Struggle for Media Recognition

The self in a media saturated world

Campanella, Bruno

Struggle for Media Recognition

The self in a media saturated world

BRUNO CAMPANELLA[1]

[1] Bruno Campanella (brunocampanella@yahoo.com) holds a PhD in Communication and Culture from Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Brazil. His main interests broadly include the study of digital media cultures, media ethnography, and processes of media power. His work concentrates on practices related to media visibility, and the influence of media in the production of subjectivities. Bruno Campanella is Associate Professor in Media and Cultural Studies at Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil.

Abstract

Using the notion of recognition, this paper reflects on the role of the media in the production of the social requirements necessary for the development of self-confidence, dignity and self-esteem, characteristics necessary for the individual self-realization. The political sociology of recognition, as developed by scholars such as Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth, is often applied to discussions on identity, multiculturalism, and social conflicts. We argue, however, that it is becoming increasingly difficult to talk about recognition without taking into account the fact that our relationships with other subjects and institutions are, to a large extent, traversed by the dispersed power of media. Thus, the ability to recognize 'oneself in the other', a condition for intersubjective recognition, is, in many cases, crossed by everyday practices aimed at broadening the subject's media visibility. In this sense, the desire for media recognition is connected to the emergence of new behavioural, emotional and psychological dispositions that cross the relation of the subject with the media. Possible ramifications of these changes will be examined using Brazil as a reference, a country where different forms of media have a large presence and, at the same time, where a considerable proportion of the population does not experience basic forms of recognition and citizenship.

1   INTRODUCTION

The political sociology of recognition, as developed by scholars such as Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth, is often applied to discussions on identity, multiculturalism, and social conflicts. The essence of their argument is that individuals cannot enjoy self-consciousness and freedom if they are not adequately recognized by others. Using the notion of recognition, I want to reflect upon the role of the media in the production of the social requirements necessary for the development of self-confidence, dignity and self-esteem, characteristics necessary for the individual self-realization. I want to argue that it is becoming increasingly difficult to talk about recognition without taking into account the fact that our relationships with other subjects and institutions are, to a large extent, traversed by the dispersed power of media. Thus, the ability to recognize 'oneself in the other', a condition for intersubjective recognition, is, in many cases, constituted by everyday practices aimed at broadening the subject's media visibility. Possible ramifications of these changes will be examined using Brazil as a reference, a country where different forms of media have a large presence and, at the same time, where a considerable proportion of the population does not experience basic forms of recognition and dignity. By doing this, we hope to help opening up new perspectives for future research articulating media, subjectivity and citizenship.

The dispersed type of power mentioned here is structured on the myth that the media represents 'the centre of the social' (Couldry, 2012). According to Couldry, notions related to the categories of media ('liveness', 'reality', 'media person' etc.) are considered more relevant than those which are not. In other words, media is viewed as a hierarchy-instituting force that divides the world; it embodies the social.

By media, we imply more than the traditional centralized means of communication based on specific channels, like television, magazines and radio. We also make reference to the social media platforms through which people currently organize their lives and build their everyday reality (Van Dijck, 2013; Couldry, 2017). These forms of digital infrastructure are also increasingly employed to establish new power relations based on a thriving economy of visibility and consumption. Some authors argue that the symbolic capital derived from the world of media seems to be advancing into almost every sub-field across the social terrain, and with ever more salience (Driessens, 2012; Campanella, 2014).

This phenomenon can also be observed in more personal experiences connected to celebrity culture. For instance, the opportunity to establish some kind of direct contact with celebrities, whether in the form of a mere tweet reply, or a physical encounter, such as a 'meet & greet' session with a pop singer, is usually regarded as a very special occasion for fans. In many situations, they invest considerable emotional, time and financial resources in order to get some kind of recognition from their favourite media personality. Far from representing an eccentricity, this type of sentiment just shows how media (or media people, in these cases) play such a distinctive role among the personal experiences encountered in contemporary world.

There are, of course, a myriad of reasons for today's public interest in celebrities, as the already relatively established celebrity studies field has demonstrated over the last few decades. However, regardless of the individual motivations behind people's engagement in celebrity-related practices, the established belief in an almost naturalized value placed on having one's existence recognized by celebrity (or by the media) should not be underestimated. The processes responsible for the formation of this moral order are, nonetheless, rather complex. They have broader implications that clearly transcend celebrity culture. These transformations are the result of rearrangements in the production of modern subjectivities, connected to the growing role of media in people's lives.

