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EDUCATIONAL POSSIBILITIES OF MEDIA-BASED PUBLIC DISCUSSION

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE GIVENNESS OF OTHERS

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A phenomenological-philosophical analysis of the givenness of others

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Abstract
This phenomenological-philosophical study investigates the informal educational possibilities of media-based public discussion by analyzing the givenness of others in such discussions. The dissertation consists of three independently published articles investigating (a) the genuineness of the empathic experience in media-based public discussions as a condition for learning by the discussion, (b) the ways the affectivity of others in media-based public discussions impacts changes in the subject’s sense-making, and (c) the possibilities of and challenges to media-based public dialogue due to differences in the “homeworlds” of the participants. The study utilizes classical phenomenological analyses of empathy, affectivity, and the co-relative concepts of the “homeworld” and the “alienworld” provided by Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein, together with insights about social phenomena provided by Alfred Schütz.

The main question addressed in this dissertation is how others are given to the subject in the experience of media-based public discussions and its implications for the informal educational possibilities of these discussions. In the three articles, I present the following arguments: (1) Media-based communication does not necessarily hinder a genuine empathic experience and thus the possibility to learn from media-based communication. (2) The affectivity of others’ communicative expressions is essentially a relation between the subject and the object, which is historically constitutive of the changes in sense-making. (3) Within a given society, the invisibility of the differences in “homeworlds” of the members of the society may challenge the possibilities of media-based public dialogue.

Based on the three articles, I conclude that in media-based public discussions, both mediality and publicness are constitutive of the givenness of others in the subject’s experience of these discussions. However, it is publicness that is decisive in the particular social context others appear to the subject. Accordingly, I conclude that out of the three informal educational situations investigated in this dissertation, the most meaningful in the context of media-based public discussions is public dialogue. However, no educational situation provides a panacea to the problems of media-based public discussions.

Keywords: affectivity, empathy, phenomenology, plurality, public discussion
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Tiivistelmä

Väitöstutkimukseni selvittää mediapohjaisen julkisen keskustelun informaaleja kasvatuksellisia mahdollisuuksia. Tutkimus keskittyy julkisen keskustelun kokemukselliseen ytimeen, eli koke-mukseen toisista keskustelijoista ja seuraaista. Työn metodi on fenomenologis-filosofinen.

Tämä väitöskirja koostuu kolmesta itsenäisestä, toisiinsa liittyvästä artikkelista. Näiden artikkelien aiheina ovat (a) aidon empaattisen koke-mukseen sekä toisilta oppimisen mahdollisuuksid mediapohjaisessa julkisessa keskustelussa, (b) affektiivisuuden rooli merkitysten muutoksessa mediapohjaisen julkisen keskustelun myötä, ja (c) osallistujien ”kotimaailmojen” kokemusten erojen tuomat haasteet. Tutkimuksessa on käytetty Edmund Husserlin, Edith Steinin ja Alfred Schützin empatian, affektiivisuuden ja ”kotimaailman” sekä ”vierasmaailman” analyysia.

Tutkimuskysymykseni on, miten toiset ovat annettuja subjektin kokemuksessa mediapohjaisesta julkisesta keskustelusta ja mitkä tämän annettuuden tapojen seuraukset ovat julkisen keskustelun informaaleille kasvatukseellisille mahdollisuuksille. Vastaan tutkimuskysymykseen kolmessa artikkelissa kolmella toisillaan seuraavalla argumentilla: (1) Mediapohjainen kommunikaatio ei välttämättä estä aitoa empaattista kokemusta ja siten mahdollisuutta oppia toisilta mediapohjaisessa kommunikaatiossa. (2) Puheenvuorojen affektiivisuus on olemuksellisesti yhteyttä subjektin ja objektin välillä, mikä konstituoimaa merkityksen muutoksen kokemusta historiallisesti. (3) Yhteiskunnan jäsenten ymmärtämättömyys ”kotimaailmajojen” välisistä eroista sekä toisaalta toisiin sosiaalisiin ympäristöihin kuuluvien jäsenten yksilöllisyystä haastavat julkisen dialogin mahdollisuutta väärinymmärryksen ja stereotypi-pittelyn muodossa.

