on the understood voice in Couldry's sense as an "expression of a distinctive perspective on the world that needs to be acknowledged." (2010, p. 1). Even though new topics might be presented and discussed, if they are presented by the same voice(s), the readers perceive them as following the same schemas and categories, through which the new stories result in old narratives and the same news.

So although the structure of the voice might be understood as complex and involving multiple voices, this does not automatically lead to a perception of diverse voices at hand, in fact, it seems that many respondents see the collective character of the voice as one of the reasons for the lack of diversity. This is due to the second perception of a voice as structures of power.

Within the perception of voice also comes a perception of what obstructs/frees that voice, what resonates with it and what makes it silent. Martin in the earlier quote shifts

from the notion of an oppression of the voice through perceived structural and institutional power relationships to more implicit, self-regulating oppression derived from the broader, more general contextual pressure of conveying the society, appropriating the language of the time, reproducing, rather than challenging the shared understandings and values. Hence, in his quote we can see not only reflection on the multiplicity and collective character of the voice, but also, and as a consequence, a reflection of the understood hierarchy and power structures within this multiplicity.

Similarly, when Milada says: "I rely on them [the journalists] in these fucked up times, that the journalists won't be scared and that they will keep writing as it is, that they won't get influenced," she not only expresses some hope and belief in journalistic integrity and practices, but she implicitly distinguishes between different voices and indicates a possibility that these can be expressed as well as oppressed.

A different perspective on the power structures of the voice can be seen in the quote from Rudolf, who has his own blog dedicated to reviewing mainly newly released films, but who also writes about other cultural events, and who reflects on his own reading of blogs – less institutionalised, amateur, individual and independent authors.

> RUDOLF: Blogs, there I value even those that ramble total nonsense, sometimes even vulgar and rude stuff. Well ok, but they still have a right to speak freely, and this right of theirs I will always protect.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Do you read it?
>
> RUDOLF: Not really, I am always joking and writing to them for example: For you, to be able to write those nonsenses of yours, we were ringing the keys[8] and dripping our blood on the barricades.

Rudolf does not necessarily value the content produced by some bloggers highly, but we can clearly see from his response that he acknowledges the voice and although he says he does not really read them, he contradicts himself by further elaborating on how he responds to these texts. Leaving a comment on other people's blogs shows that he engages with these texts, that he listens, although he might not agree, and that he hears their voices. His quote also shows his conscious recognition of the potential power of these voices within a broader social structure. Although he does not align with an opinion expressed in a text, he considers it important to have these voices present in the Habermasian notion of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989). Although in a different form, this is a reflection of the power structures of the voice nonetheless too. Rudolf in his quote grants a right to speak, and thus to address, to a voice that might be listened to by someone other than himself. His consideration of power is here linked again to the notion of diversity of voices at hand, but also the potential and ability to speak as opposed to the previous examples which refer to voices being silenced.

Lastly, the voice is perceived strongly in terms of relationality to the reader, the proximity and resonance of the voice of an author with the one of a reader. That is not to say, that the voice is more likely to be acknowledged if it is close to the reader; on the contrary, due to the perceived multiplicity and structural complexity of the voice, the relationality can be very much visible precisely due to the distance rather than proximity. This is well expressed in the quote from an interview with Vlasta below where she distinguishes herself and the voice (of media) not even expecting that these should be close.

[8] This is a reminiscence of the Velvet Revolution in 1989. People gathered on the main Prague square were ringing their keys above their heads to symbolise that they were ringing the end of the reign of the communist party.

> VLASTA: [the media are] like a third dimension, I don't know if they should speak on my behalf, … more likely they lived their lives and what they want to tell us, they tell us (…) they tell us that this is how it is.

Readers' understanding of an author as a voice, the understood voice being thus an essential element of recognising and relating to the author, allows us to transcend the prejudiced and restrictive conception of the author as a writer only and to grasp the potentiality of the relationships of the reader to the author in its complexity. Thus, the voice indicates the potential understandings of an author by whom one is being addressed, but also the uniqueness of this understanding, reminiscent of Cavarero's (2005) uniqueness of the emission of voice as well as Gadamer's conceptualisation of understanding as a fusion of horizons, where the understanding is embedded in the tradition yet belongs to and results from the moment of the encounter (of the text, in this instance voice, and the reader).

To understand, one needs to listen as opposed to only hearing the counterpart, which is why for Gadamer (2004) conversation is the embodiment of understanding. The reader is in conversation with the text – the fixed object of interpretation in which meaning is interpreted and at the same time experienced through a language (Gadamer, 2004). Cavarero (2005) goes further, as for her the final destination of a speech is a voice. It is the aspect of relationality that is of importance to her. She argues "[t]hat which is proper to the voice does not lie in pure sound but rather in the relational uniqueness of a vocal emission that, far from contradicting it, announces and brings to its destination the specifically human fact of speech." (2005, pp. 14–15).

Here too, the relationality is shown to be central to the reader's realisation of the understood author. A reader positions themselves toward the text and inevitably attributes a voice to the text in order to enter into a dialogue, a conversation – a perceived position from which the text talks to them. Metaphorically, it can be argued that the reader is resonating the (silent) text, she is relating to a text through an understood author and its voice. Thus, an understood author is not primarily perceived as a person, but rather as a voice – a complex and structured perception that is omnipresent in every interpretative situation.

8.2 Who is addressed: an understood audience

The relationality of voice cannot, however, be conceptualised only from the position of the teller, but just as importantly the voice needs to be heard, listened to and acknowledged. The perception of the voice of the understood author is therefore inseparable from the perception of it being addressed to someone – a person or a group of people – the understood audience; whether one identifies with them, or not, is independent of a reader's perception of their existence. The understood audience as an essential element of an author is therefore the directionality of the voice, yet not the destination.

Therefore, the understood audience as an analytical category of the understood author is different from earlier theoretically discussed concepts from literary theory – an inscribed reader (Iser, 1974), or a model reader (Eco, 1979). These provide a conceptualisation of the interpretative situation, and meaning-making (discussed in detail in Chapter 3). Hence as an essential element of an understood author, an understood audience is not the ideal destination or correctness of interpretation, instead, the perception of an intended audience contributes to the reader's understanding of the author, it is the reader's

interpretation of the directionality of the voice. The concept of understood audience thus enables us to further unpack the relationality of a reader to the perceived voice, as it reflects on the reader's ability to identify, or not, with the understood audience. The participants thus primarily commented on the sense of distance/proximity to the understood author, the author's ability to address the audience, and therefore its comprehensibility as well as care for the reader, but also a more pragmatic categorisation of an audience in line with various demographic characteristics.

The most common understanding of the addressed audience is a broad notion of "the readers" (also viewers, users). It is closely connected with the prior prominence of identification of voice, mainly within the spectrum of mainstream current affairs and news programmes. Within this particular context of the understood author, the understood audience is articulated in more general categories of readers, relating to other citizens, and compatriots. Once again, only when we break through the layer of the dominant understanding of media as established media outlets, does the element of understood audiences take on more varied forms.

For example, Milada mostly refers to the addressees of the understood authors she encounters as "them" – the people, the readers, her neighbours, the other citizens with whom she shares the political space, whom she perceives as potential listeners to her own voice, here resonated by the voice of the understood author.

> MILADA: It should be written in a way so people understand it. I like when journalists, when they write so they [the readers] can get it, when they arouse them [the readers]. When I read some of the sketches and commentaries in the papers, I say to myself, damn it, if the people are reading it, they have to get, that it is not possible [to continue] this way. But they probably don't read it. (…)

Here, she acknowledges that the voice of journalists in opinion pieces – commentaries or sketches – is addressing the readers, the people, in order to bring their attention to a problem they might not be aware of, or a way of thinking about it that might not occur to them. She refers to the other people as potential, desirable, audiences, yet it is she who primarily listens, who is affected by the understood voice. But just as importantly, she stresses the need of the author to care, and to be comprehensible. The voice is nothing if it is not heard.

In contrast to Milada's consideration of the audience along the dichotomy me (self)/them, where she distinguishes and distances herself from the other readers, Zdena is building on assumed shared characteristics, for example gender, which she assumes provides for greater proximity and relationality. She, as a blogger, reflects on the audience of her own texts, which are primarily stories from her own life – mainly about her family, drawing a narrow comparison between herself and her audience.

> ZDENA: Sometimes, I think that I should have chosen a different blog [platform]. Some, where there is no politics. Maybe I will move it to Ona Dnes[9], I think that's more for women.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Do you think you write more for women?
>
> ZDENA: Well, that's it. I was quite surprised, as I have received quite a few reactions from men, more from men [than women]. Even though I have female

[9] Zdena's blog is hosted by a blog platform blog.idnes.cz that is part of the news website idnes.cz – an online news portal owned by the media group Mafra. They are publisher, among other media outkets, of the daily broadsheet *MF Dnes*. *Ona Dnes* is the broadsheets' Monday supplement aimed at female readers, which has its online version ona.idnes.cz and its blog hosting service.

visitors too. But it's surprised me that they [the men] for example write [comment] there: finally a nice read.

Her distinction between male and female readers is clearly derived from her own perception of what female/male readers are interested in. But also, as a writer/reader, she perceived the blog hosting platform as a form of understood author – a place that gathers around itself readers with a particular interest (i.e. politics), or with a lack of particular interest (i.e. everyday family stories), and hence she sees her choice as potentially wrong, generating a wrong or not so appropriate audience to talk to.

The reader's identification with the perceived addressee of the text does not necessarily imply a direct positive or negative reaction toward the text. Yet, it is employed in readers' contextualising of texts as a critical tool to judge and hence bring in the prior judgements, knowledge and experiences, to evaluate a text through the perceived production practices.

The following quote from the interview with Vlasta is an example of this: she makes a distinction between different readers and hence different addressees – the one in search of sensational information and those in search of serious information – presuming that the voice and audience are interrelated and the voice adapts according to its intended addressee.

VLASTA: From my point of view, to have a viewership they have to reach for that scandalous stuff. They think it will attract people. In fact, loads of people get annoyed, but it really does attract loads of people too. I believe that it does attract them and so I do not think they do it badly. There is something else that's wrong.

Vlasta understands the author to be in a clear relationship with the audience whom the understood author addresses, which by implication is the selection of an expressed voice. The audience's assumed preferences are the cause of the particular journalistic results. The voice of the understood author has to adapt and for Vlasta it adapts well, it does fulfil its prior intention to attract readers. And hence, Vlasta, in this instance, problematizes the understood audience.

In the excerpt from the interview with Milada, we can see an extreme example of being addressed by someone's voice. In her case she not only feels addressed but she fully identifies with the understood voice to a degree that she refers to the author as talking on her behalf.

MILADA: My favourite [author] is Karel Steigerwald[10]because with him I am in absolute accord. What he writes, that really is like it is coming straight out of me.

Even though she refers here to the voice, having her own voice heard and listened to through the voice of the understood author, she declares being "in absolute accord" with the voice as it is addressing her by embodying her own voice. The voice talks on her behalf, and first of all talks to her.

The premise of understanding as a conversation is simple – if one does not listen, there is no conversation, if one does not read the text, there is no interpretative situation.

[10] A Czech writer and journalist. At the time of the interview (August 2013) he had long been one of the main commentators at the biggest national broadsheet, *MF Dnes*. The broadsheet was bought by Agrofert in June 2013, a company owned by Andrej Babiš, a Czech businessman and subsequently a leader of the Czech political party ANO. The party finished second in the parliamentary elections in October 2013 after which Andrej Babiš become Czech Minster of Finances. When Babiš's Agrofert bought the media company, many journalists raised concerns about his potential involvement in running of the broadsheet and imposing his political agenda on the newspaper's editorial decisions, and these concerns increased after his appointment to the government. A number of journalists left the broadsheet. One of them was Steigerwald who left *MF Dnes* in August 2014 (a year after the interview with Milada).

Therefore, a reader's potential lack of self-identification with the understood audience does not imply that the reader does not listen to the voice. The concept here stands for a reader's perception of the voice's relationality. Understood audience hence does not serve the reader to determine whether the text is addressed to her or not, but rather it contributes to the perception of the text's aim – an intention.

8.3 Why communicate: an understood intention

The third essential element of an understood author is the understood intention. The choice of terminology does not aim to rehabilitate the role and relevance of an author's intention in the interpretative situation, earlier disproved theoretically. Quite the reverse: it acknowledges that the perceived directionality of the voice is also understood as purposeful. Dismissing the role of the author's intention in the interpretative situation does not dispute the existence of it per se; it does not argue against an author communicating with a particular aim and the reader being aware of it. What it rejects, however, is the premise that the author's intention can somehow be fully learned, employed and applied in the act of reading by the reader.

The understood intention is perceived mostly through three subcategories: *why is the voice speaking, why it is saying this, and why is it being said in this way*? Also, based on the collected interviews it might seem that the participants' understanding of purposes and reasons why media texts are being created and produced – understood intention – is the most articulated and verbalised essential element in a reader's relating to the understood author. In comparison to the other elements, remarks relating to intention are far more explicit and people are prone to comment and reflect on them. They frequently mention commercial intentions – sales, viewership, and advertising. For example, Marta, who in general is rather sceptical about the current journalistic practices and routines in the Czech media, links the quality of news production to her understanding of media routines, and logics and mechanisms that she associates with media production.

> MARTA: I think, they [journalists] are asked to fill the pages in a given time, to meet the deadlines, and for it [the texts] to be saleable, so they have readers and the print run is not falling down. And that's the most important [for them]. That's why I don't trust it because the motivation is a priori different from bringing information. The media are often carriers of advertisements in the first place. Firstly, to sell the reading heads to the advertiser; and then glue on some content. It is secondary what that is.

This quote illustrates well the broadly shared (within the research participants) understanding of media production as a primarily commercial concern (a venture to sell copies, broadcasting time, advertising) as opposed to an intention perceived as ideal in relation to news content – to inform and to report, and to comment or analyse. In the instance of current affairs journalism, there is a particular expectation among the participants of an ultimate intention: to uncover unfair or criminal practices of politicians and businesses – to reveal the truth. The quote also demonstrates the notion of *why is the voice saying this and in this way,* as Marta reflects on the commercial motivations of the editorial teams and the particularity of time restrictions that impact the quality of the texts. Unlike in the case of the other two essential elements, there is a greater explicit notion of what the right (ideal) intention for media production should be, yet this expectation is mostly unfulfilled and dissatisfied in the view of the research participants.

The other commonly shared understood intention behind media content production is more a notion of influence, where content is perceived as being a result of particular pressure, or connections (often perceived as a political influence), or an attempt to enhance something (e.g. product, company) or someone – *why is the voice speaking*. For instance, saying something in someone's favour, or more likely omitting information that could be harmful to someone's reputation, as seen earlier in the lengthy quote from the interview with Martin: "They [journalists] would dig it out, but they [media owners] won't allow them… In them [journalists] I believe."

The element of understood intention is perceived regardless of media – institutionalised or private/individual; yet in the latter case the readers are more prone to use the understood intention to draw conclusions about the worthiness and quality of the text. Petra, who herself is a dedicated political blogger, comments on the scene of Czech blogs sceptically.

> PETRA: (…) 90% of the texts there [in the Czech blogosphere] are only a fulfilment of an irresistible need to say something, even though they have nothing to say.

Here, she sums up a fairly shared notion that blogs are primarily personal texts expressing personal opinions, but more importantly, their intention is to fulfil the understood author's need to express themselves, rather than to inform – to talk instead of to tell, the *why is it being said*. Here, the understood intention is employed to value the quality of the author and of the text as a provider of information. This shows a different attitude towards authors perceived as individuals to whom she is more likely to attribute private interests and intentions than to authors understood to be a part of media organisations. Although, in the latter case, while the quality and value of a text are also assessed, it is not through questioning whether one has anything to say, but more through perceiving *how and why is the said being said*.

Interviewees' remarks and musing on the media's (authors') intentions are remarkably more explicit than those on voice and audience. They are brought up by the interviewees without hesitations, spontaneously, and often with a hint of being in control through having this knowledge. While the other two categories – understood voice and audience – are subtle and rather implicit categories of the reader's understanding of authors, this characterisation is consistent in relation to diverse media and media texts. The explicit verbalisation of understood intention is much more prominent in relation to texts on current affairs and political news in general, where it often takes on the form of scepticism. This also applies to relations with texts that openly present opinions, interests, tastes and impressions (e.g. reviews). However, if a text reports on topics from areas a priori perceived as less biased, for example, news from the field of natural sciences, or history – that is somehow perceived as fact-based, then the enquiry into the intention of why this is being said decreases greatly.