There is considerable and thought-provoking research available today that examines the interrelationships between media, culture and society. Often appearing under the umbrella concept of 'mediatisation', these works bring important insights that aid in our understanding of how media are articulated across several social fields (e.g. Hjarvard, 2013; Hepp, 2013). The present work engages with this debate, yet from a particular point of departure: the exploration of the concept of media recognition. I believe it can provide a fruitful perspective for understanding how media interfere in the production of subjectivity in different social contexts, not only because the idea of recognition is intimately related to a person's capacity for self-awareness, a fundamental trait of the modern individual, but also because distinct social groups face the 'problem' of recognition differently. In some developing countries such as Brazil, where large segments of the population are deprived of basic forms of recognition, media are deeply rooted in everyday practices that work through the production of identities. Therefore, I would argue that it is increasingly hard to engage in reflecting on address the circumstances in which recognition can occur without taking the role of the media into consideration.

2   Recognition according to Honneth and Taylor

According to Charles Taylor, intersubjective recognition is a relatively recent achievement of western society. In its earliest form, Taylor argues, recognition – an issue related to social requirements for respect and self-esteem, which we will explore in greater detail later – is the result of the development of new modes of discipline anchored in a host of institutions, such as schools, hospitals and workhouses (Taylor, 2001: 159). Self-control, self-responsibility, control of reason over emotion and the progressive interiorization of moral sources are some of the constituting elements of what he calls the punctual self. These are the building blocks of a universal idea of dignity, peculiar to the rational agency that emerges in the 17th century.

Taylor also describes a second type of recognition, one that is particularizing, as opposed to the universalizing form related to the punctual self. The so-called expressive self is the product of an idea that became popular from the late 18th century onwards – heir of the Romantic Movement – whereby each individual is considered to be original and singular in their own way. These individual differences come to be seen as the driving force behind how each one ought to conduct their life

(Taylor, 2001: 375). The source of recognition of the expressive self comes from the perception that the distinctions between individuals are legitimate and should be respected.

Taylor argues that these two types of recognition are key to the formation of modern western identity. Both competing and complementary, they form an ideal of subjectivity that seeks equality in terms of rights and opportunities in life, yet at the same time, represents the struggle for the freedom to be different. At any rate, recognition is seen as a positive drive, something to be desired. According to Taylor (1994: 25),

> *[…] our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.*

Furthermore, for Hegel, one of the first, and possibly the most influential authors to work on this concept, the individual can only attain self-consciousness and achieve subjective freedom if they are recognized by others. Relations of mutual recognition are a pre-condition for self-realization. The German philosopher thinks of the process of recognition as a way to increase the self-consciousness of the subject. According to this perspective, once I am recognized by some other, I get closer to this other and, at the same time, I gain greater awareness about the characteristics and peculiarities of my own identity, which, in turn, also demand recognition. According to Hegel, this process occurs within three practical dimensions: love, law and solidarity. Honneth advances Hegel's proposal by deepening the practical dimensions of recognition.

Honneth proposes, for example, that not only love, but also friendship and family relationships are fundamental to the formation of a basic self-confidence of the subject. These 'primary relationships' are characterized by emotional bonds shared by a relatively small number of individuals, and are fundamental to the development of the subject from an early childhood. In this sense, Honneth seeks in Winnicott a counterpoint to the Freudian structural model of the ego and the id, according to which the psychological evolution of the child results from monological relations between his libidinal drives and his ego-capacity. According to Winnicott, unlike Freud, the process of socialization with the other, especially with the mother, is fundamental in this dynamic. In fact, the different stages of the developmental process of a psychologically healthy child are due to changes in the structure of their reciprocal systems of interaction with the mother and others with whom they have primary relationships (Honneth, 1995: 99). That is, the intersubjective relations of the individual are crucial to the formation of their identity. Even in adulthood, the subject needs to be assured that they are loved by family and friends so that they have the self-confidence necessary to play a productive role in society (ibid.: 104).

The dimension of legal relations also connects to the dynamic of reciprocity that crosses the dimension of love. Only when the subject recognizes oneself in another does she realize that this other person has the same rights and duties as herself. The legal dimension of recognition is necessary for the relationship of self-respect of the individual, which allows their participation in public life. According to Honneth, when the subject is recognized as possessing rights capable of placing her on an equal footing with others, she can fully exercise the capacities that constitute her personality.