Johtopäätökseni on, että mediapohjaisissa julkisissa keskusteluissa toisten annettuuteen vai-kuttavat olemaisesti sekä mediaalisuus että julkisuus. Mediaalisuus mahdollistaa useita erilaisia sosiaalisia tilanteita, kun taas julkisuus konstituoi juuri tietynlaisen yhteiskunnallisen kontekst-tin, jossa toiset ovat annettuja subjektiin kokemuksessa. Tähän perustuen väitän, että kolmesta informaallista kasvatuksellisesta tilanteesta (oppimisesta, merkityksen muutoksesta ja dialogista) dialogi on ilmiöön mielekkäin julkisen keskustelun kontekstissa.

Asiasanat: affektiivisuus, empatia, fenomenologia, julkinen keskustelu, pluralismi
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1 Introduction

A great part of public life in the 21st century consists of media-based public communication. Public discussion is elementary in a functioning society: By following and participating in the discussions in the public sphere, the members of the society may form political views and take stands on social and political issues in the society. As through the discussions, one may gain novel insights and reflectively come to relate to the surrounding world in a new manner, media-based public discussions can be viewed as potentially informal-educational situations.

As the 21st century has progressed, views of media-based public discussions have become increasingly less optimistic. Whereas especially digital media were viewed from the early 2000s to the 2010s as expanding and improving democracy (e.g., Feenberg, 2011; Papacharissi, 2004, 2014), public and scholarly discussions in the 2020s have turned their attention to the challenges posed by various digital media to democratic societies due to their problematic applications and lack of organizational transparency (e.g., Bradshaw & Howard, 2019; Howard, 2020; Shahbaz & Funk, 2019). Simultaneously, also other media, such as television, have been investigated as problematic to democracy (e.g., Mutz, 2015). However, despite the potential and actual problems of the media-based public sphere in the 21st century, digital media especially are still argued to have tremendous potential for civic action and community building, as they have provided a communicative platform for the expression and dissemination of the previously unheard voices of underrepresented groups (see Kleis Nielsen & Fletcher, 2020; Mounk, 2018; Sauri, 2020).

To better understand the potential of media-based public discussions, i.e., ungoverned open and free responsive exchanges of political and societal views in various public and quasi-public media, I philosophically investigated the informal educational possibilities of media-based public discussions by analyzing the givenness of others in the experiences of such discussions. This was accomplished by studying three phenomena constitutive of the appearance of others to the subject in media-based public discussions: empathy, affectivity, and plurality from the first-person perspective. Toward this end, classical phenomenological analyses of empathy, affectivity, and the co-relative concepts of the “homeworld” and the “alienworld” provided by Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein, together with insights into social phenomena provided by Alfred Schütz, were conducted and applied to arguments concerning contemporary media-based public discussions. Further, I re-
thought the phenomena of sociality and communication they articulated in their works under conditions specific to the 21st century.

Concerned with the possibilities of media-based public discussions, the philosophical motivation driving this study was to identify an accurate expression of the experiences of my generation: the confusing, vague, rapid, and highly emotional flow of media-based public discussions in our societies. Thereby, this dissertation addresses wider problematics of the contemporary democratic society from a novel angle: perceiving informal educational possibilities as a remedy to the much-emphasized problems inherent to the 21st century public realm (e.g., Feenberg, 2017; Mutz, 2015; Persily & Tucker, 2020). While the problems of public discussions and their thematization theoretically exhibit great variation, these problems are often identified within the empirical research of the 21st century as hate speech, political polarization, misinformation, and user manipulation, especially in digital media (e.g., Barberá, 2020; Crockett, 2017; Guess & Lyons, 2020; Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2019; Persily & Tucker, 2020; Sunstein, 2018).