Yet, I also identified an additional explanation for this prominent acknowledgement of understood intention – a political situation during the data collection and the context of the local media discourse. Firstly, most of the interviews were carried out in times of more alerted and awakened political and civic awareness in the Czech Republic – either around early parliamentary elections (following a rather dramatic political situation of political scandals and the resignation of the Prime Minister) or the first Czech direct presidential election. Secondly, I attribute this to the meta-discourse of local media, the way media talk about themselves, and the way in which they are talked about within the society, so this all is much more clearly reflected in relation to the element of intention than in the case of the other two. Interviewees largely adapt, and subsequently, adopt the mediated knowledge about media to share it further. It can be argued in this instance that it is largely to

demonstrate knowledge and dismiss the potential fear of being understood as under the spell of the media by the interviewees. By denouncing media through a demonstration of knowing "how it works behind the scenes" they try to gain the status of media-savvy – a media user in control of their own media consumption.

The concept of the author's intention is hence not only belonging to the cultural tradition of my interviewees: being educated in the system that repeatedly asked them and evaluated them based on their answers to the questions: what does the author mean here, what does the author want to say – asking for the identification of authors' intentions. It is simply an innate condition of communication. But, more importantly, it belongs to their understanding of communication per se, not least because the readers-listeners are the tellers in other conversations.

Reiterating the three essential elements – the perceived voice, its audience and its intention – the analysis brings us back to the beginning in a full hermeneutical circle emphasising the audiences' enquiry, whether conscious or not, explicit or not, into who is speaking (voice), for whom is this (audience), and why (intention). Asking these questions is a reader's way of anchoring an encountered text in a broader context of its existence: Why does the text exist, why am I reading this? Is it for me and do I trust it?, which enables the reader to establish the text's relevance. Thus, acknowledging the readers' enquiry into authors' intentions helps us to empirically unpack the interpretative act as situated and informed by the readers' prior understandings and imaginaries of diverse journalistic and media productive practices, and at the same time to further acknowledge that these imaginaries and understandings are complex and informed by prior experiences of being an audience, as well as by the media discourse itself as it is inevitably a result of the media-reader encounters.

Going beyond the narrow and yet somehow vague concept of the author and using it as an opportunity to understand how readers contextualise media texts in relation to their origin, existence and productive practices allows us to fully comprehend how readers tend to anchor their understanding of the text in relation to its formation. Here, we can see that instead of relating to the author per se, they are more likely to relate and position themselves to an understood voice, audience and intention, implicitly interpreting the communicative act itself. The particular and individual understandings differ between the participants. However, these three elements are essential and inherent to the way that people think about a text.

9 Dimensions of productive practices

The functional dimensions of productive practices embody multiple and diverse perceptions of an author/a producer, but mainly they reflect readers' understanding of how a text was produced (being more derived from a particular text itself) as well as readers' more general understanding of how media mediate (being more based on their perception of the structure of media and the productive processes of text creation and formation in general).

To grasp the fluidity of these understandings, these potential elements are not discussed as clearly defined categories or binaries, but rather as ontological dimensions that structure the understandings of authors (for further conceptualisation of 'dimension' see Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007). The concept of dimensions allows us to apprehend that readers' understandings of the author are nuanced, that there are multiple different understandings, which cannot be considered in terms of clear and fixed opposites. For the same reasons, they should not be primarily understood as linear, but rather as a spectrum within which the author is understood and realised. They encompass diversity within meaning and nuances within it, where the label chosen for the given dimension aims to outline the central meaning rather than being inclusive of every meaning possible. Thus, the dimensions are named with one word as opposed to a two-word scale with fixed endpoints. This openness of the dimensions allows us to focus on the interplay between those diverse qualities assigned to the understood author by readers, how they mutually determine, and potentially refigure (Ricoeur, 1980) understanding of each other and contribute to the overall understanding of the author

Eight key dimensions emerged from the analysis that expose the realisation of the understanding of an author in a particular text-reader encounter. They are broadly defined in order to encompass diverse articulations, as people might share the same vocabulary to express different meanings and vice versa. Each dimension is always also defined by a central question (see Figure 3 below) that drives the understanding of an author within each particular dimension. Not all of the dimensions are always significant, in different encounters: for every reader, a different understanding of the author can be realised within a different set of dimensions. There are no given hierarchical or cause-effect relationships between the various dimensions, although dimensions can be variously interrelated, and their varied juxtapositions result in diverse understandings of an author. Some dimensions are parallel to each other; others are completely unrelated, while often a certain understanding of an author within one dimension is likely to lead to a particular understanding within another one. A realisation of an author within a particular dimension in itself does not imply a particular positive or negative judgement or perception of the author. The positive/negative perception and evaluation of an author derives from an understanding of the author embodied within the complex matrix of multiple dimensions and the interplay between them perceived by the reader. Therefore, what one reader understands as a positive quality might be perceived as a negative one by another reader; moreover, a quality attributed to a particular author by a reader might be perceived as negative if juxtaposed with a different dimension, while in the case of another author, the same quality might be perceived as positive.

It is important to note, that none of the dimensions discussed below is perceived as an isolated or a defining aspect of the understood author. After all, readers' understanding of an author behind a text is not an act of dissecting (in contrast to the analysis presented in this chapter), but rather an act of fusing – considering various qualities mostly

unconsciously relevant to the reader, a practice of making an author intelligible and relatable.

For better orientation, I further distinguish between three *performed dimensions* and three *constituted dimensions* (Figure 3) although this categorisation is more tentative rather than rigid and strict. The performed dimensions stand for readers' understanding of the author in terms of the structure and formation of the text, thus, they are being interpreted primarily from the text itself as they are performed and demonstrated by and within the text. The constituted dimensions concern understanding of the author that is dependent and derived from the context – intertextual and paratextual (Genette, 1997b) – of the text. Although these are often established from the interpretation of the context only, they too contribute to the interpretation of the text. The constituted dimensions concern an understanding of an author in terms of the production practices, and part of the context of their understanding is indeed reinforced by the media discourse about media practices itself. The analysis shows that the way that various production practices and journalistic routines (theoretically explored in Chapter 5) are being mediated is greatly reflected in the reader's understanding of authors; however, this does not mean that the media discourse is not being challenged in the act of interpretation.

Performed dimensions	
dimension of	question of
bias	manipulation
access	dependence
originality	distinctiveness

Constituted dimensions	
dimension of	question of
structure	control
expertise	experience
alternative	recognition

Figure 3 Dimensions of productive practices

In this chapter I explain the diverse understandings of authors realised and structured by these dimensions and how the concept of dimensions allows for such diverse groupings. These understandings shift and change across time, from reader to reader, from interpretative act to interpretative act. They are in constant motion, and although they are realised in the interpretative act, they are also informing and changing the readers' horizons and therefore fore-understanding of these dimensions and the author as well. The embodiment and relevance of these dimensions are fluid and prone to change. Rather than a rigid typology, this chapter provides an insight into the process of understanding an author, to reveal the underlying mechanisms and dynamics of the actualisation of the understood author that are shared across readers and interpretative situations. The discussion does not aspire to place a fixed definition on what the understood author is, but rather it presents how the understood author comes to be, in the Gadamerian sense. The dimensions of an understood author are here discussed individually, in arbitrary order.

9.1 Performed dimensions

BIAS: a question of manipulation

The overarching label "bias" stands for very diverse understandings of the author as biased, a quality greatly considered, discussed and reflected upon by the interviewees. Participants often reflected on the understood situatedness of the authors and whether and how they bring their particular personal context into their writing, and the visibility and/or acknowledgement of this bias within their writing. What is considered here are thus reflections and comments on authors' expression of opinion, commenting, taking sides, being political, being neutral, impartial or objective. These qualities are translated into a question of the author's honesty and subsequently, the author's potential to manipulate the reader.

The interviewees did not tend to distinguish between authors according to the type of technology (television, radio, print, online). They were, however, prone to understand bias differently in relation to authors perceived as established and institutionalised media organisations (dimension of structure) or journalists, as opposed to amateurs – those authors understood primarily as other readers/media users. Although there are quite diverse understandings among the interviewees regarding whether the institutional author (established media organisations and outlets) should be impartial (neutral/objective) or partial (biased), it is a question that many interviewees voiced and reflected upon at great length. While some people dismissed bias, arguing that media should be "impartial, providing information, but not influence people" (Vlasta), others dismissed the notion of media neutrality as a possibility, appreciating that "media always serve someone (…) [and a reader] should know whom they serve and what they want to say" (Irena).

The significant acknowledgement of this dimension in the interviewees' narratives might not be so surprising considering that the debate on objectivity as possible/desirable in relation to media production has been rather prominent not only among media and communications academics (e.g. Brucker, 1973; Merill, 1974; Tuchman, 1978a), but among the media professionals themselves during the past decades. In regard to the specificity of the Czech context, with the change of regime in 1989/1990 a societal need emerged to devise new narratives and discourses in relation to the role and function of media in society (Ševčíková and Nordenstreng, 2017). In the socialist republic, media served as an organ of the one-party state, there was no space or tolerance for critical and oppositional voices, and the main task of the media was to inform and communicate messages from the party to the people (Končelík, Orság and Večeřa, 2010). Therefore in the nineties especially, the metaphor of media being the watchdog of democracy became dominant and used among scholars as well as media professionals, who distanced themselves from the notion of media being an amplifier of a particular political agenda and rather presented themselves as an independent voice, providing oversight and checks over the political and economic powers and influences (Jakubowicz, 2001).

Over two decades later, the metaphors were not so needed and the media discourse had become more varied, not unrelated to different types of ownership across the Czech media landscape – foreign investors, domestic owners[11] and media with the status of a

[11] For example, *Respekt*, one of the national political weeklies, renowned for its rather critical voice, was bought by a Czech businessman, Zdeněk Bakala, in 2006. In his editorial column dated 22nd September 2013, the editor-in-chief Erik Tabery addressed a possible conflict of interest. He said that the paper decided not to inform its readers about its owner's activities in general, to avoid raising questions as to whether they write about him with bias or not. (Accessed on 28th October 2016 at https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2013/39/editorial-bakala-okd-a-respekt)

public broadcasting service. Yet, for some, the call upon media objectivity and impartiality morphed into kind of a folk myth as shown in Marta's quote.

> MARTA: That, what the *BBC* has always voiced, that when the editor enters the *BBC* studios, he always has to leave his political opinion at the doormat, and that it should not be recognised whom he is partial to. That I think is not the case here [in this country], you can tell exactly what side which medium stands on, whom they write for, and that I find terrible.

Despite the mentioned differences, there are certain narratives shared across the interviewees, almost scholastically repeated and unchallenged as the given truth and facts of media practices. One example of correct journalistic practice is to "clearly separate what are facts and what are opinions of the editor or the media as such" (Tomáš). Here, Tomáš' understanding of an author within the dimension of bias is prefigured by the text's genre (news versus commentary) and the prejudice that news is pure fact and hence should be detached from any bias and opinion. Such a prejudice (commonly shared among the interviewees) inevitably neglects the practices of selection, framing etc.

The analysis shows that there is a great multitude of departure points for understanding the author within this dimension, yet the most significant and decisive is the question of authors' honesty questioning the potential of authors' manipulation of the readers. For Jaroslav, the bias is derived from ownership of a particular medium. "Media should, for sure, be independent, but I am afraid it is not always the case," hinting at the recent purchase of the most read national broadsheet by Andrej Babiš[12], a businessman and a leader of what was then a newly established political party ANO. Jaroslav continues: "I doubt they will be allowed to slate him too much", implying that the particular owner shapes the information provided, that the journalists might not be able to express themselves honestly, potentially leading to the omission of information relating to the owners.

Unlike in the previous examples, where the bias is linked to either political affiliation, sympathy or ownership – being partial to a particular group of people or individuals, Karla's understanding of the author within the dimension of bias is derived from her perception of the author's manipulation in order to meet particular economic interests.

> KARLA: Something somewhere happens and television goes: 'We were there first, we shot it, look.' And they present it as a disaster. Later, you might find out, that it wasn't that bad. (…) And that's what I think the journalists today aim for, to sell, to attract viewers.

She understands the author's bias as an economic logic of the media's existence itself, which results in her perception of the mediation as such being biased and manipulative through its journalistic practices, i.e. selection and framing. Therefore, her understanding of an author within the dimension of bias relates to a much more abstract notion of the author as a voice rather than as a particular person, media organisation or outlet.

In the studied data set, bias was one of the most commonly referenced qualities of texts and their authors, potentially more prominent and reflected on due to the fieldwork being conducted in the period before and after parliamentary and presidential elections. Some interviewees spontaneously contemplated welcoming or tolerating the bias more if it promoted their own opinions, yet dismissed it in the opposite case. This example of

[12] At the time of the interview, Andrej Babiš was a new aspiring politician and a leader of a newly established political party, ANO. Soon after, his party exceeded expectations in the election, and he became Minister of Finance. For more see footnote 10, Chapter 8.

juxtaposing the reader's own voice with the voice of the understood author is the subject of Chapter 11.

ACCESS: a question of dependence

This dimension concerns access to information and knowledge, and readers' perception of the author as a provider of access to (particular) information, as well as the readers' understanding of their own access to such information. The perceived potentiality of the author's access is understood as a form of power – privilege or status – or at least the potential for it, which leads the reader to question and further consider the author in terms of dependence on them, whether that is challenged, accepted or welcomed by the reader. Importantly, the dependence in relation to the author, as a provider of access, can be questioned from two (or both) perspectives – 1) the reader's dependence on the author to provide access, but just as importantly 2) the perceived dependence of the author's voice – whom the author is dependent on for their access, who is being voiced, empowered and why.

Identifying a particular understood author as a provider of access – a more powerful, and insightful person than herself, leads Magda to an awareness that the author is holding power over the information.

> MAGDA: The information you get from media, that's all you have. People who are part of the political establishment or the journalists as well, they have much more information and they kind of pre-digest it for you.

Yet, it is the reader herself who attributes the assumed access to the understood author, and hence empowers the author by granting them a special status, the status of insight. In this instance, Magda considers the notion of her dependence as given, inevitable or due to lacking an alternative, without questioning it. Other readers, who also understand the author as being their only source of access to particular knowledge, may, however, contest the claim of the understood author to privileged access, and dare to challenge the advancements of the understood author (attributed to the author by themselves). So while some readers accept or even welcome the dependence on the understood author as a door opener revealing new information; others stress the need to be an empowered reader, at least theoretically, to think about what one reads and evaluate the presented information against one's common sense, to fill in the gaps caused by the unequal access.

> BOHUSLAV: If you are not right next to the source [of information], and you do not have that insight, you have to make your own opinion. Read it, think about it and make your own opinion. Sometimes good, sometimes bad.

The understanding of an author within this dimension is indeed a result of a reader's understanding and interpretation of the text. As discussed earlier in the literature review, access is often used by media and media professionals themselves to discursively establish their expertise and argue for their privileged position in the process of mediation (van Dijk, 1995).

Some readers understand an author's declaration of (exclusive) access as a form of arrogance: "At times I feel like they are saying: 'And we know something more, but unfortunately, we cannot tell you'" (Tomáš). Moreover, the reader's perception of the author as having greater access than themselves might concur with her perception of other authors' qualities.

> TOMÁŠ: You have plenty of information, but what is important is still missing. (…) Watching the TV news there is very similar information to what was earlier on the radio, in most newspapers or on news websites.

Hence, while for Tomáš the dimension of access is expressed through the notion of lack of original ideas because all authors have access to the same sources; for someone like Martin, the dimension of access is acknowledged in relation to a lack of alternative voices but also in his perception of the author's willingness and ability to voice them. "The opinions that are around me, they are not in the newspaper at all," comments Martin on the lack of left-wing perspectives that he perceives in the main national newspapers. Therefore, the reader's acknowledgement of the author's access (a certain form of power), can be at the same time interpreted as habitual and predictable, and therefore the author is understood as disempowered due to the perceived lack of originality and/or ability to access other sources. So the readers' understanding of an author within one dimension is commonly related to their understanding of the author within other dimensions.

In contrast to those examples referring predominantly to institutional and mainstream authors (professional journalists and media producers), access is also a greatly acknowledged dimension when understanding authors of texts that are produced by other readers – people who produced media content as a part of their own engagement with media. When Jaroslav talks about reading the online comments of football fans, he also considers the authors within the dimension of access: "From the online discussions I learn about things that are often official two, five days later" (Jaroslav). The dependence that comes with access here is clearly positive and appreciated. And the author's understanding within the dimension is not articulated in terms of providing access, but rather as sharing information within a community of fans.

However, Daniela, who has recently investigated options for house renovations, reading multiple comments and recommendations from various online sources, expresses a different understanding of the author's access. In her case the question of dependence translates to suspicion towards the understood author: why is that opinion being expressed, and where does the insight originate from?