The third dimension of recognition described by Honneth is related to the idea of social esteem. Differently from the ideia of self-respect developed from the notion of universal equality between subjects, self-esteem involves the perception that each individual has a unique individuality in relation to the others. That is, characteristics that differentiate one person from another must be culturally valued within society. In this perspective, the necessary conditions for the development of the self-esteem are part of the field of cultural struggles that aim to produce the recognition of previously disregarded groups or individuals. According to Honneth (1995: xvii), a fair and solidary society, which allows the full realization of the individual potential of citizens, is one in which

> *common values would match the concerns of individuals in such a way that no member of society would be denied the opportunity to earn esteem for his or her contribution to the common good.*

As noted earlier, the three dimensions of recognition worked out by Honneth describe different aspects that interfere in the formation of more egalitarian relationships between individuals. Such dynamics depend on institutions of recognition, understood by the sociologist as daily social practices that integrate the intentions of the subjects. Following Hegel's proposal, Honneth argues that individual freedom can only be achieved when subjects share their aspirations with other members of society. This type of sharing occurs through social practices that regulate, for example, intimate forms of relationship, exchanges that cross the market economy, as well as in different modes of deliberation in the public sphere. In a more recent work, Honneth (2014) proposes to reflect on the current relevance of such social practices for the recognition process, considering the transformations that occurred in the last decades in several social fields.

Despite his insightful examination of the moral and communal dimensions of recognition, which are especially important in this discussion due to their two-way form, Honneth does not pay much attention to the role of the media. When mentioned, the media appear only within debates on democracy and the public sphere (see Honneth, 2014: 281-283, as an example). However, the importance played by the means of communication in the development of new behavioral, emotional and psychological dispositions, which has direct consequences in the formation of the self-esteem and self-respect of the contemporary subject, is ignored.

Perhaps because their main research interests lie within political philosophy, neither Honneth nor Taylor investigate media and how they affect different forms of recognition. At the same time, it is not difficult to imagine how such issues might come together. In which ways, for example, is it possible to identify new forms of attribution of self-esteem and self-respect produced by media culture? What types of logics and morale structure the media and how might they influence intersubjective recognition? Do media affect contemporary models of citizenship, and if so, how are these processes configured within different social contexts, wherein individuals experience distinct possibilities of self-realization and recognition? These are just a few of the questions that a careful exploration of the idea of "media recognition" can help to answer.

3   Media recognition: the constitution of an idea

Taylor's perspective on the moral sources of modernity is central not only for understanding what we mean by media recognition, but also for comprehending the influence that different social contexts might have on this type of recognition. For this purpose, I call particular attention to the articulation that Brazilian sociologist Jessé Souza makes of the theories of Charles Taylor and Pierre Bourdieu.

Jessé Souza attempts to develop a sociological theory capable of accounting for what he calls the "social construction of sub-citizenship", a phenomenon that he believes is found mainly in peripheral societies such as Brazil[2]. Souza suggests that, in such societies, the punctual self described by Taylor, product of a process of recognition linked to the universalization of dignity, never takes hold in the deeper and more complete way it has in core western societies. In the latter, the acquisition of the welfare state represented the historical consolidation of a process of pacification and social homogenization that resulted from the spreading of bourgeois ideals responsible for the formation of an emotional economy centered around self-control, self-discipline, flexibility and the valuing of reason. Far from constituting a fortunate historical coincidence, this change was actively and consciously wrought over the course of several centuries[3]. According to Souza, this slowly-maturing process of the creation of a "social imaginary" never occurred in countries such as Brazil where, until the late 19th century, the economy was based on the labor of a vast population of slaves who were never recognized as individuals worthy of freedom. In this type of society, the processes that were necessary for the adoption of the psychosocial requisites of the punctual self were historically absent,

---

[2] By peripheral society, Souza refers to societies which were not constituted as complex societies through the processes of western rationalization. On the opposite, peripheral societies received the influx of a material and symbolic culture from western countries such as the UK, the USA and France, marked by a dynamism and vigour which didn't leave much space for reaction or some kind of compromise (Souza, 2003: 96).

[3] As an example, Souza sites the English poor Laws, the great Awakenings, which take place during the 18th and 19th centuries in the United States, and other similar processes occurring in France.

at least until the 20th century. In short, universalizing forms of recognition linked to the idea of a basic dignity shared by all strata of society never took root in the peripheral Latin American societies.

The reasons for this situation are complex, and it is beyond the scope of this paper to probe into them. Evidently, the consolidation of a moral model of the punctual self in developed western societies does not mean that the disputes surrounding it have become extinct. However, to a certain extent, they seem to have shifted to another plane. For Taylor, conflicts surrounding recognition in European and North American countries take place today within the field of culture, linguistics and community, favoring a 'politics of difference' linked to minorities, feminist groups and the politics of multi-culturalism (Taylor, 1994: 25). These struggles occur within a framework that places value on difference, a characteristic of the expressive self.