In contrast to the typical analytical outcomes of these empirical studies, an analysis of the experiential conditions of the informal educational possibilities of media-based public discussions yields broader and deeper insights into several phenomena: (a) empathy as a condition of the possibility for understanding others and thereby also a condition of possibility for learning from interactions with others; (b) affectivity as a condition of the possibility of turning one’s attention to and making sense of others’ contributions and their content; and (c) experiencing a “homeworld,” in contrast to an “alienworld,” as a condition of possibility to perceive the plural public sphere from an individual subject’s point of view. On the basis of these foundational structural features, the main topics of the three separate analyses included in and comprising this investigation are the following: (a) the genuineness of media-based empathic experiences as a condition of the possibility to learn from media-based public discussions; (b) affectivity of objects in media-based public discussions as a condition of the possibility of changes in sense-making of objects under or related to the discussions; and (c) acknowledging one’s “homeworld” as one’s point of view in contrast to what appears as an “alienworld” as a condition of the possibility to engage in public dialogue by media.

The main object of investigation in this study was the givenness of others in media-based public discussions as experienced, as a condition of the possibility of informal educational situations in these discussions. Accordingly, the main research question addressed in this study was how others are given to the subject in media-based public discussions and the implications of their givenness for the particular
informal educational possibilities of these discussions. The motivation for formulating and investigating this question was that the givenness of others is at the very heart of the experience of media-based public discussions. It is we, as members of our societies, who make up the discussions by our communication with each other.

For the investigation, I chose to draw from and utilize classical phenomenology. By this, I mean Husserl’s investigations of the conditions of experiential intersubjectivity and sociality as well as the investigations of some of his most innovative followers and critics, most importantly Stein and Schütz. Moreover, I also drew from the works of contemporary phenomenologists, employing their explications, interpretations, and applications of the original Husserlian and Steinian sources for my own argument. I chose this methodological and conceptual framework for three main reasons. First, in their precision and detail, the classical phenomenological works and their contemporary explications and elaborations provide deep and manifold descriptive investigations of the constitution of our experiences of other persons, of affectivity, and of social-cultural differences. Although the emphasis in their analyses is on the perspective of the experiencing subject, the subject is studied in relation to other experiencing subjects. Hence, these works provide useful tools for investigating empathic and affective experiences in a social-cultural-historical context, such as media-based public discussions. Second, contemporary philosophical discussions about the problems concerning the act of communicating by media often take place within the phenomenological framework strongly relying on the classical phenomenological analyses. Authors such as Dreyfus (2008), Friesen (2014a, 2014b), Fuchs (2014), and Staehler (2014) have made important contributions in this regard (see also Osler, 2020; Svenaeus, 2021; Ward, 2018). These arguments provided a good starting point for the present investigation. Third, the classical phenomenological framework explicitly brackets empirical questions concerning the causes of the investigated phenomena and thus provides the opportunity to describe and analyze the objects of these phenomena as they are experienced by the engaged subject independent of causes and effects not present in the experience. I will explain this at length in Sub-chapter 2.4.

This investigation comprised a thematization, description, and preliminary analysis of a relatively novel phenomenon and, as such, aimed to provide a basis for multiple avenues of future inquiry. By examining the conditions of informal educational possibilities as they are experienced, a novel contribution was made to research on both the possibilities of media-based public discussions and the field
of contemporary phenomenology. The possibilities of media-based public discussions have not yet been exhaustively investigated via the methods and approaches of classical phenomenology. Thereby, the current investigation also sought to refute the view that classical Husserlian and post-Husserlian phenomenology are, as Steinbock (1995) repeats the allegation, “deaf to the question of history and to its own place in the historical context; it vitiates otherness and the social world; it is unable to treat the political life, ethics, gender, ecology, and so forth” (p. 2; see also Aldea et al., in press). Thus, the research setting itself was among the results of the present investigation, demonstrating that classical phenomenology can be used to analyze the contemporary phenomenon of media-based public discussion, and that it can do so from an educational angle—a notable methodological achievement.

Besides contributing to phenomenology and the theory of public discussion, this study also added to the educational-philosophical discussion of informal education and, more specifically, to discourses around classical phenomenology. This latter field of philosophy of education includes, among others, the following specialized approaches: the discourse of learning-as-experience, utilizing especially the works of Husserl (Buck, 1989; Friesen & Kraus, 2019; Meyer-Drawe, 2008), the related idea of learning as an embodied situation (Dreyfus, 2008; Maiese, 2017), and the discussion of the possibilities of learning by media, utilizing the works of both Husserl and Heidegger (see Dreyfus, 2008; Friesen, 2014a, 2014b) or otherwise drawing from Merleau-Ponty (Ward, 2018; see also Brinkmann & Friesen, 2018). What the current investigation adds to the educational-philosophical field that utilizes classical phenomenology is the identification of informal educational possibilities in our already existing everyday situations, as these possibilities are embedded in these situations.