> DANIELA: When I read those opinions, I think: this is strange. I am suspicious that the person is lobbying for a particular company. But sometimes you are looking [in the text] for things that are just not there.

Hence, understanding an author within the dimension of access is derived from the perceived access of the author, which is subsequently interpreted as their ability/willingness to share it or grant it to the reader. Yet, only juxtaposition with other dimensions determines the actual understanding of the author as an access point or not.

ORIGINALITY: a question of distinctiveness

The dimension of originality does not refer to literary or artistic value, but rather it refers to readers' perception of authors in terms of diversity. The author is understood as original when the texts she produces are perceived as providing new or different viewpoints. The author is therefore understood as distinct from the other voices within the media environment. Yet, originality can be also articulated in negative terms and perceived as lacking through notions of repetition and replication – perceiving the author's voice as being the same as others, not saying anything new or even as Milan puts it: "the journalists are copying everything, there is so little creativity that it is pointless to read it."

Originality is primarily articulated as a practice of seeking information. It is the process of acquiring information itself, as well as the willingness and ability to acquire it, which differentiates it from the dimension of access that refers to authors' potentiality and facility to provide information and knowledge per se. Importantly, these two dimensions relate to different dynamics: while access is primarily seen as a promise (whether assumed or fulfilled), perceiving authors' social status, and considering the sum of knowledge of the reader in comparison to the author, and hence raising the question of reader's dependence; originality relates to authors' actual performance and realisation of the access, and a comparison is drawn between the understood author and potential other authors – the reader's prior experiences of authors, and therefore relates to the question of the author's distinctiveness.

Although it is a *performed dimension*, and the understanding of an author is derived from the textual features, the dimension is primarily referred to as practices of production in readers' narratives – the practice of seeking and sourcing (new) information. Despite the multiple perceptions of what is different and distinctive across the readers, there is a shared understanding that the author should provide or even uncover new, unique, or different information in comparison to their fellow authors. Originality is perceived in terms of adding something – a new piece of information, own perspective, yet this must be well argued for, as essentially, originality is primarily understood as finding/going to the source, respecting and acknowledging the origin of any information, statement or argument.

Milan runs his own non-profit online magazine, where he publishes news from the IT industry, relying almost exclusively on official press releases. He goes to press conferences and always takes a picture of the relevant people. This is a practice he highly values as adding value to something (the press release) that otherwise everybody has. His understanding of the author in terms of the dimension of originality is informed by his own productive practices. He brought these into the encounter with other texts as part of his horizon, which results in his articulation of the author's originality as a difference from other authors. It is the practice of copying, and passing on the same or similar information to others, that degrades, in his view, the quality of the understood author and her outputs. He, himself, seeks unique and novel content.

> MILAN: They [articles by other media] lack the images. They are likely shortened, but content wise it is still the same press release we have received. I don't have a high opinion of journalists. They make money by copying from each other and they do mostly nothing with the articles.

From his perspective, he adds value by adding pictures, whereas other journalists (from well-established media brands) only shorten the official press releases in their writing, and therefore they do not add any value.

The articulation of originality as a form of practice is well illustrated in the quote from Marta. Being an editor of psychology books, one of her guilty pleasures is reading articles from magazines, especially aimed at women, that are labelled as psychological advice. Although these text-reader encounters are for her primarily a form of entertainment, a distraction from everyday life, she still considers the author in relation to originality.

> MARTA: I think I can tell if they just wrote it off the cuff. I can tell based on whom they quote, I can tell how hard they work on it, if they actually contacted someone or just sat down and wrote it in one go during a Saturday evening. But overall, I read it for entertainment.

Her understanding of the author is, here, driven by the perception of the process of how the author came to the information. She refers primarily to an author's willingness and

ability to obtain it from a primary source, a practice of gaining original information, contacting a source, and having a chance to ask her own questions, rather than working with secondary sources, presumably without the chance to clarify and acquire additional information. This also indicates that in relation to non-fiction factual content, the author is understood within the dimension of originality based on how close to the origin of the information they manage to get, as opposed to simply offering their own – though original – thoughts and ideas.

Seemingly, it is a less prominent dimension in regards to content produced by other fellow readers – content considered to be a type of audiences' engagement, i.e. comments, recommendations, etc., however, as content produced by other users is of a very diverse character, the understanding of an author making a difference or being distinctive is more likely perceived in relation to having and sharing one's own experience (dimension of expertise) or voicing different opinions (dimension of alternative).

9.2 Constituted dimensions

STRUCTURE: a question of control

The dimension of structure encompasses the understanding of an author as being part of or belonging to a particular social and/or media system, raising the question of control over the voice. The dimension of structure reflects readers' contextual understanding of the author as a singular voice or a structured corpus of multiple voices. The notion of structure refers primarily to two aspects: composition of, and belonging to – and both are considered when understanding the author within the dimension. The former concerns structure as a composition and relations between the multiple voices involved, and the possible multiple involvements of people with different roles in the formation of the text; the latter notion refers to the perception of the author's institutional belonging and thus the understanding of the author's institutional character.

The reader thus understands the author as a result of the employment of various rules and practices to shape and control the potential multiplicity of the voices involved in the text creation, to deliver and present them as a singular voice. It encompasses an understanding of an author within the broader institutional structures of the media sphere, their dependency on it as well as their loyalty to it.

Whatever the interviewee's understanding of structure is, mostly they tend to identify its centre and to personify the location of the voice.

> JOSEF: The company owns media in half of Europe (…) They are likely to have a meeting and decide the directions for Eastern Europe. And then the editor-in-chief runs it, it is up to him (…) to lead his herd, he is responsible for the edition.

Despite relating to a singular person, the interviewees are still greatly aware of the broader complexities of production and structural relationships that comprise an understood author. The need to identify the location, a holder, of the voice originates in the reader's need to locate the source of control over what is being said, although not necessarily in the form of responsibility. Hence, the question of control is the defining question of this dimension.

Soňa, discussing a particular television programme, reflects upon the multiple involvements and collective authorship. She focuses primarily on the person of the presenter, to whom she grants the role of the person who is tying it all together.

> SOŇA: I think there are more of them who are involved (…), but I think she [the presenter] is part of it all, I don't think she just comes to read it out loud.

For her, it is the figure of the presenter, that raises certain emotional responses: "she is nice", and who contributes to the perception of the programme as a whole. Others perceive the structural complexity of the understood author with regard to the (institutional) distribution of work, not only in relation to the actual production activities, e.g. writing but also apropos of management of the medium/platform. For example, Rudolf comments on one national broadsheet.

> RUDOLF: Primarily, you can see that the paper is well run managerially. Someone has to tell them [the journalists] you are gonna write this and in this way, there will be this type of article and on this topic. Not that they would tell them exactly what to write, but they set it up and also they can find the good people [stuff].

The question of control or power over the voice is particularly considered in the understanding of the author's situatedness within the broader social structure, and thus understanding of the author as a part of the system of political powers and influences. This is expressed by Alois, who complains about various media being partial to particular political parties. Commenting on a particular situation of one national commercial television channel, whose CEO was (at the time of the interview) a Romanian.

> ALOIS: Nowadays, as the main shareholder is Romanian, the news for our country is a little bit more objective (…) I think, that he is not that tied up with the political powers (…) In the past they hardly ever talked about what's happening in the government."

The foreign nationality of the CEO is understood by Alois as a distance from the system, and therefore the greater ability of the author, understood here in its great complexity as the media brand, to be critical of the political elites in the country. In comparison, Rudolf, a blogger himself, expresses a perceived lack of a place within the system, which for him is the perceived community of fellow bloggers.

> RUDOLF: It is not a place to look for friends. There are no people to play the same note with. Everybody is an individualist there, writing their own thing.

Similarly Jan, who runs his blog commenting on current political issues, further reflects on being autonomous and detached from an institutional structure, as he draws the link between structure, or its lack here, and control – as a manifestation of an author's freedom of expression.

> JAN: Now, I have a free space available to post, there is no censorship or self-censorship. I can write what I want and when I want.

With the understanding of reduced or absent structural control, the author is increasingly understood as standing for herself, voicing themselves. The perception of the author's responsibility there is more likely to be shifted towards an author as an understood audience. This was particularly prominent among the interviewees in relation to Wikipedia. The interviewees commonly referred to the unreliability of that source, and the lack of control over the correctness of the information available there. Yet, this awareness was mostly appropriated by the interviewees as a practice of consumption of the source and the understood lack of structure of this particular author was commonly related to the different practices and routines of control, similar to what Lévy (1997) calls collective intelligence, that will correct or amend potential mistakes: "There is no guarantee that it is 100% correct, but if I write something there, someone else will correct it" (Josef).

We can, therefore argue, that the understanding of the author as an imposition of structure, and hence control over the content, provides readers with a sense of reliability. Content produced with the absence of structural control is seen as freer – free of the imposed control, but also of the corrective mechanisms that are subsequently sought for in alternative mechanisms (e.g. collective knowledge) to make the understood author more relatable and/or reliable.

EXPERTISE: a question of experience and authority

Within the dimension of expertise, an author is understood in terms of being an expert or an ordinary, regular person, as Josef puts it, "[they are] discussions of ordinary people, like myself," when talking about online comments under news articles. It is a dimension of the status of the understood author, not dissimilar to the dimension of access. They both relate to the notion of the understood author having access to and subsequently providing particular knowledge that the reader is likely not to have. The difference between them is determined by their characters of being performed (primarily textual) or constituted (primarily contextual) dimensions – access and expertise respectively. Therefore, in the case of expertise, a reader calls upon the established dimension of access, yet actualises this in relation to the perceived reputation of the author, as expressed by Renata when she talks about seeking new authors because they were recommended to her. Therefore the unknown is contextually anchored in the paratext of the recommendations.

> RENATA: I read blogs of people I value. (…) There are people I find, because I want to find them or because somebody recommended them to me.

The dimension of expertise is grounded in the reader's perception of the author's social status, identifying the author as an expert or not, yet considering this in terms of an author's experience, rather than a reader's dependence. Instead of questioning the power and dependency, the reader here understands the author through the perceived authority of their voice. The understanding of the author within this constituted dimension is strongly embedded in the other texts. This is a very paratextual dimension that further shows the intertextuality of interpretation and the readers' understandings of authors as anchored in their horizons.

The dimension of expertise inevitably refers to the notion of an expert. It is precisely the experience and knowledge in a particular field, or in relation to a particular problem, that is being considered by a reader here. This can mean either being an expert within a particular field – "In relation to the bumblebees, for example, if I see [a website of] some association, well then I go there. It is clear, they are the experts, aren't they" (Kamila); or being an expert as an author per se – having experience of being an author, providing information and demonstrating knowledge of how to be an author. The latter notion indicates the reader's assessment of the understood author in terms of their professional skills, further addressed in Chapter 10. As Josef puts it: "The journalist does not need to be an expert to know what they are writing about. Yet, she should not learn about the topic for the first time at the editorial meeting when she learns she is due to write about it."

Petra, who runs a website about theatre[13], offers a particular example. When discussing how she selected the authors who work for her and run the website, she primarily expresses her understanding of them as authors, although her underlying motives here are her business objectives and aims. In her selection, she calls upon both aforementioned

[13] The website provides information about plays, actors, and directors, reviews and other theatre related information. The idea behind it is not dissimilar to the international film database imdb.com.

articulations of the author as an expert – expert in the field and expert in the profession of journalism.

> PETRA: For the website I secured collaboration with Marta Bystrovová, who is an elite culture and art journalist, and Kristýna Čepková, who is a recent graduate from DAMU [Theatre Faculty of Academy of Performing Arts]. She is a very clever girl, who knows pretty much everything about theatre.

The dimension of expertise primarily relates to the articulation of the expert in opposition to the ordinary person: "I look at the comments section, the discussion of the normal people, who are of course not journalists" (Radka). But the perceived ordinariness of understood authors is in some instances greatly relatable for other readers: "I rely on discussions quite a lot. Well, people have similar problems there and so they help and advise" (Zdena). Thus, there is also a parallel understanding of expertise as a dimension of experience in general. This positioning of the understood author within the dimension of expertise relates to authors otherwise perceived as non-expert, and more importantly of non-elite status. This encompasses content produced by other media readers, content that is primarily defined as a form of users' productive engagement with media (Pavlíčková and Kleut, 2016) – recommendations, feedback, opinions, and comments. The positioning here is derived from the author's constituted experience. As Milan puts it, sometimes when making decisions, "other users' experience can be significant."

ALTERNATIVE: question of recognition

Unlike the other dimensions discussed in this chapter, the dimension of alternative reflects a more silent and lacking relation. Although earlier stated that the dimensions are not defined by dichotomies, here the counterpart term – mainstream – could be used to reflect the characteristics of the understood author in question. It is not to say that this dimension is absent, more the other way around; this dimension is so strongly present and taken for granted, and moreover the positioning within this dimension was strongly biased by the almost complete lack of interviewees' acknowledgement of possible alternatives to mainstream sources that I decided to choose this missing position as a marker of the dimension. The notion of mainstream/alternative does not imply the same as the distinction of professional/amateur but rather relates to the question of recognition and establishment, the understanding of the author as voicing underrepresented or marginalised voices (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007).

Firstly, the interviewees referred primarily and mostly to mainstream media, in the sense of media types as well as media outlets, brands and platforms. With exceptions, they did not hesitate to comment and reflect upon content produced by less institutionalised, less established authors (content produced by other readers and media users, or less prominent, known or foreign media brands) spontaneously or when prompted in their interview. Yet, these are understood as additions and extensions of mainstream media production, rarely or never as an alternative. What is fully lacking is recognition of the possibility of an alternative. The independent, in the sense of non-institutionalised, voices are rarely, if never, sought to provide a different, contesting perspective. Moreover, even among those supposedly alternative, as in non-institutionalised voices, there is a great reliance on the well-established and recognised ones – the renowned alternative voices.

The consumption and reception of alternative authors are therefore not sought to gain new perspectives or understanding, to hear new, different voices. The prevailing practice of consumption is expressed by Marta, who was really dissatisfied with how the main Czech

media inform their readers about abroad, and hence prompted a question about whether she is looking for some other alternative sources.

> MARTA: I don't really engage in that. What [content] comes to me, I work with. But I am not systematic. Probably I would also be sceptical. I would think, where does the person get the information from? Is he just passing on what he learns here [in this country, from the local sources] or does he have contacts abroad? Would I have a chance to find out where he takes the information from and how he works with them?

And therefore, those voices primarily remain unrecognised, at least within the studied data set. In relation to the understanding of an author within the matrix of dimensions of productive practices, I would argue that the articulation of an alternative is incorporated into the perception of the mainstream, but those alternative sources are not recognised as an alternative, or they are not even encountered due to particular reading strategies and habits that follow routinized (mainstream) paths. Yet, I consider this dimension to be worth mentioning due to its absence in the participants' articulations, although simultaneously, this alternative was somehow hungered for by various interviewees and expressed by their dissatisfaction with the current mainstream media on offer.

10 Realisation of the understood author and the role of familiarity

This chapter focuses on the final component of a reader's understanding of the author, which is prompted by the question of why a reader understands the encountered author in a particular way. It builds on the previously established essential elements and dimensions of productive practices. The understanding of an author implies that the author was realised, and therefore related to, in and through the interpretative act. The understanding is not possible without the reader listening, engaging with the voice, and hence relating to it. The analysis showed that in their understandings the readers build on what is already familiar to them, in order to understand and appropriate the unfamiliar. Through the process of iteration, the analysis referred back to the theory and found support for the readers' recognition of the significance of particular dimensions in Gadamer's (2004) notion of familiarity.

The potential element of realisation encompasses the understanding of the author as she becomes tangible to the reader, as the previously devised dimensions of productive practices are assessed and related to. The interplay of different dimensions informed by a reader's horizon is realised in an understanding that entails readers' relating to an author – whether they like her, trust her, will grant her more attention, and will follow her in the future, or not.

Following the previous two empirical chapters, it is clear that in the actual interpretative act, a reader does not systematically evaluate an author and her characteristics along each and every particular dimension; rather an author is understood as a cluster of those, with different dimensions taking on a more significant role than others in each and every reader-author encounter. Moreover, in some instances, a particular dimension can dominate the understanding and can stand for the author as a whole.

Familiarity is therefore the central theme of this chapter, it is the environment, the setting within which understanding is possible; it is an expression of closeness, of recognition (or its absence). Nonetheless, it serves a reader to situate the object of understanding, in this instance an author, within an intelligible framework of what is known – the familiar, to interpret it and appropriate it. That is to say, familiarity promotes the relevance of particular characteristics of an author for the reader, and thus determines the realisation of the understood author. It does not necessarily change the conceptual understanding of an author or her characteristics, but rather it determines their value and meaning to the reader in particular – the actualisation of understanding.