Pierre Bourdieu makes a decisive contribution to our understanding of the mechanisms that naturalize social difference through structuring structures that act directly on the practical experience of the subject within the cultural field. Yet according to Souza, Bourdieu did not realize the extent to which his analysis of the formation of class habitus was unable to take the different levels of moral learning, which go beyond barriers of social category of this sort, into account. In other words, his analyses of class formation through a system that inscribes evaluative and perceptive structures on different strata of French society are linked to the conditioning influences of life styles and world views. The bodily inscriptions of habitus, as Bourdieu describes them, operate at a cultural level, in the daily life sense of the term, that is, linked to the most trivial choices of daily life including those that are connected to taste. Thus, taste is not something that is inherent to the individual but a marker of class that structures social hierarchies from an early age, through the pre-reflexive and spontaneous practices inscribed on the body itself. Hairstyle, way of speaking and dressing, eating habits, etc. are markers that all of us bear and through which economic inequality is naturalized.

Notwithstanding the forms of social stratification constructed, to a large extent, through practices of daily life linked to the field of culture, Souza argues that Bourdieu presumed, albeit implicitly, the existence of a moral perspective widely accepted by French society of his day, premised on the fundamental equality of subjects. In Souza's view, this meant that in France as well as in other European societies there prevailed a basic respect for the other, regardless of social class and meaning that all were seen as '*useful* members of society, albeit unequal in other dimensions' (Souza, 2003: 176 – emphasis in original). To put it differently, core countries can be characterized by a shared universal level of dignity, fruit of a "long march" that consolidates an equitable moral vision of the individual.

This type of habitus, operating at a moral level and responsible for a fundamental equality presuming that all subjects are useful members of society, is, within Souza's argument, deeply rooted and prior to the habitus that Bourdieu describes. For this reason, the Brazilian sociologist baptizes it as primary habitus. Its configuration is connected to the moral predispositions of a social group or individual

that enables them to be legally[4] or symbolically recognized as full-fledged citizens, able to act as a productive force in society. That is to say, this is the habitus of the punctual self, which, according to Taylor, appeared in the 17th century in the wake of the emergence of the bourgeois institutions that were responsible for ideals of self-discipline and ability to work.

Perhaps the connection between the punctual self and the making of a productive force is the key to understanding the way recognition and media connect. The punctual self, in Souza's view, should not be understood exclusively as a result of a moral view presuming the existence of universal dignity as a source of recognition, particularly in today's world. The productive capacity of an individual – result of the disciplining processes analyzed in depth by Foucault – is a fundamental element for our understanding of the sources of dignity. Put differently, people are not recognized today, in the universal sense of the concept, merely because they are rational agents worthy of dignity. Rather, they are recognized as subjects insofar as they acquire the social and individual requisites that turn them into producing agents within society. In this context, the individual who is linked to the media world (celebrity or not) on the basis of his or her ability to produce a special type of meta-capital connected to public visibility and who acts in different social fields is seen as the model of the producing subject that contemporary society values (Couldry, 2003; Heinich, 2012).

Jessé Souza does not discuss the role of media in the formation of the contemporary punctual self yet does however signal the relevance of certain individual configurations linked to the productive field and necessary for the creation of self-confidence, respect and self-esteem. In Souza's view, the most basic type of recognition in today's world must be thought of in terms of Reinhard Kreckel's concept of the 'ideology of performance' (*Leistungsideologie*). Greatly summarized, Kreckel argues that the notion of the 'full-fledged citizen' (*Vollbürger*), one whom experiences the kind of recognition that allows for self-fulfillment, must possess the three elements that together make up the 'meritocratic triad': position, salary and qualifications. This triad not only serves to legitimate differential access to personal and professional chances in life, but also places the category of 'work' in a fundamental position, enabling the subject to form his or her personal identity completely. The constitution of these capacities are a result of the development of that which Souza refers to as the primary habitus. In Souza's (2001: 170) words,

> [...] the primary habitus is a set of psychosocial predispositions which reflect, within the realm of personality, the presence of an emotional economy and of the cognitive preconditions for a performance that adequately fulfills the demands (variable in time and space) pertaining to the role of producer.

---

[4] When we speak of legal recognition we are not referring only to the description of laws, but to the capacity of the legal system to carry them out. We adopt a perspective similar to Hegel's in which the mere description of laws is not enough to guarantee their application.