It is notable that contemporary phenomenology and phenomenological inquiries of education developed separately and without many mutual discussions. This is despite the fact that some philosophers of education utilize phenomenological concepts and results and some also execute phenomenological inquiries into education-related topics. Moreover, phenomenologists of intersubjectivity and sociality and phenomenological philosophers of education might even discuss the same topics—such as personal development, learning, and communication—but without addressing one another. For instance, in the phenomenology of education, Friesen (2014a) has investigated media-based communication, as has Fuchs (2014) within the phenomenology of empathy, without mutual discussion. Similarly, Howell (2011) has explored learning by
drawing from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty in the frame of classical phenomenology, without referencing Meyer-Drawe’s (2008) work on the same topic. This dissertation thus seeks to bridge this gap by integrating these two fields.

This dissertation consists of three topically related but independently published original articles, each addressing one of the investigated phenomena related to the givenness of others in media-based public discussions and one particular informal educational possibility related to these discussions. Article I addresses the question of a genuine empathic experience in media and the possibility of learning from media-based public discussions; Article II addresses the impact of affectivity of others on the change in sense-making in media-based public discussions; and Article III addresses the challenges that the differences in our homeworlds might introduce to public dialogue.

Based on the original articles, this dissertation includes, roughly put, the following descriptive argument, presented in more detail in Chapter 4: On the basis of Steinian investigations of empathetic encounters, media-based communication is not necessarily any less genuine or real than encountering others face to face. This is because the constituents of empathy, as identified by Husserl and Stein, can be present in media-based communication. Thus, mediated communication and discussion as such should not hinder learning through discussion or other communicative informal educational situations. Following the Husserlian-Steinian description of affectivity, the dissertation argues that others’ contributions in media-based public discussions affect us and that, over time, the sedimentation of these affects are constitutive in the alteration of our sense of particular objects under or related to the discussions. In lived worldly situations such as the media-based public discussion, affectivity is context-related. Within a given society, there may be multiple cultures, subcultures, and social and ethnic groups and thus different perceptions among members of the society concerning what is “normal” or familiar/unfamiliar. That is, the dissertation argues, within a society, there may exist multiple different experiences of what Husserl called the “homeworld.” These different “homeworld” experiences, however, may not be evident when communicating on public media platforms, thereby potentially challenging the informal educational possibilities of media-based public discussions.

Based on the three original articles outlined above, I will conclude, in Chapter 5, that, in the experience of media-based public discussions, both mediality as the form of communication and publicness as its nature have a constitutive role in how others are given in the subject’s experience of these discussions. Through mediated communication, the other is given and is affective not as a directly perceived lived
body but rather as an expression, as an indication thereof—verbal, pictorial (as expressive), and/or textual. However, it is publicness that constitutes the givenness of others in this context in a particular way, appearing publicly not simply as unique individuals in their own right but also as representations of societal standpoints, social groups, “us” or “them,” or identities, further impacting how the others and their expressions affect the subject. Based on the characteristics of media-based public discussion, I will conclude that of the three informal educational situations—learning through discussion, change in sense-making, dialogue—through which I studied the informal educational possibilities of media-based public discussions, the most meaningful is public dialogue. However, no particular educational situation provides a panacea to the problems posed by media-based public discussions because of the very attributes of the discussions themselves: informal, unorganized, and open to all who wish to participate.