This chapter firstly addresses readers' familiarity with the previously discussed dimensions of productive practices and their significance for readers' relating to authors in more general terms of understood *skills* (being a writer) and *professionalism* (being a journalist). Secondly, it elaborates on familiarity as a process of recognition that is significant for readers' relating to an author as an entity that is identifiable and identified. Here, readers' naming of an author is considered a form of understanding/application, a vital act that enables readers to identify and recurrently recognise an understood author to be able to further relate to her.

10.1 Dimension of assessment: the familiarity with productive practices

Seeking to encompass audiences' broad understanding of everything that comprises an author, what are the essential and potential components of such a definition, and how these are realised and understood in the interpretative act, the notion of an author is defined as a cluster of productive practices driven by the aim to communicate (voice, intention and audience). As already said, some of these practices are foreseen, anticipated and sought for, while some are encountered unexpectedly; however, when enquiring into the audiences' understanding of the author, a further level of analysis needs to be considered, which is the significance and meaning of these dimensions and their realisation within the understanding of an author. How are these dimensions implied, considered, and are they relevant or missed in the understanding of an author? It is due to fore-understanding and familiarity with those practices that lead to a mutual co-determination of them in the interpretative act. The past encounters with media, media content and media and content producers – particularly of factual, non-fictional content, are called upon by readers to understand the author at hand.

Readers' familiarity with productive practices and their assessment realises readers' understanding of an author within two overarching categories that I refer to as – *skills* and *professionalism***.** These embody and cluster the multiple dimensions of productive practices, the individual decontextualized and value-free qualities as discussed earlier in Chapter 9, into a particular realisation of the definition of the understood author implicit in every reader's encounters with texts as elaborated already in Chapter 8. These two categories are then directly related to two particular understandings of the author – being a *writer* and being a *journalist*. Assessment of skills concerns readers' understanding of productive practices that relate to an author's ability to create and produce text (media content) in general, hence the understanding is of the author as a writer, a creative entity. On the other hand, the assessment of professionalism encompasses those dimensions relating to readers' more specific understanding of the role of journalists in the society, and assessment of their ability to perform such a role, with a greater focus on the ability to produce and deliver factual content in particular.

These two realisations of an understood author – a writer and a journalist – are in no way reductions of the broad definition of the understood author. Rather they are its actualisations in the interpretative act, and therefore they are not mutually exclusive. They both refer to the role of an author as a producer or creator of content, yet the former focuses on abilities that are understood to be given or gifted by many readers, referring to more general terms of content production – the abilities to express, write, formulate; and the abilities of the latter one related by readers to more particular skills of production, seen as a craft and/or a profession, in the sense of being taught and/or practised.

For Milan, a journalist is someone who "understands the subject, can ask relevant questions, and can write about it in a way that someone would want to read it or listen to it." This is a rather vague description, yet one that summarises well, that for the readers the notion of good/bad is often rather elusive, referring to skills that are very subjective, as shown by Milan's earlier remark that "someone will like to read it" or when Karel simply says "well written". Yet, in discussing particular aspects of text or media production, those judgements became more tied to particular performances, as seen when Rudolf determines the quality of journalists from their ability to use language correctly, "Primarily, they speak bad Czech, they cannot formulate, they cannot write, they are bad journalists, or inexperienced, I would say. These days anyone can get a job as a journalist."

They are rooted in the general definition of the understood author as a voice, audience and intention, yet actualised through the familiarity and relevance of particular aspects of an author suggested or performed by the text. These understandings are in no way exclusive to each other, on the contrary, they are particular realisations of an author that can indeed be multiple and complementary to fully form an understanding of an author as such.

The two categories that I have called skills and professionalism are, hence, formative of the readers' relation to the understood author and expressions of readers' understanding of what it means to be a particular author. They are judgement laden, unlike the dimensions of productive practice, within which the understanding is value free. In their statements, the interviewees are always judgemental – as even an expression of no interest is an attribution of value. By conveying judgements through the interpretative act, the participants realise their value systems – assessments devised by their fore-understanding of how media content is and should be produced, and what qualities are required to be a writer and/or a journalist. This commonly leads readers to an overall assessment of an author as a good/bad writer/journalist, further related to the perception of the text as being written well, badly, and/or (in)correctly. Therefore, this assessment serves the reader as a tool to appreciate or criticise the understood author and further relate to her, and in particular, to place trust. To continue reading can be therefore considered as trusting in the particular text at that moment, or at least an openness to trusting it, as well as being part of forming a long-term trust relationship where that relationship, once established, is considered familiar; a reader repeatedly places their trust in the understood author as a form of prejudice rather than as a result of understanding.

For the readers to assess quality, the analysis shows that they often have a strong, concept of what they understand as good and bad, a prior understanding of quality and professionalism brought into the understanding of an author and actualised through the interpretative process. Therefore, through their diverse experiences of media and their diverse interpretative practices, people become familiar with, and form their prejudices concerning the ways in which media work, what media do, their role in society as well as the differences between different media in relation to those points. Simultaneously, these lived experiences with media are supplemented by mediated experiences in the form of readers' own interpretations of the media's reporting on their own practices and functions within society.

Like any other media content, the media's self-reflexivity is not necessarily taken at face value. The media's metadiscourse and self-reflexivity are also part of the readers' horizon (as a tradition into which they belong) and contribute greatly to (re)formulations of public discourses and societal values relating to media, being highly relevant for its formative power in mediating what is being understood as given, or taken for granted knowledge about media. This is demonstrated in the interview with Karla, who comments on a televised discussion about the role of the media in the United States, using it further to draw parallels and conclusions about the journalists' conduct in the Czech Republic, which further enables her to normalise what she perceived as journalistic practice.

> KARLA: Just today, as the second round [of presidential elections] is coming, they [the TV presenter] talked with the one who used to be a US correspondent. They talked about whether the media have the power to influence people, and how is it in America. How the media express their opinion about the candidates. He said it is common there… that it is a decision of the media owner. (…) it is the same here, you know, the investigative journalists in television they've been through so many different media [outlets]. At one time they resonate with the leadership, and later they do not and so they move on.

The two realisations – a writer and a journalist – are rooted in the general definition of the understood author as a voice, audience and intention, yet actualised through the familiarity and relevance of particular aspects of an author suggested or performed by the text. These understandings are in no way exclusive to each other, on the contrary, they are particular realisations of an author that, can indeed be multiple and complementary to fully form an understanding of an author as such.

SKILLS: being a writer

The category of skills refers to interviewees' identification and perception of skills and practices needed by the author to produce and create the text and how these are performed and exhibited through the text: it is a perceived ability of the author to be a skilful writer or media producer. It is devised by each reader's fore-understanding and anticipation of what an author of such a text and/or genre should be, and should do. In other words, the understanding is a result of the discrepancy between the ideal (anticipated) and understood (interpreted) author. The textual qualities associated with the creation of media text as a form of expression are being considered and the text is not only judged as good or bad, but also as worthy of the reader's attention. The understood performance of skills in relation to the particular author often prompts further interest in them and also contributes to further recognition and active searching for more information.

The most prominent practices reflected on in the understanding of an author as a writer are: the (correct) use of language – referring to its grammatical as well as syntactical use; the quality of the content, where the author-writer is understood in terms of her writing skills – referring to a perception of an author as someone who has something interesting to say and/or who says it in an interesting way; and the conceptualisation of the media text – this does not mean that the text has to be written or printed, but which refers to the skills of creating a text.

The relevance of bad (good) use of grammar in understanding an author was significant for multiple interviewees, who commonly used it to further grant, or not, trust in that author. For example, if the text, "the way it is written – if the language is ok, good syntax, it is not sloppy," then Marta is more likely to perceive an author as trustworthy. She interprets the authors' correct use of the language as a performance of their care for the text as such, a perceived diligence that extends to the subject matter as well. She is thus more likely to see such a text as both written with care and well researched, and hence more trustworthy.

For Petra, a good author (in this instance she talks about bloggers) "should have something to say, have an opinion. Then there are some rules of written text, and thirdly, one has to speak Czech. So you can read it, your eyes don't hurt, they [the blogger] have a natural skill for syntax." Her remark about being able to speak Czech does not imply a distinction between native Czechs and foreigners, but rather between good and bad users of the language. Similarly, Josef argues that journalists should "set up the standards of the language." Jaroslav too, expresses similar expectations when he says: "I am annoyed when television journalists cannot speak well. They have problems with subject-verb agreement [a grammatical rule]. And that applies not only to those on commercial television but to *Česká televize* [*Czech Television*][14] too. They are uneducated reporters at first sight". He makes conclusions about other qualities of an understood author here based on his knowledge of grammar, which he perceives as an essential skill for an author as a creator and writer in general. For him, televisual journalism is expected to set standards in the

[14] *Česká televize* [*Czech Television*] is the national public service broadcaster.

same way as written texts are. He identifies journalists of well-established media organisations with the role of setting up standards for the use of contemporary language.

However, the use of language is seen as a key quality of being an author independent of whether authors are otherwise perceived as professionals or amateurs. It is a skill of expressing yourself correctly (use of grammar, syntax) but also in an engaging way. "Well written" refers to the perceived stylistic and poetic skills of a writer or a media content creator. Zdena comments on her selection of blogs that are worth being read and followed: "Fundamental to them is writing. How they write. That's what makes an impression on me – grammar, mistakes. Based on [authors'] expression of themselves, I think you can tell quite a lot."

In relation to quality and the understanding of being an author, interviewees mostly do not distinguish between factual and fictional texts. In various instances, participants used literature as a reference system for quality and as a benchmark for the use of language, and of writing and journalistic style. Authors were understood in comparison to various examples of Czech literary authors, to make a more general point about the current state of media. Rudolf is not the only one who draws a parallel, or rather a distinction between current journalists and Karel Čapek[15].

> RUDOLF: He was a master of the word like no other. (...) the beauty of the language, no one showed it like him. (...) They [authors of that period] were greatly educated, keen to learn, well read.

Although skilled writers are greatly perceived as gifted, in the cited quote we can also see that excelling in something is perceived as a result of the invested effort and dedication. Being a good writer is here therefore commonly linked to a much greater canon of literature, and what is understood by participants as a set of qualities and skills approved by the passage of time, as opposed to only comparing between different contemporary authors. Thus, the quality is assessed more within the broad horizon of one's cultural and media tradition rather than in relation to the particular text only.

Milan's perception of the author as a writer shows a different articulation of the stylistic skills, reflecting on the author's ability to express ideas and formulate text: "[someone], who knows how to ask and then write it in a way that someone will like to read it or listen to it" (Milan). Similarly, Marta comments on the author's good ability and skill to formulate and deliver the text (radio commentary), providing insightful content. She derives the quality of an author from his performed political outlook, when reminiscing about a foreign affairs radio commentator.

> MARTA: When it is Petránek's analysis, it is always good. He is brilliant, he has a great overview that goes beyond the small Czech pond. Even though he is 80 now, he still reads the foreign press agencies. If he says something, it is definitely worth it.

To further reiterate that the assessment of skills and being a writer should not be understood in relation to the written text only, but rather as skills of delivering and creating content, an excerpt from an interview with Petra is illustrative of how this understanding can express itself in relation to, for example, audiovisual content, and yet still be considered as a notion of stylistic skills. She relates authors' performance and quality to a more generally understood life experience of the author, but in her case, the style (and way of delivery of media content) is closely linked to the appearance of the understood author.

[15] Karel Čapek (1890-1938), Czechoslovak novelist, playwright, essayist, and journalist. He is seen as one of the greatest Czech writers of the 20th century if not of all time. He was also internationally known for his creation of the word robot that he used in his play R.U.R.

> PETRA: On *TV NOVA* the majority of people there are not of quality. They have some very young news presenters, which is nonsense. There should be a distinction between what is a catwalk show and what is a news programme on a major television channel. If I am correct, the *BBC* has a rule that presenters of their main news programme cannot be younger than 40 years, whereas on *NOVA* they cannot be older than 25 years, so it seems. So there are handsome people, but you can argue about their professional competencies."

Referring to the main national commercial television channel, she clearly distinguishes between the multiple voices – the media brand as well as individual presenters. She primarily focuses on the age of individual presenters, equating the young age of the presenters directly to a lack of their professional competence and experience, and therefore restricting herself from perceiving the presenters as being of quality. Although referring to the presenters and their ages, she assesses the professionalism of the media brand as a whole. The criteria for the selection of presenters are by her understood as an expression of productive practice, one that devalues the understood author in her eyes.

The assessment of the skills as performed by the understood author is not relevant only to the general anticipation of being a writer but can be activated also in a very personalised way, where the reader relates to the author and appreciates their skills through that author's resonance with them. This is well illustrated in the excerpt from an interview with Milena, as she feared that a journalist whom she highly appreciated – Karel Steigerwald[16] – would leave a national broadsheet when its ownership changed. As she did not see his name in the newspaper for a while, she wrote him an email. In his response, she was assured, as she retells it, that: "he is and will stay as he is. I think that he will not let them [change him]." The understanding of performance, here, extends to sharing the same or similar opinions. It is a circular self-determining dynamic. Through past experiences, Milena understands Steigerwald as a good author. Yet, her prior expectation of his performance leads her to be more prone to interpret his texts, as she says, "in accord with her opinions" in future encounters.

The analysis shows that assessing the understood author in general terms as a writer builds on a very broad notion of what it means to write (produce) a text. This can, indeed, be a generational specificity, but for the interviewees here, the relevance of literary canon as a form of art/skill for expressing oneself serves as a norm setting up the standard for their assessment of variously encountered authors.

PROFESSIONALISM: being a journalist

The term professionalism is greatly contested within the media and journalistic industry as well as within the various other public/academic discourses (see for extensive discussion section 5.2). Identification of the understood author as professional (or not) was very prominent within the interviews, suggesting that such an understanding of the author aids the readers greatly when relating to the author, as among other things, it too assesses a certain quality of the understood author – that of being a journalist. Therefore, the category of professionalism enquires here into what the interviewees understand as a professional author, as opposed to how a professional author (a priori defined by the media industry) is being perceived. In which way and form is the notion of the author as a journalist familiar to them, and how it is articulated within their horizons of fore-understanding? The assessment of professionalism was first and foremost considered in

[16] For more details on Karel Steigerwald see footnote 10 in Chapter 8

terms of employment and thus as an expression of various standards of practice. However, the understanding and assessment of the author as professional also draws on a range of dimensions of productive practices, which I will discuss in detail below.

Interviewees often understood an author in terms of employment and having/doing a job which the participants relate to subsequent expectations of being professional as a defining logic. As Rudolf puts it: "A journalist is a professional, those who write blogs are amateurs, not professionals, it is a hobby," because being a journalist "is a job, an employment" (Rudolf). Such an understanding leads a reader to have further expectations of an author and her actions (production) being conducted by routinized practices and/or codified rules.

> DANIELA: a journalist should have a certain internal self-censoring mechanism, they should not release information that is not verified.

In the quote from Daniela, professionalism is perceived as diligence, and approaching the job and/or task with a full commitment on the part of the author to do the best that they can, as Soňa puts it: "taking the task seriously". This is an understanding that Tomáš similarly expresses as "being prepared (…) you can see he studied the topic in advance".

The understanding of an author in terms of her professionalism calls upon the readers' familiarity with the productive practices in their process of assessment, rather than the status of authors' employment. While in the case of authors associated with well-established media organisations (either as particular journalists or the organisations themselves), readers have a much clearer notion and fore-understanding of productive practices and are therefore more confident in assessing the author's professionalism as fulfilled or failing; in the case of other authors, a reader might need to rely on their familiarity with a more particular type of author, or with a particular individual or source, to assess professionalism. Lacking such familiarity, readers tend to understand them as unprofessional or amateur.

It is thus a judgement-laden assessment, and the different dimensions of productive practices are juxtaposed as the reader perceives the professional quality of the author. When Jaroslav talks about a particular journalist, who has his own prestigious political TV debate show, he assesses the journalist's professionalism together with his understanding of the journalist's bias.

> JAROSLAV: Although he is well praised and honoured (…) he is not a pro[fessional] (…) he is not able to deal with everybody in a neutral way, he behaves differently to those he likes from those he does not."

The understanding of the author here is negotiated between the actual performance of the journalist and the expectations in relation to the particular genre (TV debate). Readers, thus, anticipate and assess different practices of production as correct or good, in part according to the type of media and genre, and such a distinction is hence significant for the understanding of an author. This can also be seen in the last quote, where there are particular expectations derived from the text being perceived as a debate in which the presenter has the role of an impartial mediator.