The absence of these preconditions makes the comprehensive recognition of the individual difficult, at the same time that it generates the fragility of their social condition. It is for this reason that Souza denominates precarious habitus the 'limit bellow' that of primary habitus (Souza, 2003: 167). The precarious habitus is structured through behavioral, emotional cognitive and even nervous dispositions, as Duarte's work on the "mental" constitution of the urban working classes in Brazil suggests (Duarte, 1986). It restricts the individual's ability to hold a productive role such as the one Kreckel describes. Given the difficulty in building a more concrete distinction between both types of habitus, we could think about it through the idea of inclusion (primary) and exclusion (precarious)[5]. In other words, individuals that don't reflect the presence of the primary habitus can be seen as excluded citizens. Although it may be possible to argue that the existence of large segments of society which are economically and socially excluded is particularly present in developing countries such as Brazil, as a result of complex historical factors (Fernandes, 2008), the growing global demand for flexible, competitive subjects makes the precarious habitus increasingly evident in all societies.

In her analysis of the recent transformations in the capitalist system, Eva Illouz suggests that the identity of the middle classes in western societies has increasingly been acted out through a 'narrative of recognition' (Illouz, 2011: 8). In her perspective, middle class men and women in these societies have built personal and professional relations that mix public and private spheres, distinguished by a type of rationalized and commoditized feeling that is also marked by a desire for self-fulfillment. The process of identity construction, according to Illouz, unfolds more intensely on internet platforms responsible for the construction of a public emotional self that desires recognition and that frequently precedes the construction of private sphere relations. Although the author explores the consequences of such dynamics primarily as they appear through dating sites, this is in fact a broad phenomenon that covers digital media in general.

In their examination of the phenomenon of micro-celebrities and influencers in social media, Hearn and Schoenhoff (2015) also describe the consolidation of an ideal of the productive subject who manages the representation of his private life on the internet. Social media influencers are individuals who seek to capture the attention of followers on platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook, through the careful construction of an 'authentic' persona that is able to produce a visibility capital (Heinich, 2012) easily convertible into economic forms. Similarly, Senft (2012: 346) argues that micro-celebrities may be understood as individuals who make use of practices aimed at 'deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same'. According to Hearn and Schoenhoff, the popularity of influencers and micro-celebrities is the result of profound changes in cultural, media and, most importantly, economic and political fields. The increasing influence of the media in different spheres of daily life, conjugated with the expansion of consumption and the flexibilization of the labor market, has contributed to the

---

[5] I am indebted to Nick Couldry for raising this and other important issues discussed in this working paper.

consolidation of an ideal of the individual who is his own entrepreneur and uses different types of media and social networks to build his personal and professional identity. Far from being a niche phenomenon, media practices associated with micro-celebrities have expanded rapidly in all social strata, as can be seen by the major influence that Youtubers and Instagramers have acquired in recent years[6]. However, unlike what has happened with traditional celebrities who pursued a difficult and often very long route to fame, nowadays there is a prevalent belief that the media world is within everyone's reach.

The expansion of reality shows which has taken place since the late 1990s has contributed significantly to the increased opportunities that ordinary people have to appear in the media, a phenomenon that Turner (2010) has baptized as the 'demotic turn'. Turner argues that the function of the media has changed over the last few decades. More than platforms for representing one's identity, reality shows and personal media have become major constructors of personal identity. Turning to Skegg's (2005) work, Turner (2010: 49-50) argues that reality TV/game-show are traversed by 'grammars of conduct' that function as models for self-management, offered as answers to the public's existential issues. Skeggs' analysis of reality shows such as Wife Swap, Supernanny and What Not to Wear shows how participants coming from the working classes, when exposed to different ethnical contexts, demonstrate attitudes that can be characterized as inflexible and inadequate. Treated as if they were revealing 'bad selves', these participants are portrayed as incapable of showing responsible self-control, result of their diminished cultural resources - for example, in deficit as 'good husbands', 'good mothers' or people who know how to 'dress correctly'. Such programs have a pedagogical character, marked by recommendations of supposedly more appropriate models of subjectivity. This type of identity production described by Skeggs is clearly connected to cultural resources linked to the sphere of life style consumption and taste which, in turn, may be related to the pre-reflexive and spontaneous practices that Bourdieu outlines (and which Souza describes as belonging to the secondary habitus). In other words, such reality shows promote the universalization of a specific system of evaluative and perceptive structures that are not favorable to the working classes. Yet it is also possible to argue that the "grammars of conduct" that are called into question through the content of these television programs are not necessarily connected to the primary habitus described by Souza, or the new demands required for a comprehensive recognition of the individual, necessary if he or she is to become a producing agent who is able to live out his/her own abilities.