To facilitate the visions of the present and the future we wish to have, we need to explicate our possibilities. The possibilities of media-based public discussions are also the possibilities of democracy, defined here as a particular social and/or societal arrangement—not a mere governmental form—functioning according to ideals of equality and plurality, where the citizens/participants possess the ultimate authority (see Dewey, 1927; Dryzek, 2005; Mouffe, 2000) (“societal” as pertaining to aspects of a society—in contrast to “social,” which concerns social relations; for details on the concept of democracy, see Sub-chapter 6.1). Public discussions, as open and free spaces for exchange, are, by definition, democratic spaces, as there are no pre-set goals or authorities governing the discussions, and there are no schematic restrictions on who can participate in the discussions (see Habermas, 1964/1974). A society or an international organization (such as the European Union) that permits spaces for public discussions thus also allows democratic spaces (see Lefort, 1988). Put another way, a society would not be democratic without the possibility for open discussions of societal matters in the public sphere, where views can be freely exchanged, identities can be fully expressed, and political opinions can be both formed and disseminated (e.g., Ercan & Dryzek, 2015; Marchart, 2018).

It should be noted that even though a normative hypothesis was postulated at the beginning of the investigation—that the informal educational possibilities of media-based public discussions are positive and thus preferable—the argument itself is not prescriptive. That is, the aim of the argument was not to state that members of society should learn from public discussions or lead a public dialogue. On the contrary, the goal was to investigate the informal educational possibilities
in a descriptive manner by scrutinizing the givenness of others in media-based public discussions. As I will demonstrate in the concluding chapter, however, the actualization of the educational possibilities of media-based public discussions does not automatically exclude the problems associated with such discussions, such as political polarization.

In the following chapters, I will first present the structure of the study, including the definitions and characterizations of media-based public discussion (see Sub-chapter 2.1), the informal educational angle (see Sub-chapter 2.2), the research questions (see Sub-chapter 2.3), the methodology, and the source literature (see Sub-chapter 2.4). I will then present the theoretical framework of the study, which was constructed from relevant elements of the works of Husserl, Stein, and Schütz (see Chapter 3). Thereafter, I will review the original articles comprising this dissertation with respect to the construction of the argument (see Chapter 4). Next, I will propose my conclusions (see Chapter 5). Lastly, I will remark on the contributions of the dissertation (see Chapter 6), the limits of the study on which the dissertation was based (see Sub-chapter 7.1), and avenues for future research (see Sub-chapter 7.2).
2 Structure of the study: From a political-philosophical theme to questions in classical phenomenology

The study began with questions about the informal educational possibilities of media-based public discussions and proceeded to an exploration of the experiential conditions of these possibilities. Media-based public discussion remained the thematic object of the investigation in contrast to the operative concepts of empathy, affectivity, and homeworld/alienworld presented in Chapter 3, by which the givenness of others in media-based public discussions were investigated. In the following, I will present (a) the definition and characterization of media-based public discussion, (b) the informal educational angle of this study, (c) the research questions, and (d) the phenomenological-philosophical method and the classical phenomenological source literature of the study. This chapter of the summary of the dissertation thus clarifies and explicates the central concepts and methods crucial to interrelating the three abovementioned research articles and their common theoretical and methodological basis.

2.1 Defining media-based public discussion

Based on the scholarly literature of public discussion and 21st century media, I define media-based public discussions as those ungoverned open and free responsive exchanges of political and societal views in various public and quasi-public media—in principle, any media that are accessible to all—in which reciprocity in terms of contributions occurs not between particular persons but instead between “all” of those who actually or potentially participate in these discussions (see Badouard et al., 2016; Habermas, 1964/1974). Such discussions are not limited to one or even a few platforms but rather encompass multiple sources from which contributions to particular topics can be derived. As such, contemporary media-based public discussions are socially and temporally vast, incorporating contributions from multiple elements of society and embracing a diversity of viewpoints and myriad expressions ranging from rational arguments to emotional appeals and continuing unabated for indefinite periods of time. As discussions, the contributions must still, more or less clearly, respond to other contributions presented on the topic, as otherwise the activity is something other
than discussion (Bridges, 1979) (for a detailed discussion of the concept of “discussion,” see Sub-chapter 6.2).