The dimension of structure is often relevant to the interviewees' understanding when considering the author as a journalist. The perception of the interviewees that the author belongs to a particular structure of production is subsequently understood as the author's commitment to certain institutional rules, which indeed might subsequently lead to restrictions on the author's freedom of expression (see above section on the dimension of structure). Whereas, in relation to content perceived as produced autonomously, the productive practices are understood as more organic processes, and hence less systematised, routinized and controllable: "The journalist has a responsibility. Some

webpage or a Wikipedia entry, you know that someone created it because they like it, but they do not really have any [public] responsibility" (Magda).

Interestingly, Marta questions certain productive practices and whether the author's compliance with them does not paradoxically have a negative impact on the text. "There are many [authors], who I am sure, would like to do it differently [better], but they are being crushed by the grinder of deadlines and pressure from above, being limited by how long the text can be, and so forth," argues Marta when she acknowledges that various productive practices can also be imposed on a text and limit its quality. Her quote suggests that the implementation of certain productive practices serves objectives other than professionalism and quality. This shows the complexity of the dimensions and their interplay in the understanding.

When considering online media, readers make a great distinction in their perception of authors from the online division of established and mainstream media companies, in comparison to media platforms that host content identified as a genre of micro-blogging, social networks, discussion forums or an independent blog. They are linking the notion of structure (or lack thereof) to the perception of alternative media practices and production standards.

However, even an author primarily called an amateur might be assessed as professional as Kamila's example shows. She is a keen debater on a well-established online discussion forum, a media space highly familiar to her, and therefore she is able to draw on her extensive experiences and familiarity with authors from the forum, familiarity that is central to her media experiences. Therefore, talking about other debaters, she refers to them in relation to knowing-how, being experienced, and following the rules, practices, and protocols of use set within the community of the particular forum. Her referencing to those fellow debaters indicates her respect for them and their operation within the platform. Although she does not refer to their professionalism, the logic that drives her understanding of those authors corresponds to that referred to by others as professionalism, when discussing mainstream media organisations.

> KAMILA: At *Okoun* [the online forum], there is a high percentage of educated people, people, who are home there at the forum, they've been growing with the server for years.

Although professionalism is, among the interviewees, predominantly associated with employment, where someone is paid to deliver work to certain standards and expectations, but also involved in some structured, and possibly controlled system, the understanding of the author derives from the realisation of performance of particular practices a priori understood by the reader as professional. Hence, we can see the complexity and mutuality of all the discussed dimensions, as those practices are indeed those of accessing information, of biased reporting or performed conventions of being an author among others. That is to say that each and every dimension brings with it the context of the others, most likely assumed on the part of the reader too. Hence, diverse dimensions need to be understood and interpreted within the matrix of all the dimensions of productive practices at hand.

10.2 Dimension of recognition: a realisation through naming

The realisation of the author in the act of understanding is the recognition of the author, what I refer to as identification and the ability to name them. The understood author thus can be realised in language and thus named. As discussed earlier, it is through the understanding that the author is being realised and becoming visible. Recognition is a reader's ability to understand the author as an identifiable entity, not only as a productive presence. The realisation of the author refers to the reader's appropriation of the notion of authorial presence behind the text within the familiar (Gadamer, 2004) through recognition and assessment of diverse textual as well as non-textual features. This does not mean, in any way, that readers want to, or need to, know or uncover the identity declared by an author, the 'correct name' or the 'true identity' of an author. On the contrary, it is the expression of the understanding of an author – its application. Naming the author is the readers' ability to identify and appropriate a further relation to her and the ability to recognise her in the future. Readers might decide to use a name suggested by the text or devise their own. In the naming process, an understood author can take on the name of an individual, a brand name, a handle name or any different form of label or identification mark.

The analysis showed that participants often relate to authors through various socio-demographic characteristics like gender, ethnicity or the age of presenters or journalists, or legal and economic characteristics (non-profit or corporate media; foreign investment in media organisations), as well as audio-visual clues (fashion choices, a colour scheme of the studio or a particular layout of newspapers, design of websites, etc.). It should be noted that although the last example can also be read as the expression of productive practices, this section focuses on how they are brought into the understanding as markers of recognition.

However, many interviewees refer to those characteristics as if they formed part of an author's nature, as a given, rather than as constructed and arising as a result of productive practices. Therefore, these too are interpreted, and the interviewees tend to consider them as significant in their understanding of an author. For them, these characteristics primarily serve to identify and name an understood author, to make them familiar and relatable. For example, Karla's comment about one reporter's serious look shows her understanding of the author from the way they present themselves, which is then further brought into her interpretation of the text.

> KARLA: You can tell what sort of person they are, whether they are more ambitious, or rather modest. For example, some people, at first sight, you think for yourself, yes, he looks serious, like he is not making it up.

While Petra links presenters' age to production decisions, Soňa does not question it, rather she takes it as a given and uses it as a tool to further relate to the text: "For example, Spáčilová is my age. So I think, indeed, the woman has seen it all, so she knows if it is that way or not." Soňa interprets the correspondence between her and the author's age as a shared value, and consequently assumes a similar volume of experiences stocked over that time, which results in her understanding of her and the author having a shared horizon – a bond that enables her to place trust in the understood author. These cues, such as age, that are not perceived as productive practices thus lead a reader to secondary contextualisation of an understood author, drawing on the reader's familiarity with those features beyond the concept of an author, and bringing that understanding back into the

interpretation of the author. Identification is embodied and expressed in the act of name giving.

Drawing on characteristics and features of the author, other than the productive ones, further enables the readers to understand, within a familiar framework, authors encountered for the first time, or interpretative situations where they are unable to recognise or perceive an author's productive practices. That means, that although a reader might not have any previous experience with that author or a particular type of text, genre, media, etc., it is through actualising the author within characteristics perceived as other than productive practices, that the author becomes familiar and intelligible to the reader. In the following excerpt from an interview with Vladimír, he discusses what makes him choose a particular current affairs programme. After a while, he focuses on radio broadcasting and commentaries on *Radiožurnál* (one of the radio channels of *Český rozhlas* – the public service broadcaster) in particular and starts to distinguish, without being prompted, various commentators.

> VLADIMÍR: And one more I like, the bald one, what's his name? Well, that does not matter, I can't remember now. Pokorný, I just don't like him, because I've known him for a long time and I've never liked him. He is such a fossil, I think.

The quote illustrates well that the process of name giving does not necessarily relate to the official name of a person, i.e. Pokorný, but is primarily a way of identification and recognition – e.g. "the bald one". In this instance, naming is interestingly combined with a reference to the commentator's physical appearance, despite radio being audio only. This intertextual understanding of the author, not exclusive to Vladimír, shows that the ability to identify (to name) an understood author allows readers to follow her across time and various media types, platforms and genres, as well as to bring in other contexts unrelated to the medium.

The readers' recognition of, and relation to an author is realised through the act of name giving; it is a realisation of the understanding of an author through the means of language. The name giving does not refer to personification or a realisation of the understood author by uncovering the author's essence or true identity, instead, the process of name giving is an act of becoming an author within the reader's understanding and their appropriation within one's horizon. A descriptive statement of whether and how a text is signed – the attribution of authorship suggested by the text – does not necessarily correspond with readers' realised perception of the name or authorship of a text.

Nonetheless, a name (or lack thereof) is an authorial feature that is commonly proposed by the text itself (for example through in text references, self-identification or a signature) as well as formed and shaped through a range of accompanying paratexts (commentaries, responses, references, etc.). The analysis shows that the act of name giving is an interpretative tool informed by the name, or lack thereof, indicated and suggested by the text, as well as the reader's understanding of the author along the already discussed essential and potential elements within the interpretative act.

The textual performance of the name is most commonly through a signature attached to the text (or lack of it), whether in the form of a byline or any different form of attribution, to identify authorship rather than an author. In that sense, authorship, as a tool to determine responsibility over the text and its content and ownership of the intellectual property of the text (Hartley, 2013), is part of the paratext, inevitably co-forming a context of a text, belonging to its horizon. It does not equate to the concept of an (understood) author that is of interest here. That said, the interviewees too, see assigned authorship as a form of taking on responsibility over the text and a claim of ownership, as expressed for example by Marta.

> MARTA: It is important [who the author is], of course. It is also a lead that one can follow. There should be a particular person who stands by it [the text] then at least I know that this person serves this medium, this opinion, that side. That should be known, it [the text] should be signed.

Perception, or even recognition of authorship is different from naming the author as a realisation of the understanding. Although these two acts might overlap, especially in the case where the name is clearly stated and suggested by the text, they do not have to.

Schutz argues that "any name includes typification (…) By naming an experienced object, we are relating it by its typicality to pre-experienced things of similar typical structure, and we accept its open horizon referring to future experiences of the same type, which are therefore capable of being given the same name" (1970, p. 117). Thus, the name allows the reader to identify the same author, and to typify this experience for future encounters, but also, the encounter with a previously unknown author is evaluated in the light of Schutz's types and hence helps the reader to understand the author in relation to the various dimensions previously discussed, using the formerly established types as a reference point for further identification, relating to and assessment.

The subsequent section addresses two forms of authorship – declared and omitted – to further unpack the role of the name in the understanding of the author. In the first instance, where text openly claims its attribution to a particular author (whether an individual or a collective), I discuss the perception of the name as well as the act of naming. Whereas in the latter instances where the authorship is obscured or seemingly absent, I argue that every text is always contextualised and understood in relation to some productive practices.

Declared name

Undeniably, many media texts, especially the mainstream ones, have a clear attribution to an individual or collective of authors and creators, and in that way they are declaring and suggesting their authorship. Readers are exposed to variously pronounced attributions, yet it is not axiomatic that a reader uses the declared identification to name an understood author. A name is a tool to establish an author's persistence and continuity, however, as shown earlier in the quote by Vladimír when he refers to the radio presenter as "the bald one", it is not necessarily the proclaimed name by which the reader refers to the understood author to form this continuity in their horizon of understanding.

With regard to understanding of an author through identification and naming, the brand names of particular media outlets (i.e. radio stations) serve as identifications that allow readers to build continuity and familiarity with the author, and to inform readers' further expectations. There are no particular differences in relation to various dimensions of productive practices or in relation to media forms, platforms or brands. When Marta says: "We listen to *Radiožurnál* and *Six* [Český rozhlas 6][17]. (…) I listen to it, but often I do not know who reads the commentary, it is secondary to me," she openly admits that she is not paying any attention to the names of individual commentators, yet, she is clear about what radio stations she listens to. Similarly, Marie, when explaining her preference for a particular newspaper and her loyalty to it over the years, shows how one relates to an understood author by using the brand name of the medium.

[17] *Radiožurnál* is the main news station of Český rozhlas (Czech Radio), the public service broadcaster, *Český rozhlas 6* [*Six*] was another station whose main programming format is the spoken word with a focus on opinions and analysis. On 1st March 2013 the station was renamed *ČRo Plus*.

> MARIE: *Mladá fronta*, I am still calling it that way,[18] that was a communist paper, so we went with *Lidové noviny*.[19] In those days, you knew what you would find on what page (…), [but] when I buy *Mladá fronta* on Mondays, there are so many sheets [because of the papers' supplements], and I do not even know where to start and how to tackle it.

When Renata elaborates on her internet use, explaining how she navigates her online searches and how she understands different links that the search engine displays to her. The web addresses allow Renata to identify the author and to activate certain expectations and prejudices.

> RENATA: If I get directly to the website of the searched problem, then I go there. Or there are sources when I think this one can be reliable and this one is definitely not a reliable one. So based on the link [the web address] I can see what is and what is not a reliable source.

In this example, the web address is a name that not only establishes the identity of an author, a source of the content, but also refers to previous experiences. Its perception is then brought into the understanding of author here, as Renata's familiarity with certain formal features of the web addresses raises certain expectations and informs the act of reading.

When Petra talks about people who comment on her blog, and her reading of those comments, she reflects on their sometimes concealed identities. There, she clearly refers to the importance of being able to establish continuity, to recognise an author through a consistently used name. We can see that Petra's ability to repeatedly give the same name to particular textual expressions allows her to establish a relationship with the given understood author, a common history of encounters that she can build upon in the next encounters.

> PETRA: A name is not a carrier of the opinion. Whether someone is writing there under their real name or they are using a handle name, that actually does not matter, because at the end of the day, they do not change the handle name, so you still know who they are.

She clearly states that the name serves purely as an indicator, allowing her to promptly refer to prior experiences and hence familiarity with the author. When she says "You still know who they are.", she does not necessarily refer to their 'real' identity, as mostly, she has never met these people in person, but she refers to her past experiences of them. She knows who they are because she can link them to their previous comments, their previous writings and expressed opinions. It is precisely this familiarity with the author that informs the interpretations through prejudices and past experiences. It facilitates the reader's expectations of the author's typical topics and opinions too, as further expressed by Jaroslav: "In the case of some articles, I know that when I look who wrote it, I do not read them anymore. I've read so much from those people already, so many stupid things, that I do not deserve it anymore." An understood author is not reduced to a name; rather it is the other way around – the name embodies the full understanding of an author, so it can be appropriated into the horizon and made available for future encounters.

At the same time, Vladimír's perception is more of a normative expectation than a lived experience as he states that "news should be anonymous," explaining that he visits a limited

[18] The broadsheet she is referring to is called *Mladá Fronta Dnes (MF Dnes) since 1990*.
[19] Since 1998, the two broadsheets *Lidové noviny* and *MFDnes* have been owned by the same media company Mafra a.s.

number of particular websites to learn about the news. These are sources that he names, that he is familiar with through past experiences, and the author is understood in relation to expectations of particular productive practices. As authors are often understood as a brand (medium, programme, etc.), understanding an assemblage of productive practices as a singular name (brand) further shows the reader's attempt to anchor and personify the understanding of an author.

Obscured name

In contrast to the declared name, text can also be anonymous, in the sense of formal features. That is to say, it is encountered without a name and/or attribution. However, no text is anonymous, in the sense that an understood author is absent, nor is it possible for the understood author not to be named. The naming process is inherent to understanding, therefore understanding of the author as anonymous is a process of naming. Although some authors are identified as anonymous by various interviewees, the term bears a very different meaning for each and every one of them. Their understandings and applications of the term range from simply acknowledging an absence of attribution and display of a name, to perceiving a lack of accountability on the part of the author. Therefore paradoxically, in the latter case a text can be signed with some form of name or attribution, yet a reader does not perceive that name as significant. Instead, they perceive the understood author as in disguise, pretending, or purposefully hiding behind some other textual features and therefore deliberately trying not to be accountable for the content. This is especially the case in relation to social media; for some interviewees, this perception was the same as their perception of the internet in general. The interviews showed that the perception of anonymity is not directly linked to the actual presence or absence of a name, but rather it is an interpretative practice, where unfamiliarity with a particular media platform and its protocols of use leaves the reader short of interpretative tools and prior experiences to draw upon. That leads one to defensive assumptions about a source; the perception of anonymity, in this instance, elicits suspicions about a text and its author on the part of a reader. A rather different understanding of anonymity is expressed by interviewees who do not associate this concept with an absence of name identification, but rather with their own inability to attribute a certain name to the author.

All the respondents had some experience of television, radio, and newspapers, and their presumed productive practices and authorship. However, this was not the case for some participants in relation to social media. Those who were not acquainted with them, did not use them, or very rarely, tended to use anonymity as a form of prejudice – that is to say, the anonymity of the text was not perceived as a result of the understanding, but rather it was an interpretative tool used to familiarise the content and its author in order to understand her. A perception of anonymity then stands for a familiar characteristic, that allows them to interpret the text from a known position. This was the case of Soňa as she talks about social media, but as she was not using any social media platform herself, her experiences were only mediated.

> SOŇA; I am suspicious. I think that 99% of people do not write the truth there [on social media], because they are hidden behind the anonymity of it. And so they can write there what they want.

Rather than relating to particular authors posting or publishing texts on social media, it is the media form, social networking sites, that are here understood as an author, and an author that she understands as anonymous – "the anonymity of it". This understanding is

then brought into the actual interpretation of (mediated) content and information supposedly from social media.

A similar view was shared by Jarmila, who makes a more general comment in relation to the internet. She clearly understands the author in a complex and multidimensional form here – not only as a person (i.e. you), but also as a media form (i.e. newspaper). "On the internet you can write everything, anonymously, you do not have to put your name there. … Well, you do not have to do that in the newspaper either. Well, I perceive it as quite anonymous." Soňa's and Jarmila's lack of personal experience with social media means that they do not encounter those authors directly, but only if and when referred to by others, primarily mainstream media. Therefore, these are prejudices belonging to their horizon as they are not a result of direct encounters. Yet, they still illustrate how different degrees of familiarity, and (mediated) experiences lead to diverse informed understandings.