The perspective that Andrejevic (2013) adopts in his analysis of the participation of 'ordinary people' in reality shows may be more fruitful for reflections on the role of the media within a contemporary morality that sees the subject as a useful member of society. One of the key aspects of the demotic turn described by Turner is the predisposition found in 'ordinary people' to submit themselves to constant monitoring, whether in reality shows or through social networks. This is a consensual and

---

[6] See: https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/08/13/tecnologia/1502578288_835104.html?id_externo_rsoc=whatsapp

even desired form of surveillance, immersed as it is in discourses on the empowerment of the subject which, in the last analysis, attempt to rationalize a logic that takes the individual as a product to be consumed (Andrejevic, 2003). In other words, the ordinary person's proximity to the media world, both in reality shows and, primarily, through internet social media, is frequently understood as capable of engendering a producer-subject who is, nonetheless, an object of consumption.

The popularization of 'hope labor', a concept developed by Kuehn and Corrigan (2013), can also be understood as a manifestation of this same type of morale that has been taking shape over the last few decades. The authors use the concept to refer to the unpaid activities carried out by people who seek visibility in social networks, blogs and review sites. This type of activity naturalizes the free and voluntary production of online social media contents by individuals who hope that it will garner them future work opportunities. "Hope labor" is connected to a set of principles that place value on people's permanent availability to produce, even during their leisure hours and even if this means that they themselves must become commodities. In this sense, it is a phenomenon that encapsulates very well the uncertainty of labor relations connected to the media world, which amplify the presence of the precarious habitus in society. The recent opening of university programs in Shanghai, China[7] and Recife, Brazil[8], which offer modules on web-video publicity and merchandizing, strategic thinking, oral expression and other such skills that are meant to teach students how to become digital influences, is testimony of these tendencies.

The above-described practices offer clues to the development of a model of subjectivity that shows psycho-social predispositions linked to the formation of a media-based sense of self-consciousness. The ability to recognize oneself in the other, a condition for intersubjective recognition, is increasingly permeated by daily practices aimed at increasing the media visibility of the subject. In this regard, the conditions that individuals need in order to acquire self esteem and be recognized as useful members of society are contingent upon the incorporation of the economic, political and material logics that regulate the infrastructure of communications media. What we refer to as 'media', whether mass or new types of media, are not open spaces where it is possible to achieve what Honneth (2014) calls 'the right to freedom'. Quite the contrary, social media, in particular, operate through opaque strategies that seek to keep people permanently connected in order to maximize economic gains (Skeggs and Yuill, 2016).

A particularly important perspective in this discussion involves the meaning that this model of subjectivity acquires in countries such as Brazil, in which an expressive portion of the population has never been able to enjoy basic egalitarian conditions of citizenship, whether in terms of interpersonal solidarity or with regard to the State. The question becomes even more complicated if we consider

---

[7] http://uk.businessinsider.com/become-internet-famous-with-this-college-degree-2017-6?r=US&IR=T

[8] https://www.tecmundo.com.br/mercado/121105-faculdade-recife-cria-graduacao-digital-influencer.htm

that Brazil is a country that exhibits extremely high rates of media penetration and influence. Television, for example, is a part of over 97% of Brazilian homes, which puts it a notch above refrigerators. In early 2017, Brazil had the fourth highest number of internet users in the world, coming in behind only China, India and the USA (Dossier Internet Usage Worldwide, 2017: 13). For the same period, over 65% of this group, which meant 90 million internet users (Dossier Internet Usage in Brazil, 2017: 29), also used social networks. Even in relative terms, the numbers are impressive. At the end of 2015 (Dossier Internet Usage in Brazil, 2017: 28), the daily average of time that users spent on social networks was 3.3 hours, the second most in the world. It is no coincidence that Brazil, along with the USA, is one of the only two countries in the world that has Youtube Spaces in more than one city (in the Brazilian case, these cities are Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo). Youtube Spaces refer to the large commercial spaces that Youtube has created, to be used for promoting events and workshops that offer broad technical infrastructure and studios in which "the most creative people can learn, connect up and create together"[9]. The whole set up serves the purpose of producing contents meant for dissemination through social networks. A recent study carried out in Brazil involving media consumers from different social strata revealed that two of the three most influential personalities in the country are Youtubers. According to the director of Youtube for Brazil, 'Brazilians are compulsive consumers of video contents'[10]. Our purpose in examining this data is to reflect upon some of the possible impacts of the heavy media presence in societies where the precarious habitus described by Souza prevails.