Conceptually separated from private and professional life on the one hand, and from government offices on the other, public discussions are, in general, as Habermas classically defined them, open and free to all in the civic sphere (Habermas, 1964/1974). Public discussions serve as an arena in which members of society can freely discuss public matters and in which general opinions, values, and political actions in society can be formed and altered. Accordingly, such discussions exclude topics that are private or professional—following, for a moment, Arendt’s (1958/1998) argument that the public does not allow intimacy. Thus, relations of love and friendship, when expressed in public, cease to be private or professionally related and instead come to represent something wider, becoming part of the societal context. While Habermas’s definition can also be read as a prescriptive ideal, together with definitions of publicness as visibility to all and as a sphere between private/professional life and the government (see also Arendt, 1958/1998), openness and free participation for all members of the public sphere also become, in principle, descriptive characteristics of public discussion. These attributes are, however, “light” in the sense that, put otherwise, a public discussion would not be public if some members of society were, per se, excluded from participation or if the discussion were not, in principle, visible to all.

In being open to all, the public sphere is necessarily plural. By “plurality,” I mean both (a) the Arendtian idea of plurality as the plurality of perspectives on something visible to all, from the viewpoint of each person (see Arendt, 1958/1998)2 and (b) the idea of plurality as a plurality of opinions, values, etc.,

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1 Concerning public matters, public discussion is an arena of politics and thus a topic of political philosophy. The “political” here means, distinct from the “social,” as Loidolt (2018) explicates it, the non-neutrality of the “we.” Or, put another way, the “political” can be distinguished from the merely technical in that it is not based on mere practical terms but also on values and/or interests. One could also describe the political as the organization of our coexistence. It must be noted that while Arendt has been criticized for separating private from public matters, her analysis of the public and the private can also be interpreted as being concerned with the appearance in the phenomenological key (see Loidolt, 2018). The separation of the public and the private does not mean that one should not make private matters public, but instead that when questions concerning something that takes place in the home is expressed to the public, it is no longer individual or private. Following Arendt, though, it might be difficult to argue that the contemporary media sphere actually allows a public sphere, as Arendt found mass media and the mixing of the “social” and the “political” to be problematic in terms of the existence of an actual public sphere (see Arendt, 1958/1998).

2 For Arendt (1958/1998), plurality is quite literally “the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world,” and, as she argued, “we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (pp. 7–8).
provided by deliberative and agonist theories of democracy (e.g., Ercan & Dryzek, 2015; Mouffe, 2005). In other words, the public sphere is constituted by gatherings of people around the same topics (see Loidolt, 2018), not all of whom may share the same values, identities, and political opinions.

In this investigation, media were viewed as the form and the structure of intentional action in which public discussion operates. That is to say, the term “media” was utilized in the sense of the public and quasi-public media, as being accessible to all members of society, or as being accessible after the creation of a user account, the transaction of a decent payment, or something similar. Media-based public discussions are distinguishable insofar as they are mediated by certain communicative tools accessible (at least in principle) to all members of the public sphere (the society, a city, a town, an international unity, etc.). By contrast, public discussions as such are conceived as a broader concept in various forms, such as via media-based platforms or in person. As Habermas (2006) argued, however, public discussion in its contemporary breadth and scope would not be possible without the existence and near-universal accessibility of powerful media platforms. In the 2020s, such platforms potentially also encompass quasi-public social media.

“Media,” therefore, are here broadly defined as communication platforms that transmit our communicative expressions to others via vessels beyond our lived bodies. In this regard, media have a material character by which they are capable of providing particular possibilities of communication in the public sphere. Although this material character can assume a diversity of forms, some materiality is required since only materiality can give the expressed content and form a relative stability and permanence across space and time. In line with Lievrouw (2011), I speak of media both in the technological sense of devices that extend our capacity to communicate and in the relational sense of intercession and communication. Broadly put, media comprise those technologies that extend the human presence over great distances, both temporal and spatial (O’Donohue, 1999, p. 75). For clarity, I conceptually distinguish “the mediate” as something delivered to the subject by means of something other than the lived body—by “media,” as defined here—from “the immediate” as something delivered to the subject by the lived bodies of others in the subject’s presence. For this, (without explicating this in the articles) I applied Waldensfels’s analysis (2009), where “mediate” refers to the experience of the other’s absence in communication, which he captures quite well in his somewhat rhetorical question: “What would a medium capable of mediating
the immediate look like?” (p. 110), referring to the essential attribute of absence in media-based communication.\(^3\)