Jaroslav's comments on anonymity are very similar to Soňa's and Jarmila's notion of anonymity as a form of privacy. Considering an author as anonymous enables them to fill in the gaps of unknowns, and to construct a more general and familiar understanding of the author (i.e. football fan, social media user) that is brought into the interpretation. He reflects on his reading of online discussions between football fans, distinguishing them from online discussions on political topics.

> JAROSLAV: They [fans] are anonymous people, they discuss this particular thing [football] there, there is no class hate, it is the thing they share – the interest in it, and they are able to talk about it without any nastiness.

For Jaroslav, they are all simply football fans and because the discussion is primarily focused on the topic of football, this might not create a great opportunity to understand those authors in relation to other (social and cultural) issues and therefore for Jaroslav these authors are not fully contextual and intertextual. Even though an author proposes her own name, a reader considers her anonymous, as they perceive the name to be secondary and thus the author, and her identity, seems unreachable to them. In the case above, Jaroslav perceived them through a single theme, and so in their complexity they remain anonymous to him.

11 The dialogue of voices: the role of the understood author in the process of mediation

The last analytical chapter builds on the audiences' understanding of an author as a mediator of social reality (Livingstone, 2009) – a voice directed to an audience with a particular intention, and expands it by empirical exploration of readers' understanding of the role of the author in the process of mediation. It explores readers' understanding of authors by asking how this realisation informs the interpretative act, formulated in the research question *What roles does the understood author embody within the interpretative act?*

The analysis shows that when considering authors and media texts, readers tend to, explicitly or implicitly, relate the encountered voice to their own understanding of social reality and their value system – their perspectives, priorities and interests, what Schutz (1970) refers to as relevance. In the case of production practices, readers relate to authors through their assessment of them as writers and/or journalists, understanding an author in terms of how they fulfil expectations of those productive roles. In the case of the author as a mediator, readers' relating to authors does not only reflect authors' performance of particular practices, but just as importantly, the acknowledgement and recognition of the reader in those practices. Therefore, this chapter, focusing on the particular understandings of the author as a mediator, elaborates how the previously understood author's voice, identified and realised in the act of naming and assessment of productive practices, is positioned by readers in relation to their own voices. Thus, the understood author is not only an interpretative tool in the interpretation of the text, but also an extension of readers' positioning of their own voice within the media production.

Four roles are identified: *to inform, to recognise, to approve*, and *to guide* (see Figure 4). These empirically devised categories result from readers' negotiations between 1) how the reader acknowledges and perceives the visibility of the author's voice within the text – the understanding of the voice as rather *engaged* (advocating a particular perspective) or *impartial* (taking more of a neutral stance and being rather a channel for the information), and 2) the understood relatability of the text, that is to say whether the text and the understood author is perceived as relevant/irrelevant in terms of the subject matter. The analysis of the data shows both the readers' prejudices and expectations of the authors' roles in the process of mediation, as well as the actualisations of these roles in the interpretative act.

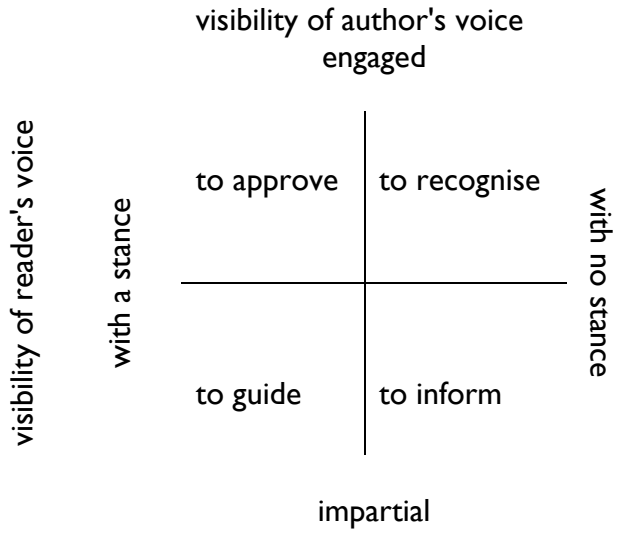

Figure 4 Dialogue of voices: what role does the understood author embody within the interpretative act?

11.1 The roles embodied by the understood author in the act of interpretation

The understanding of authors' role in the act of reading is strongly related to a reader's perception of the subject matter of the text, and even more to the perception of a genre (i.e. commentary, opinion piece, news report, etc.). That is not to say, that these understandings are determined by these perceptions, but rather informed by them, as they greatly vary across the interviewees. The four roles devised from the data are not exhaustive, they encompass roles of authors embodied by the understanding of the participants of this project only, and might vary significantly with different contexts and lived experiences (in different geographies, and different socio-demographic characteristics or at different times). The interviewees, in their consideration of mediation, primarily discussed institutionalised, well-established authors, and the majority of them were sceptical overall about content produced by other authors – amateur content producers.

The understanding of the author's role is here explored as an enquiry into how the reader uses the understood author to understand the text and subsequently the social reality that the text mediates (Livingstone, 2009). This section thus identifies four different roles: *to inform*, *to recognise*, *to approve* and *to guide*. These are readers' expectations and prior understanding of the role of media and mediation (as a part of one's horizon) informed and realised by the understanding and realisation of the author within the interpretative act – the perception of the different productive practices within the text and thus the visibility of the authorial presence in the text (Figure 4). Thus, two roles – *to inform* or *to recognise* – perceive the author as impartial, whereas the other two roles – *to approve* and *to guide* – consider the author as engaged. The understanding of an author is an iterative process, and so this is not a causal relationship, and one understanding does not precede nor determine the other. They both co-form and inform the understanding and becoming of an author and therefore they are mutually dependent and informing each

other. The reader's understanding is here also determined by the reader's own relation to the text – its subject matter or genre, considering also whether and how the expressed perspectives and opinions convey those held by the reader.

Perceived visibility of an author's voice

Regardless of its positive or negative appreciations, for the majority of the participants the understanding of an author was informed by the perceived visibility of the authorial voice in the text (or lack thereof). Some readers prefer authors to openly and clearly state their opinions and perspectives, so they can position themselves in relation to them. Others valued when authors attempted to keep a neutral, distant stance, as expressed for example by Karla, when commenting on the news that was being broadcast as the interview took place.

> KARLA: I totally do not like, for example here on the *ČT24* that I am watching, when they analyse it, their opinions. (…) I want news and then I make my own opinion. But this, when they analyse it – [discussing] this one and that one, that she thought and he thought, and he wanted it like this [referring to various objects of those analyses]. That makes me angry really."

Vlasta too reflects on the understood presence of the authors' opinion in the news, which shows her understanding of the author fully present in the text, that is to say, all three components – the voice, audience and intention, whether implicit or explicit. She suggests that even when they claim to be simply passing on information, there is a certain form of: "distortion"; she thinks there is no such thing as a neutral (impartial) author and therefore prefers the author, their voice, to be openly visible in the text.

> VLASTA: "Even the things that they [the media] think they are informing us about, what is happening in the world, even that angle is distorted. That makes me angry. I prefer when someone says some commentary, although I might not agree with it, in fact, I think it goes more into depth."

Further, she is fundamentally questioning whether any author can be providing information detached from the content, as opposed to engaging and advocating in some form or another, in this instance simply by their decision to inform an audience about it. Although it has been established that the understanding of an author consists of understanding an author as a voice directed towards an audience with an intention, the exploration of the understood role of the author in the interpretative act takes this even further, and questions the understood visibility of the voice within the text and the interpretative act. The visibility is then understood as a form of engagement, having a stance, and opinion that is expressed within the text, or the reader perceives an absence of this visibility, which they understand as a form of neutrality and/or impartiality of the author.

The two roles *to guide* and *to approve* understand and perceive the author present and visible in the text. The role of the author understood as engaged and visible is to guide the reader in relation to the unfamiliar, to provide a perspective, to anchor and to familiarise; whereas in the light of the already familiar, the understood engaged author is expected to approve readers' prejudices. In the latter case, the reader trusts and appreciates the author for their shared perspective, for their confirmation of 'rightness' from the position of assigned authority. The realised understanding of an author can also be negative if the reader's expectations are not being met.

If the author's approval is not granted, and if the understood author does not share the reader's views, yet is engaged in the text, a reader's appreciation and trust in the given

author is questioned, suspended or not granted in the first place. Often these readers, expecting the presence of authors' voices in texts, reflect on the impossibility of impartiality as they understand any productive practice as already shaping and framing, and having a particular intention.

On the other hand, in the case of an author understood to be detached from the text, whose view should not be present and visible in the test – that is to say, to be neutral or/and impartial in her mediation – the reader attributes to authors a certain degree of normative expectations that are related to their perception of various genres and their productive standards. The role of the understood author here is to recognise the familiar (from the perspective of the reader), that which is relevant, significant and of importance and/or interest, and to facilitate, to provide further information. The distinctions between these two roles – *to inform* and *to recognise* – are far more nuanced than the two former roles. Readers cannot as easily relate to the perceived author's voice due to the perceived limited or omitted visibility of the author's voice within the text.

In the case of the engaged author, an author promotes or criticises a particular perspective, her voice is clear, acknowledged and locatable, the perception and understanding of her intention is clear (although it might differ from the actual intention of the author). Due to the clarity of the voice there, a reader is given the opportunity to relate this voice to her broader social context and understanding of the world and social reality, to position herself in relation to this voice – does and/or ought the author talk on her behalf or not. The relating to the impartial author is much more obscured and problematic, precisely because it lacks visibility. A text is indeed attributed to an understood author, that is defined as voice, intention and audience, yet the reader expects or anticipates the voice and intention to be rather instrumental than expressive.

Therefore, the recognition of the reader's own voice here is also slightly shifted. What readers perceive as the presence of their voice in the previous instance – the actual knowledge at hand (a familiarity with a given topic or the perspective framing it), is here further extended to one's need to know. That is to say, a reader delegates onto the understood author a responsibility to recognise and highlight what information is relevant to the reader.

A reader's recognition of a voice and intention as defining elements of the understood author, yet expecting them to be instrumental or not pronounced, suggests that a full realisation and appreciation of those two roles – *to inform* and *to recognise* – is unachievable, and is expected as an ideal that the understood author is supposed to be aiming for, yet is never able to achieve. As a part of the process of relating, a reader always perceives a certain voice, intention, and audience, and therefore will always assign a certain perspective and stance to an understood author. Therefore, there is a rather prominent and shared vocalised dissatisfaction with the understood author in relation to the impartial author among the interviewees. Readers' disappointment with the process of mediation is a consequence of this, as well as the declining trust in the particular understood authors.

To approve

When Jarmila states: "I like this economist, she has spoken a few times recently and she was the only person who said what one thinks. Well, nobody asks me and I would probably not be able to say it in such a comprehensive way, but she translates my opinion and [those] of people around me that I trust, like and respect," she recognises the voice and it resonates with her own. Her interpretation of the message of the text aligns with her own views and she uses it to expand the familiarity of the view to the voice as well. Moreover, the understanding of the author within the matrix of productive practices further builds the realisation of the author as an expert. Jarmila names them "an economist" understanding

them as someone who holds certain expertise within the subject at hand. Jarmila does not only appreciate the "comprehensive way" in which this particular economist confirms and voices her own opinion, but even more importantly, the opinion of people who count as opinion leaders for her, the community she identifies with, to which she belongs and wants to belong – "people around me that I trust, like and respect". The perceived alignment between the two voices – that of the reader, and that of the understood author also understood as an expert, is interpreted by Jarmila as an approval of her view.

The role labelled here as *to approve* thus refers to the understandings of the author as approving or confirming that one holds 'the right' opinion. In these instances, an author is often granted a privileged position by the reader due to the perceived better or more extensive knowledge of the subject matter. If the subject matter is of significance, interest and relevance to a reader, if they consider themselves engaged in relation to it, then they seek in the understood author a confirmation of their perspective. They turn to the understood author with confidence, with a certain sense of companionship, but also respect. The perception of expertise results in readers granting authority to the understood author and accepting a subordinate position in the process of mediation. Such an understanding of the author in terms of expertise and authority subsequently leads readers to seek approval not only of the rightness of their perspective, but just as importantly, approval of the significance of the issue and its value as Marta said about a radio commentator: "If he says something, it is definitely worth it."

The approval, resulting from the shared perspective and opinion between the reader and the understood author, is also sought by readers because it grants them entitlement to hold those perspectives as articulated by Jarmila earlier. The perceived authority of the understood author then often allows the reader to further interpret the agreement with an author as recognition of one's own perspective by the general public, and empowers the readers in holding such an opinion. So when a reader is in agreement with the opinion expressed in the text, a reader perceives her own voice to be expressed, listened to and advocated for. However, among interviewees this was more prominently voiced as a lacking realisation of an author. For example, Martin's quote indicates his frustration, as his expectation of approval of his lived experience from traditional mainstream media is unfulfilled.

> MARTIN: The voices that are around me, they are lacking in the papers. For example, that someone would say how it was before the revolution, that he would say: this is what I did, this is what I had, this we didn't have, but we had this and that. Nobody says that. I also experienced it [the revolution], so I know how it was [during the communist regime].

There he reflects on his dissatisfaction with his voice being unrepresented in mainstream media, as his memories of communism greatly differ from how this period is portrayed by mainstream media. While he perceived the voices of understood authors as visible, he perceives his own voice as invisible to them, which he interprets as a disapproval of his voice.

Josef, speaking about reading readers' comments to online articles, also touches upon the harmony between the reader's and author's voices.

> JOSEF: I do not really read what people write. It doesn't have any informative value. If I like Zeman[20], then I will write that he is great, if I do not like him, then I will write that he is a prick.

Here, Josef says that people use online comments to state their views rather than discuss them, reflect on them or reconsider them with others. He reasons that if you know the author's opinion from previous encounter(s), you do not need to read their entries anymore, because you know what they will keep saying. This further results in his prevailing attitude that nothing can surprise him as he engages with understood authors that proved themselves over time. Interestingly, interviewees who shared Josef's attitude often complain that the encountered authors are repetitive, not revealing anything new. They lament that nothing new is being said, yet they either do not seek, or they purposefully eliminate any alternatives.

To guide

The embodied role of the author within the text as *to guide* is realised in the understanding through the dominant perception of the author as having access to information or knowledge that the reader does not have. Soňa talks about a particular foreign affairs journalist, who reports on Russia. This journalist is for her the main authority on the topic that she has no other (unmediated) access to.

> SOŇA: She follows it within a broader context. When something happens there [in the region] she is able to highlight it and explain it. (…) She tells me the things that preceded it or why it matters.

The understood visibility of the author expressed as "highlighting and explaining" is appreciated by Soňa, in this instance. She understands the author as guiding her within the unknown. Soňa further exposes how her trust in this particular understood author (a foreign affairs journalist) has been established over time, through past experiences, but also in combination with non-textual context. She knows the journalist indirectly, also as a friend of one of her family members, hence this personal connection, of a sort, further contextualises her familiarity with the understood author, leading to certain prejudices and anticipation before the first reader–author(text) encounter. This initial familiarity is further negotiated in every interpretative act and further contributes to the understanding of that author, in this instance increasing her credibility.

The role *to guide* is expressed by the interviewees as placing trust in an understood author, in order to learn about the unfamiliar and to be provided with interpretative tools that allow them to introduce and further appropriate those presented perspectives and opinions into their horizons. The familiarity already established with an understood author through past experiences significantly contributes to their granting the understood author a right to speak, explain and contextualise the unfamiliar. It further serves as one of the incentives for readers to place trust in an understood author.

When Soňa says about a particular commentator: "They analyse it fully and then I can add my stuff that I know [about. So, I can decide whether] it is possible like that or not," she refers to the perceived author's guidance within topics where she perceives that she is lacking in knowledge. The role of the author is, in this instance, understood as offering new, alternative (unfamiliar) perspectives to either learn new things or learn about familiar topics from unfamiliar angles.

[20] Miloš Zeman was, at the time of the data collection, one of the candidates in the presidential elections.

The author's understood role here, *to guide*, was commonly anticipated by the interviewees in relation to traditional media in particular, primarily deriving from their prior understanding of editorial practices, their institutional character and perception of a certain exclusivity of access. This is addressed by Renata, who explains why she is not as critical towards print media as she is in relation to online media.

> RENATA: In the case of the internet, if you do not narrow down the question, you get a heap of information, you need to go through it and sort it out, unlike in the case of a [print] magazine, which is for me by some default already thematically or content-wise pre-determined. I already know, what I can expect there.

She also understands an author as guiding her, however rather than guidance through a particular subject matter, she understands the author's role as guiding her through the process of mediation in more general terms as she understands the author as engaging in a form of selecting, ordering and prioritising the information before presenting it to readers. Thus, she delegates the responsibility to access and sort information to the understood author and trusts the author to do this according to certain standards (defined by her prejudices of editorial practices).