As we have discussed previously, the most basic form of recognition, connected to the punctual self, seems today to be within reach of those subjects who have access to the set of conditions necessary for the creation of the flexible worker. Within this context, personal identity is able to take shape completely only for those subjects who bring together the psycho-social, cognitive and emotional resources needed to play the role of producer. Similarly, meritocratic discourse plays an important role in the formation of a social system that naturalizes the idea that such conditions are necessary if the subject is to have access to basic dignity. This may be possible, since meritocratic discourse is based on the promise that the opportunities needed in order for someone to be able to reach his or her potential and goals in life, regardless of the conditions that he or she is born into, are equally available to all. In theory, talent and effort are what count. However, although this promise is a myth that, in the last analysis, helps to legitimate a system of low social mobility (Piketty, 2014; Littler, 2017), it does create the possibility to devise public policies, such as affirmative action or for basic income distribution, that are meant to increase opportunities for the most disadvantaged segments of society.

---

[9] https://www.youtube.com/yt/space/

[10] https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/08/13/tecnologia/1502578288_835104.html

Nonetheless, such situations become more problematic when we take into account the place that media have been occupying in the shaping of individuals' self-confidence and sense of respect. Intersubjective recognition becomes contingent on practices that presuppose continuous efforts to garner media visibility. Even more important than content-production through social media or television participation, these practices are premised, albeit implicitly, on the producer as object of consumption. The increasing use of social media within contemporary dynamics of sociability, for example, is accompanied by the deepening of an 'economy of attention' (Goldhaber, 1997), within which social relations, interests and institutional affiliations become commodities in a matter of milliseconds, by means of obscure algorithms.

4   Conclusion

Recent transformations in processes of intersubjective recognition seem to restrict even more the possibilities for self-fulfillment among social groups who are obliged to live in conditions that, following Souza's approach, we can refer to as "sub-citizenship" (Souza, 2003: 181). The importance that the media have acquired in the daily lives of people in developing countries, as shown by the data on the use of social media in Brazil, threatens to redirect conflicts that have sought to strengthen feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem in certain portions of society. The path for socially marginalized groups to achieve basic, universalized dignity strays further and further from the traditional modes of struggle to become useful members of society. Instead, the psychological and behavioral predispositions that are needed in order to develop productive capacities are currently directed toward new moral models that demand the subject's ability to create a type of media visibility which, in turn, becomes a product to be consumed.

For reasons that are worthy of deeper investigation, certain peripheral societies such as Brazil seem to be more than ready to throw themselves into social practices connected to media-based moral models. We can speculate, for example, that the considerable symbolic meta-capital acquired by the media in this type of society conjugates with the lack of basic, universalized principles of citizenship, transforming the search for "media recognition" into a sort of "fast track" toward a sense of inclusion that is supposedly able to provide self-esteem. One of the possible consequences of this phenomenon lies in its inability to resolve the problem of symbolic and material inequality that underprivileged strata of these societies experience, albeit providing the ambiguous sensation that the type of recognition that is connected to the media world is at least partially able to carry out such a task. Furthermore, it produces the risk of 'self-reification', flowing from practices that implicitly demand the commodification of the individual himself. In Honneth's words, 'the more a subject is exposed to demands for self-portrayal, the more he will tend to experience all of his desires and intensions as arbitrary manipulable things' (Honneth, 2008: 83).

The self-reifying social practices that Honneth mentions reflect the economic interests of major corporations that are often obscured within myths linked to the alleged 'democratization of the public

sphere', 'empowerment of the individual' or the production of something that is generically referred to as "collective intelligence." Put in other terms, it is suggested that these abilities are unable to integrate individual's intentions from the perspective of the other, with the perspective of weakening struggles for the right to freedom, particularly within contexts in which the most basic forms of recognition have not yet been stabilized.

5   REFERENCES

Andrejevic, M. (2003) *Reality TV: the work of being watched*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefi eld Publishers, Inc.

Campanella, B. (2014) Celebridade, engajamento humanitário e a formação do capital solidário. *Revista Famecos* 21(2): 721-41.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Couldry, N. (2003) Media meta-capital: extending the range of Bourdieu's field theory. *Theory and Society* 32 (5-6): 653-77.

Couldry, N. (2012) *Media, Society, World: Social theory and digital media practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Driessens, O. (2012) The celebritization of society and culture: Understanding the structural dynamics of celebrity culture. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16(6): 1-17.

Duarte, L. F. (1986) *Da vida nervosa das classes trabalhadoras urbanas*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor Ltda.

Fernandes, F. (2008) *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes*. Rio de Janeiro.

Goldhaber, M. (1997) The attention economy and the Net. *First Monday* 2(4): http://firstmonday.org/article/view/519/440

Hjarvard, S. (2013) *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*. London: Routledge.

Hearn, A. and Shoenhoff, S. (2016) From celebrity to influencer: tracing the diffusion of celebrity value across the data stream, pp. 194-211 in P.D. Marshall and S. Redmond (Eds) *A Companion to Celebrity*. London: John Wiley & Sons.

Heinich, N. (2012) *De la Visibilité: Excellence et singularité en régime médiatique*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.

Hepp, A. (2013) *Cultures of mediatization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Honneth, A. (2003) *Luta por peconhecimento: A gramática moral dos conflitos sociais*. São Paulo: Editora 34.

Honneth, A. (2014) *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Honneth, A. and Buttler, J. (2008) *Reification: a new look at an old idea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Illouz, E. (2011) *O amor nos tempos de capitalismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor Ltda.

Kuehn, K. and Corrigan, T. (2013) Hope Labor: The Role of Employment Prospects in Online Social Production. *The Political Economy of Communication* 1(1): 9–25.

Littler, J. (2016) *Against Meritocracy: Culture, power and myths of mobility*. London: Routledge.

Piketty, T. (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Senft, T. (2012) Microcelebrity and the Branded Self, pp. 346-54 in: J. Hartley, J. Burgess, and A. BRUNS (Eds) *Blackwell Companion to New Media Dynamics*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Skeggs, B. (2005) *The making of class and gender through visualizing moral subject formations*, *Sociology* 39 (5): 965–82.

Skeggs, B. and Yuill, S. (2016) Capital experimentation with person/a formation: how Facebook's monetization refigures the relationship between property, personhood and protest. *Information, Communication & Society* 19(3): 380-96.

Souza, J. (2003) *A construção social da subcidadania: para uma sociologia política da modernidade periférica*. Belo Horizonte: Editora da UFMG.

Taylor, C. (1994) *Multiculturalism*. Princeton, NJ. Princeton University Press.

Taylor, C. (2001) *Sources of the self: the making of modern identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Turner, G. (2010) *Ordinary people and the media: The demotic turn*. Sage: London.

Van Dijck, J. (2013) *The culture of connectivity: a critical history of social media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

6   FURTHER REFERENCES

Dossier Internet Usage in Brazil, Satista. Available at: https://www.statista.com/study/22625/internet-usage-in-brazil-statista-dossier/

Dossier Internet Usage Worldwide, Satista. Available at: https://www.statista.com/study/12322/global-internet-usage-statista-dossier/

Media@LSE Working Paper Series

Media@LSE Working Paper Series will:

Present high quality research and writing (including research in-progress) to a wide audience of academics, policy-makers and commercial/media organisations.

Set the agenda in the broad field of media and communication studies.

Stimulate and inform debate and policy. All papers will be published electronically as PDF files, subject to review and approval by the Editors and will be given an ISSN.

An advantage of the series is a quick turnaround between submission and publication. Authors retain copyright, and publication here does not preclude the subsequent development of the paper for publication elsewhere.

The Editor of the series is Bart Cammaerts. The Deputy Editors are Nick Anstead and Richard Stupart. The editorial board is made up of other LSE academics and friends of Media@LSE with a wide range of interests in information and communication technologies, the media and communications from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (including economics, geography, law, politics, sociology, politics and information systems, cultural, gender and development studies).

Notes for contributors:

Contributors are encouraged to submit papers that address the social, political, economic and cultural context of the media and communication, including their forms, institutions, audiences and experiences, and their global, national, regional and local development. Papers addressing any of the themes mentioned below are welcome, but other themes related to media and communication are also acceptable:

Communication and Difference	Mediation and Resistance
Globalisation and Comparative Studies	Media and Identity
Innovation, Governance and Policy	Media and New Media Literacies
Democracy, Politics and Journalism Ethics	The Cultural Economy

Contributions are welcomed from academics and PhD students. In the Autumn Term we also invite selected Master's students from the preceding year to submit their dissertations which will be hosted in a separate part of this site as 'dissertations' rather than as Working Papers. Contributors should bear in mind when they are preparing their paper that it will be read online.

Papers should conform to the following format:

6,000-10,000 words (excluding bibliography, including footnotes)

150-200 word abstract

Headings and sub-headings are encouraged

The Harvard system of referencing should be used

Papers should be prepared as a Word file

Graphs, pictures and tables should be included as appropriate in the same file as the paper

The paper should be sent by email to Bart Cammaerts (b.cammaerts@lse.ac.uk), the editor of the Media@LSE Working Paper Series.