The guiding role is also greatly appreciated by Tomáš, whose media habits were somehow different to most of the other interviewees. In order to learn about voices marginalised or missing in the national media, he extensively follows international media, in particular Al Jazeera online. Tomáš understands the brand as an author that highly engages in, and provides alternative narratives and perspectives in comparison to the mainstream Czech media. However, he, with a certain sadness, also acknowledges the limits of this: "If I want a good commentary, I will look at Al Jazeera, the problem is that there is never anything about the Czech Republic." He seeks access to information and perspectives that are not available in his national context, in the local media, yet at the same time he realises that the understood author of his choice employs similar editorial practices and thus when he seeks information about topics that are close to his home, these are not in the focus of the particular author. Al Jazeera can take on the role of a guide within its domain of interest, but this role does not extend into the domestic issues that are of interest to Tomáš too.

An instance of mediation in which the majority of the interviewees anticipated and relied on the guiding role of various understood authors were long-running criminal cases, especially involving political and business elites. In these instances, readers perceived their reliance on the media's access to information, particularly in relation to the complexities of those cases but also due to their long term character of the news story. However, especially in relation to the latter, most of the interviewees shared and expressed great frustration and disappointment in mainstream media's ability to fulfil these participants' expectations.

> FRANTIŠEK: I think that journalists are getting worse, because there are cases that are started but nothing is ever finished. Just sensationalism. Today they write this and this, and in a week nobody [the journalists] cares about it anymore.

The quote expresses František's perception, shared by many others, of declining interest among particular media in reporting various criminal cases "to the end" and thus failing the guiding role. This perceived failure of the author's role in the mediation of social reality is linked to his understanding of particular productive practices and their realisations.

To inform

When Marie says about particular radio presenters: "They do not force any opinion on you, they just introduce the news," she does not expect the author's voice to contextualise the provided information, but a voice that is subordinate to the information itself. She perceives the intention of the voice as "just" to provide and channel information, nothing more. It is the perceived simplicity of the intention to deliver the news – "just to introduce the news" – that defines this understanding of an author. The perception of an author's role within the text, in this instance, is *to inform* – to provide and channel information rather than to comment on it, frame it or express opinions and views as in the two previous roles. The reader's understanding, thus, includes a perception of a voice, yet it does not seek or appreciate its visibility within the text.

The reader's understanding of this role of an author is instrumental, it encompasses their understanding of the essential role of journalism and media, not unsimilar from the scholarly discussions of the role of media (see McQuail, 2010) or what Chalaby refers to as "fact-centred discursive practices" (1998, p. 5). This role of an author, is in fact hardly ever realised by the interviewees rather it is understood through the absence of a recognition of this role in the understood author. The notion and fore-understanding of this role is thus idealised and understood through a comparison to the realised author who does not meet such an expectation.

"Mainly I am interested in the news and it is often missing, the simple news," says Vladimír, referring to the role of media to collect, organise and select information. The process of mediation is here understood as providing information, facilitating or assisting with access to it. It is the information itself that is understood as a voice, rather than the realisation of the voice through any productive practices. For Karla, any journalistic work beyond the reporting of facts threatens the truth and obscures the reader's view and ability to form their own opinion. She was very suspicious of any media content presenting a particular perspective. I spoke to her while the news channel *ČT24* was running on the television and we watched it while talking. When a journalist from a magazine was used as a guest commentator for some particular news, she strongly disapproved.

> KARLA: He [the guest journalist] thinks it is like this or that it means that. How does he know? He thinks. It is an opinion of that journalist. (…) For me the journalist should collect the news and write it up, [be] the most faithful to how it happened. They can add their perspective, but it is of no interest to me.

She clearly feels frustrated with the inability to reach what she understands as the truth. She dislikes any commentaries or reports where journalists take on the role of experts, in order to offer possible explanations of the given news, and she has a prevailing suspicion of spin. For her, the journalist's role is to provide information rather than guide readers through it. As the previous quote demonstrates, she expects the journalist to deliver the needed information – *to inform*. Any additional information that could have a guiding role is for her in fact obscuring the view and understanding of the content.

Readers' commonly expressed disappointment with institutionalised, traditional media in relation to sustaining continuity in reporting. The role *to inform*, or the absence of it, is in these instances not understood as compromised by the author's own views and opinions, but rather as manipulated through some editorial practices, i.e. selection and editing.

> VLASTA: Well, the question [is] what we learn about and what do we not learn about, if anything happens then. (…) I am not sure whether it is appropriate for me to learn that so and so stole I do not know what, (…) and [that he] is in prison and

> his property was confiscated. I do not know if I need to know all that, but if I have once learnt that he stole all that, then I would like to know that he was punished.

Vlasta questions the journalistic practices and whether the events that the media inform her about are reported fully. She clearly indicates that the understood author took a decision to tell her this information, which then ought to have been reported in its wholeness. Lacking the resolution of the case, Vlasta understands the author as neither informing nor guiding her. This leads to a certain doubt and disorientation on her part, both in relation to whether she ought to have known it in the first place – is this information of interest and relevance to her – and, whether by omitting the conclusion, the author is not manipulating the information.

This does not mean that readers here do not expect the author to provide context; however, their understanding of the context is articulated in terms of complexity, that is to say, providing all possible angles or complete information, as opposed to focusing on a particular part or perspective. The role *to inform* is thus first and foremost understood through the dimension of access, as the understood author is expected to provide access to information, to channel information to the reader; the decision about its relevance then rests with the reader.

When understanding an author in relation to content produced and distributed by non-institutional authors/by individuals, especially content presented as recommendations and advice, the author and their voice are undeniably visible in the text. That is to say, these texts are often open expressions of their authors' opinions, primarily personal recommendations or advice, yet many interviewees valued and sought the factual part of those texts, disregarding the expressions of endorsement. They used the perceived value free descriptions to translate those recommendations into their own value system, as we can see in the case of Marta talking about people's holiday recommendations.

> MARTA: Details are better, because then I can see that he [the author] dislikes that there is no club within 2km distance, but that does not bother me, on the contrary.

She understands the author through various textual features and perceives them as a voice with intention, yet she actively disregards the presented perspective, that would be otherwise guiding. The voice is thus understood as informing her, providing facts, and she uses them to form her own opinion.

To recognise

The notion of relevance is what distinguishes the role *to recognise* from the role *to inform.* The author is understood as recognising the reader and what matters to them. In contrast to the readers' understanding of an author as a provider of factual informative content, as described by the role *to inform*, the role *to recognise* is different because that information is understood as relevant or of interest to the reader. This can be illustrated by a quote from Vladimír, who comments on his use of media and why he mostly does not read blogs. He addresses a distinction between news that are "passively" consumed (*to inform*) and information that are sought for as one has interest in them (*to recognise*).

> VLADIMÍR: press, or news channels reach you, you do not seek it, you consume it passively (…). But if I was to search for information on the internet or blogs, then that's active and that does not actively interest me.

Zdena complains about the poor quality of mainstream media and makes a comparison between institutionalised media (especially tabloids) and other producing members of her

online communities. She further comments that media have too much freedom and can make up information.

> ZDENA: There is nothing that would enrich you, that you would need for life [referring to tabloid]. (…) You find everything on the internet, all you need. Advice, recommendations.

She uses the internet extensively to seek advice on various issues, from health issues to pension schemes. She finds the advice that she receives online through her search and use of discussion forums to be enriching and useful. She seeks and consumes this content for its perceived informative value, and appreciates the understood relevance to her life situations. Here, the role is primarily *to recognise*, rather than *to approve* or *to guide*, the relationship between her and the understood author here is not a perceived relationship of power. She does not question their truthfulness as the perceived authenticity stands for truthfulness here.

The authors understood as having the role *to recognise* are by the participants mainly understood as impartial and neutral in distinction to the roles perceived as *to approve* and *to guide*. For Soňa, an author is understood as failing *to recognise* as she perceives her voice being omitted from the public arena. Talking about the presidential elections, she comments on various media favouring two particular candidates for the second round before the proper election campaign had even kicked off.

> SOŇA: Suddenly, there were opinion polls published everywhere [in various media channels]. And I was thinking, whom do they talk to, where is it coming from that these two [candidates] will get the most votes and that they will pass into the second round?

Soňa reflects on not recognising or identifying with the information that has been circulated by the media. She disagreed with the presented information because she found it unrelatable, not corresponding with her lived experiences, and her perception of the reported situation. In her surroundings, she did not recognise what the media had been telling as a fact. Not only did she not have access to the information, but she lacked the tools to recognise the origin of the information as such, to trust its existence in the first place.

12 Conclusion

This project aimed to explore the audience's understanding of the author, of the productive and mediating practices behind the text, by examining the media experiences of 50-65 years old Czechs as its empirical foundation. The main question *How do people understand an author that they encounter in the interpretation of factual media texts?* stemmed from the interest in audiences and their media practices, and the realisation that although there is extensive research into how people interpret media messages and use media as objects, the question of how people understand media as an actor of mediation is underdeveloped. The choice of philosophical hermeneutics as a main theoretical framework for audience research might be unexpected, and unconventional, yet its ontological approach to understanding enabled me to not only theorise understanding as a concept of my research enquiry, but also provided an overarching philosophical framework in which my methodological as well as existential perspective might be situated.

When I started to engage with and read the work of the scholars from the audience research tradition, and its rich body of theoretical and empirical research whose agenda has evolved and expanded over the years, I was hooked, this was my field. I was, and still am, first and foremost interested in the audience and their relationships with, uses and interpretations of media in the broadest possible sense of that term. I was driven by my interest in interpretative practices, and reading about the potential for resistance among media audiences vis-à-vis ideologies distributed and sustained by media, I wanted to go beyond the questions of what meanings are being drawn from media and why, what are its (social, cultural, economic) determinants, and how that reflects on the power relationships between the media and their audiences, and subsequently the ideological and power struggles within the society. I was curious to understand the interpretative act itself, and how these interpretations are enabled and came to be in the first place. And so I turned to literary theory, in particular, Iser's (1974, 1978) work on an implied reader and indeterminacy that was concerned exactly with that. Following the trajectory of his conceptualisations backwards led me to Gadamer's (2004) *Truth and Method.* And as the second sentence of the translators' preface says: "The book is powerful, exciting, but undeniably difficult." (Gadamer, 2004, p. xi), I was hooked again. I found a theoretical framework that resonated with me; it enabled me to see the connections between the dots I was trying to conceptually connect, but it also addressed me in a more general existential way, as an interpretative being, providing me with a framework not only to conceptualise interpretative practices of readers and audiences, but also being a researcher.

Reading Gadamer's work, my research objective and questions started to make sense, and I devised and proposed a theory-led concept of the understood author that is located at the intersection of the notions of the author as inscribed and imagined, which are brought into the interpretative act as part of the text's and reader's horizon, respectively. Of course, what is outlined in this thesis and theoretically situates the whole enquiry is indeed my reading of Gadamer, my understanding informed by my own prejudices and tradition. I wanted to understand, explore, and listen. I wanted to know what people see and pay attention to when they engage with media, and philosophical hermeneutics enabled me to do just that.

An exploratory approach was at the heart of the empirical enquiry. As the theoretical emphasis was on proposing the concept of the understood author, the empirical and analytical work sought to understand how this concept is realised in real-life audiences-media encounters. It was important to be open to those different understandings explicitly or implicitly brought into those encounters, whether they were anticipated by the

theoretical framework and literature review, or not. I was aware of the danger of providing a rigidly structured definition, while in fact, the objective of this project was the opposite – to open the definition to multiple understandings, to be able to see what role they play in the act of reading. Therefore, I did not seek definitions, but rather conditions of understanding. Further, the theoretical and empirical work of the project questions the mutual co-existence between the author and the text, where the text cannot be understood without the author, which at the same time results from the interpretation of the text.

This conclusion uses the overview of the main findings, extensively discussed in the main body of the thesis to reflect on the theoretical, empirical and analytical outcomes of this project and address their impact and relevance for audience research agenda.

Relation between theory and analysis

One of the key challenges of the thesis was to turn a highly iterative process into a linear narrative: fitting a process that was circular and which evolved as a spiral (Glynos and Howarth, 2018) into the expected and anticipated format and structure of a PhD thesis, moving back and forth between the theory and analysis. Writing the thesis was a bit like deciding what came first, the chicken or the egg. Although I devised the theory informed concept of the understood author while collecting my data, I then had to leave the analysis of the interviews to one side, only to return two years later. What at first felt like an unplanned break (as a result of my pregnancy and maternity leave), turned out to be a helpful detachment from the data. In a notion of understanding, I was focusing on the text, not its author. I gained a distance from the politically charged time of the data collection (between two sets of highly watched and discussed elections) as well as the respondents' subjectivities that became clouded with the passage of time. I was able to focus on the recorded accounts of their experiences with authors.

I started to identify patterns and relationships between the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1997) resulting in the identification of my main analytical categories and subcategories. But I also realised that the understandings I am analytically devising from the data are fuelled by two processes – experience and familiarity. That brought me back to Gadamer (2004) and this time I reread his work closely to further consider how relevant his framework is to my findings and to further conceptualise these two notions.

The concept of *experience* offered a valuable framework to theoretically anchor the observed practices of understanding. The analysis showed that participants organised multiple experiences into one narrative to create coherence and meaning. Construction of experience as gathered knowledge required connecting different lived experiences, seeking those links, and ordering and promoting some over others, reminiscent of Ricoeur's (1984) concept of emplotment. Hence, participants' accounts of media experiences were analysed in terms of their context: which aspects of those experiences are being promoted within those accounts, what is significant about them, and why they are significant and relevant to the participants. These particular instances of experience formed a more general expectation that was nevertheless informed by the immediate experience. It is, however, for further theoretical and empirical consideration how to best record these experiences, as any reflection on the part of the participants is already a form of applied understanding, and therefore an understanding absorbed within the horizon.

The second key concept was *familiarity*. The analysis showed that the known, the familiar, is a setting within which understanding is possible; an expression of closeness, of recognition (or its absence). Nonetheless, it serves a reader to situate the object of understanding, in this instance an author, within an intelligible framework of what is known

– the familiar, to interpret it and appropriate it. This resonated with Gadamer's notion of the horizon of understanding – the known, the taken for granted, the familiar – again provided a relevant theoretical anchoring of the analytical explorations of the reader-author relationship, and how readers relate to authors as an inherent part of understanding. That is to say, familiarity promotes the relevance of particular characteristics of an author for the reader, and thus determines the actualisation of an understood author. As understanding is an application, familiarity does not necessarily change the conceptual understanding of an author or their characteristics, but rather it determines their value and meaning to the reader in particular – the actualisation of understanding.

The limitation of Gadamer's (2004) concept of horizon, however, is that it refers more to a volume of foreknowledge and past experiences, without addressing the notions of intensity, clarity or availability of those experiences. It is concerned with the content rather than nuance and degree. Thus, it resembles rather a sum of knowledge that is expanding through future encounters but does not address whether knowledge and experiences, once acquired, are all of the same quality, relevance and readiness for further understanding. Although Gadamer (2004) himself argues for a continuous transformation rather than a simple expansion of one's horizon (as well as of understanding), the concept of horizon as such is somehow insufficient for an enquiry into relatability, by lacking the recognition of its parts and their temporal relevance as opposed to its wholeness only. Engaging with the data, it became clear to me that the concept of the horizon does not reflect the fact that all that is contained within the horizon is not of the same relevance and significance. To fully conceptualise the understood author, I realised the notion of relevance needs to be regarded too. I found inspiration in Schutz's (1970) quote; he distinguishes between theme and horizon in his problematizing of relevance. He argues that "we have in the field of our consciousness an unstructured whole of contiguous configurations, each of which is capable of becoming theme or remaining as horizon within his field," (Schutz, 1970, p. 23), which enables us to reflect further on the relation to direct and indirect, and more and less familiar, experiences. To reflect on this, I conceptualise the understood author as multidimensional and used the notion of dimensions of understanding that reflect the different nuances of these understandings. I also distinguish between dimensions of productive practices that understand the author in relation a certain particularity and dimensions of realisations, that assess these in relation to one's own value system.

Lastly, when I finished analysing the collected data and established all the individual elements and dimensions, I returned to academic literature, in particular to media and journalism studies, to see how these often contested concepts are, in particular the different references to production, discussed. These debates are outlined in the theoretical part providing a theoretical counterpart to the data driven categories.

What is an author?: The data driven definitions of essential and potential elements

The research shows the complexity and broad diversity of what an author means to different readers; what the expectations of an author are; how the more abstract notions of authorial power or productive agency behind a text are perceived and understood; how the notion of author, producers, sources, and origin of a text is at times perceived very strongly and at other times completely disregarded. Moreover, there is hardly any consistency in all of that within the media consumption of one reader themselves. The understanding is not only fluid, but also constantly changing, often illogical in its wholeness, yet rational in its particularities. Thus, there is not one definition, one understanding of

what an author is and who is the author behind a text. There are multiple understandings, and these vary among readers, in relation to texts, technology, and time; they are complex, multiple and most importantly continuously actualised, negotiated and in a dialogue with each other. Therefore, I argue that the understanding of the author is contextually situated within each and every individual text-reader encounter. For that, I propose a multidimensional model that reflects the concept's fluidity and vicissitudes as well as contextual grounding.

Despite the diversity of understanding, however, there is a common ground: essential elements – voice, audience and intention – that are the preconditions for the author to be understood by the reader in the first place; not because without their presence there is no author, but more precisely, these are always and ineluctably assumed on the part of a reader. They demarcate the space within which the author can be understood, and are the necessary conditions for the becoming of an author in the interpretative act. In scholarly literature the notion of voice is often discussed in terms of who is talking and who has access to be a voice (Spivak, 1993), but the voice can only be embodied in the process of hearing and more importantly listening – as an expression of audiences' willingness to engage, to take part in the conversation, to know and understand. By engaging with the voice – by listening – the reader enters into the act of understanding the author. The essential elements thus form a foundation for any further exploration of readers' or audiences' understanding of authors, in terms of different media technologies, genres, or practices of production, or in terms of different participants.

The understanding of the author is then realised through diverse particularities, and characteristics – textual or paratextual (Genette, 1997b) that are significant for the participants in the interpretative act. They are the potential elements of the understood author, as they are not its fixed attributes, but rather realisations embedded in the interpretative act. They might be visible and acknowledged, or not, by different readers at different times. Considering the potential elements as dimensions of understanding highlights that they are not clearly defined elements, but rather nuanced and fluid spectrums within which the understanding can be realised. The understanding of an author within any dimension is temporal and contextual. The same reader can understand an author within these dimensions differently in relation to different texts, or the same text in different instances. The dimensions are not parallel, superior or subordinate to each other, nor they are exclusive and defined against each other. Studying their interplay further reveals how they mutually determine, and potentially refigure (Ricoeur, 1980) understanding of each other and constitute the understanding of an author. Analytically devised, the dimensions showed that the realisation of the understanding of the author is in terms of its understood role in the production of the text that is assessed against one's prior knowledge and expectations, and leads to a recognition of the author in its particularity as well as complexity.

Being able to understand the author enables the reader to relate to her, considering their mutual situatedness, placing trust or perceiving one's own empowerment or lack thereof and granting the understood author a role in that particular communicative act of media consumption. Simultaneously, from the perspective of the audience research agenda, being able to study people's understanding of the author provides a valuable entry point to the subsequent questions of how people navigate their media consumption and negotiate the act of meaning making. Establishing that the understood author is not limited to the personified producers but can be equated with media brands, organisations, complex practices of production or even technologies enable the research to explore further the fluid and often volatile relationship of people with the media.

The analysis reveals the fluidity of these understandings and how we cannot study these as fixed relationships, when considering people's relation to media. Questions of how people understand particular content, a genre or medium are limited by not recognising the in-motion character of these relationships. The understanding of an author by a reader may vary with each text and its interpretation and simultaneously, an interpretation of a text as a message or genre varies with an understood author, which at the same time is situated within a particular time and context. This does not mean we should resign from studying these understandings and relationships, but rather this insight calls for a greater sensitivity to the context and cautiones against fixed conclusions that might not be relevant by the time of their proclamations.

Critical reflections: the understanding of power relations

Placing this thesis conceptually at the intersection of philosophical hermeneutics, and audience research while acknowledging the multiple notions of the author within the broader field of media studies, the question of power over the meaning and power relations between the media and audiences needs to be reflected on. Unlike audience research, in particular the tradition within cultural studies, that is concerned with audiences' potential to resist media as a mediator of particular ideologies, Gadamer's (2004) work is not concerned with the notion of power. He conceptualises the act of understanding as an agreement, the willingness to understand, and openness to listen and negotiate, rather than a struggle as considered by many other scholars (e.g. Mendelson, 1979; Martin-Barbero, 1993; Gray and Johnson, 2013). The analysis was driven by this conceptualisation of understanding, arguing that to explore the power relations, the understanding of the author needs to be established first. Nonetheless, the thesis and its research findings provide a conceptual ground for thinking about the power relations between people and media. The recognition of the notion of an author (as a voice addressing an audience with an intention) as inherently present in the interpretative act enables us to further question this relationship in terms of power and agency. I considered Gadamer's (2004)concept of agreement as listening (Lacey, 2013). As to engage in the understanding one has to not only hear but also to listen and a precondition of listening is a voice, a voice of the author. But there is also the voice of the reader, as the horizon of understanding. The voice of the reader might remain silent, but is always activated in the act of understanding, not least because understanding is always an application, as Gadamer (2004) argues, and therefore the two voices enter into a conversation.

Although the power relations were not the focal point of this research, it does not mean that the reader did not perceive and interpret them. Not least because one of the essential elements of the understood author is an intention, and therefore understanding of that voice as having an agenda and a purpose. This is not necessarily perceived in negative (or positive) terms or as manipulation or propaganda, but it contributes to the understanding of the author as situated and intentional. The multidimensional conceptualisation of the author helped to further unpack that the understood intentionality of the author can be linked to some of the dimensions only and therefore more prominent in some understandings than others.

The dimensions of bias, access or structure, all include interviewees' reflections on control over knowledge – what is being said, who can access it and why – these show participants' consideration and understanding of their own as well as the author's dependency. As the participants often understood the author as a media structure or a part of it, their understanding acknowledged this complexity of different involvements and voices and led them to question the power dynamics behind them, as well as how to relate

to that. Through the analysis I established that the realisation of the understood author and the process of naming – identifying the authority – enables the participants to locate the intention, which can then be more easily understood in terms of power. It is for further research to delve into how these understandings translated into readers' empowerment in the media-user encounter, and whether readers' recognition of the complex structures and involvement behind the media enables more critical use as well as interpretation of media.

This project does not address the question of media power and audiences' agency and potential to resist per se, but it provides a blueprint for how to consider these two dynamics and their mutual dependencies. The analysis shows that people are aware of an authorial presence behind a text, whether in the form of acknowledging the situatedness of the text, the productive practices, or the institutional structures. They reflect on these, and their interpretation of the text, and their relation to the particular instance of mediation is informed by this understanding.

Empirical reflections: the situatedness and homogeneity of the findings

One of the deliberate choices employed in the research design was the selection of the participants based on their age (50-65 years old) in order to make people over 50 more visible research subjects and recognise them as a valuable source of empirical insight. It would be short-sighted, then, not to reflect on the findings also in terms of the demographic of the participants. Specifically, what insight does the data analysis provide about their understandings of the author and what role, if any, do their age and life histories play in these understandings – as a) an expression of a particular stage of life, and b) as a shared historical context of their lived experiences although resulting in their diverse perspectives and comparison of before and now.

The participants, indeed, had very different life trajectories and lived experiences, not least due to their different social and economic backgrounds, but also in terms of their relationship with and use of media (to be expected: the recruitment was driven by my interest in this diversity). However, they shared the historical context within which their life trajectories have been shaped and evolved. Also considering the concepts of prejudice and tradition one brings to the act of understanding, they were exposed to the same social institutions (and their transformation throughout the years), in particular systems relevant to knowledge production and distribution like systems of education or media.

Most of the interviewees shared and expressed great frustration and disappointment in mainstream media, whether in their perceived bias, or lack of diversity of voices, yet they still turned to them as the main source of information. The mainstream media, whether as a general media outlet or particular media brands, were for my participants the main reference point. They did not significantly challenge the authority of media. For most of them, engagement with some form of news content was a part of their everyday routine suggesting that these practices of media use and engagement were deeply ingrained in their understanding of themselves as social beings. As discussed in the main analysis, the notion of alternative voices was, with a rare exception, understood within the mainstream, and respondents showed either limited engagement with alternative sources, or did not understand those sources as an alternative to the mainstream. What these accounts had in common was the understanding of an author as part of a bigger (institutional) structure and therefore the already mentioned dependency of the voice. Questioning the actual location (within the structure) of the perceived voices was a shared form of understanding of the author.

The dimensions through which their understandings of the author are realised are therefore reflected in terms of the commonalities among these participants and their potential particularity vis-à-vis other age demographics. Overall, the analysis showed that the notion of media is associated with a symbolic authority, that is assessed along the various dimensions of productive practices and results in the assessment of the author (media) as skilful and/or professional. The value system against which these understandings were assessed was deeply culturally situated, emphasising as a benchmark of quality and professionalism the use of grammar and stylistics of authors who were taught as contemporaries when these participants were in school.

The art of writing, the concept of being an author – an isolated, solitary, inspired individual – are widely circulated and constructed notions throughout the history of written literature, by writers themselves as well as by those depicting them, their biographers as well as by popular culture, and indeed by the educational curriculum, as at least in the Czech Republic, literature has been traditionally taught in the form of authors' biographies. Journalistic practices too have been variously discussed for decades within the academic (Brucker, 1973; among many e.g. Tuchman, 1978a; Zelizer, 1993) as well as the professional environment; in relation to the production of media content per se as well as in the terms of more general questions of the role of journalism and media within a democratic society. Those publicly circulated understandings of authors – writers, journalists and media in general – belong to readers' horizons too (to different degrees), forming a reference framework and serving as interpretative tools informing understandings of authors, as readers might vary in their appreciation of those practices.

Being an author and what is next?

The metaphorical circle continues as I am writing these last pages of this thesis. Once finished, this text, offering its own reading and application of a theoretical framework as well as its interpretation of participants' lived experiences, will become a text for interpretation itself. A text standing for itself with an author, whose intention does not matter, an author whose task has been done. At this moment I can still contemplate whether I explained myself well, and whether I defined the concept clearly, or did due justice to the accounts of my participants. But in fact, at this moment you are reading this and all that there is are these words and what they mean to you.

Starting with Morley's (1980, 1992) and Katz and Liebes' (1990) work and many other works of audience researchers published in the past few decades, I read Iser (1974, 1978) and I read Gadamer (2004). My interpretation of all these works inspired me to devise the concept of the understood author. I am putting it out there, to be interpreted and used, and to be instrumental for further research. The purpose of the concept was to fill a gap and expand the exploration of interpretative practices. By providing an empirical analysis of particular experiences and understandings of authors among the research participants, I offer a conceptual map that may inspire other researchers in ways that I would never imagine. The concepts can be used and appropriated to reflect not only on other audiences and media users beyond the group of 50-65 year old Czechs presented in this work, but also for different or more specific notions of the author, for example, specific productive practices, media technologies or infrastructures, in relation to genres and much more.

Since the data collection took place, blogging gave way to, or at least become overshadowed by, microblogging on social media; social media platforms became much more intertwined with traditional media brands providing a new infrastructure for the distribution of their information (Plantin *et al.,* 2018; Hase, Boczek and Scharkow, 2022); generative AI is increasingly used to produce content (Herman, 2021); people engage with

streams of content curated by their personalised algorithm on their social media. At the same time, people are very particular about choosing which content producers and creators they follow – and the social media space in general is very personified and characterised by identity attribution (Mathieu and Pavlíčková, 2017; Schwarzenegger, 2020). The audiences are increasingly faced with content where not only the identity but also the humanity of the sources is contested in conjunction with the increasing proliferation of media into other social structures. And so there is a strong argument and need for the audience-centric research to reflect, theoretically as well as empirically, on the notion of the author as an integral part of its interest in people's emancipatory and resistant interpretations and uses of media. The question of people's understanding of media and its presence (in terms of structure, control or power) behind them is more relevant than ever.

And so this concept is ready and free to grow, I am putting it out there with its extensive empirical exploration, that provides its empirical dimension and demonstrating its applicability and relevance to future research. The concept of the understood author is now ready to go places, all I can do is hope that it will be interpreted, appropriated and repurposed.

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Appendix I - Profiles of research participants

Alias	Interview date	Gender	Born	Age	Media use	Professional status	residence
František	13/11/12	M	1952	60	Main source of information traditional media – television, radio, newspaper. Occasional internet user.	Office job/sales	capital
Marie	13/11/12	F	1956	56	Main source of information traditional media – television, radio, newspaper. Occasional internet user.	Qualified office job	capital
Marta	13/11/12	F	1961	51	Use of traditional media on daily basis. Confident user of the internet for work as well as private purposes.	University educated, highly skilled office job	capital
Vladimír	13/11/12	M	1953	59	Use of traditional media on daily basis. Confident user of the internet for work as well as private purposes.	University educated, highly skilled office job	capital
Marcela	14/11/12	F	1961	51	Very limited media use, including traditional media channels. Mainly for entertainment or in relation to professional development (professional magazines, etc.)	Skilled worker	big city
Radka	15/11/12	F	1953	59	Intensive use of media for professional purposes. Access to information fundamental to the professional status and performance.	University educated, top management in international corporation, professional and social influence	capital
Kamila	13/01/13	F	1958	55	Intensive user of the internet, participant in various online fora. Regular use of traditional media. Founder of a fan page, administrator and contributor to multiple online for a.	University educated. Unskilled jobs / unemployed.	big city
Daniela	14/01/13	F	1959	53	Use of traditional media, confident online user, especially to search for needed information, hobby, advice, etc.	University educated, qualified office job	capital
Milan	14/01/13	M	1955	58	Uses media on daily basis, mainly for his job and interest purposes. Runs and administers own website of professional news.	Entrepreneur, qualified office job	capital
Petra	15/01/13	F	1961	52	News fan. High consumer of media, particularly news (print/online). Political blogger.	University educated. Entrepreneur.	capital

Alois	16/01/13	M	1948	64	No use of the internet, Regular use of traditional media – mainly television, interest in news.	Manually working (retired)	town
Josef	16/01/13	M	1956	56	Day to day confident user of online media. Interested in politics and keen searcher of information of interest	Small entrepreneur	town
Karla	16/01/13	F	1948	64	Very basic use of the internet, Regular use of traditional media – mainly television, interest in news.	Qualified office job (retired)	town
Renata	17/01/13	F	1956	56	Daily use of traditional media as well as of the internet. Professional use of the internet (contribution to professional discussion fora)	University educated, a head of non-profit organisation	capital
Rudolf	17/01/13	M	1953	60	Very active online, very confident to use the internet for own interests (culture). Has own blog concerned with film reviews. Regular consumer of mainstream media, particularly news.	Prominent, influential job (retired)	capital
Jan	21/01/13	M	1947	65	Daily use of all media, writes and maintain own blog of political commentaries, which he started in early days of blogging, it is not hosted by any blogging platform, it is his own website.	University educated, qualified office job (retired)	town
Magda	30/03/13	F	1949	64	Heavy newspaper reader. Modest user of the internet – mainly for daily news and search in relation of her interests.	Qualified office job (retired)	capital
Soňa	31/03/13	F	1950	63	Main source of information traditional media – television, radio, newspaper. Occasional internet user.	Unqualified office job (retired)	capital
Irena	04/04/13	F	1953	60	High civic engagement, but limited use of media. Main sources – television and radio, occasional use of the internet	University educated, qualified office job (retired)	capital
Martin	14/05/13	M	1957	56	Traditional media. Prominent television user. Modest use of the internet.	Qualified skilled job	town
Zdena	15/05/13	F	1954	59	Confident online user for advices, recommendations, owner of a blog of small stories. Traditional media consumed mainly for entertainment.	Skilled jobs (retired)	village
Jarmila	17/05/13	F	1949	64	Regular daily use of mainstream media. Strongly expressed reservation towards the	Office job (retired)	capital

					internet, social media in particular.		
Jaroslav	28/08/13	M	1955	58	Intensive media user, prominent newspaper reader. Confident user of the internet.	University educated, specialist highly qualified job	town
Milada	31/08/13	F	1954	59	Traditional media. Prominent newspaper reader. Basic use of the internet.	University educated, specialist highly qualified job	town
Antonín	02/09/13	M	1955	58	Limited use of media, no use of the internet,	Skilled job	capital
Radim	14/11/13	M	1958	55	Confident user of the internet. Heavy news consumer, search for alternative sources.	Highly qualified job, university educated.	capital
Bohuslav	21/11/13	M	1953	60	Traditional media. Use of the internet to follow and gain more information in relation to his hobby.	Skilled job	village
Vlasta	21/11/13	F	1955	58	Regular use of traditional media. Very limited engagement online.	Qualified office job	little town
N/A	03/04/13 (not recorded)	M		1950	63	Mainly television, tabloids. Focuses on entertainment and infotainment	Manually working (retired)	village