According to definitions of public discussion and the media, “public media” can be defined as those media that are, at least in principle, visible and accessible to anyone who wishes to access their content. Conversely, contributors to such media speak to potentially everyone, to (partially, potentially, more or less) an anonymous audience, without knowing who might receive their contributions to the discussion (Badouard et al., 2016). Therefore, public media can include open social media platforms as well as television channels or newspapers. In the early 2020s, examples of such open social media platforms include Twitter, Instagram (public profiles), YouTube, and public blogs, even though, in current social media (but increasingly in other media as well), not everyone actually views the same content simultaneously. What one does on these media might be seen by anyone—even potentially by everyone. By contrast, online communication apps that only allow communication in closed groups cannot be said to be public media in any sense, as such communication occurs, again, within closed groups. The same holds true for intranets of organizations, school magazines, or (private/work-related) phone calls. It should be noted that defining the public and quasi-public media does not ignore the problems of big media corporations, particularly that their non-transparent algorithms challenge and distort the discussions occurring on their platforms and pervert the public sphere by imposing the interests and power of private companies (see, e.g., Persily & Tucker, 2020).

Accordingly, in this dissertation, “media” cover all possible kinds of public or quasi-public media platforms, both digital and traditional. Different media can be connected and intertwined in various ways. As both Chadwick (2013) and Kupiainen (2013) have argued, the internet as such is not one type of media among others but rather operates as the basis for various media types online and permits their interconnection with each other as well as with media outside the internet. For example, many news media outlets have both online and offline services and/or products—that is, on internet platforms and in print, television, and/or radio broadcasts. Further, the digital aspects of news media can be shared and discussed

\(^3\) To the Husserlian readers: I do not think Husserl’s distinctions between immediate and mediate grounding, or between immediate and mediate evidence (see Husserl, 1976a, §141) to relate to mediate communication, because Husserl discusses the legitimacy of evidence, not the different appearances of worldly objects, especially other persons. Moreover, concerning the concepts of mediation, in philosophical literature, the concept is sometimes used in a wide sense of describing how the world is given to us also in our bodily presence, e.g., the world being mediated to the subject by one’s body, or the other subject being mediated to the “I” by the world.
in other digital media, often social media. Moreover, both media and the public sphere or the publicness have a processual character (Krotz, 2017), with the actual venues functioning as the public sphere being dependent on historical, cultural, and societal contexts and possibly changing from time to time. For these reasons, it is important to discuss “media” as a form of public discussion that might apply to particular platforms that currently exist but also to those that might exist sometime in the future.

The changes generated by modern information technologies—especially the internet—have rendered the conception of the media-based public sphere in the age of the so-called “Web 2.0” ambiguous (see Binder & Oelkers, 2017; Krotz, 2017; Seeliger & Sevignani, 2021). This is despite the fact that the effects of media and information technology on the public sphere have been widely investigated in our societies (e.g., Feenberg, 2017; Mutz, 2015; Papacharissi, 2014; Persily & Tucker, 2020; Sundén & Paasonen, 2020). Within media studies, due to the emergence of the internet and social media, it has been argued that we are witnessing a so-called “new structural transformation of the public sphere” (see, e.g., Binder & Oelkers, 2017; Krotz, 2017; Seeliger & Sevignani, 2021). Together with online media, public spheres have expanded to encompass private lives and individuals (e.g., the ambiguous in-between role of “influencers” as figures who are not quite public but certainly not private) and permeate both international organizations—for instance, the European Union—and individual nations (see Fraser & Nash, 2014). While traditional media were and still are filtered by media organizations and editors, online media have provided platforms for more or less unfiltered expressions by anyone (e.g., Papacharissi, 2014).

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4 This term is a reference to Habermas’s early work The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, 1962), which is a historical-sociological account of the emergence, transformation, and disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere (see also Lippmann, 1922, 1925). The classical picture of the media-based public sphere, as Habermas presents it, includes the idea of the shift from the coffee house discussions of the 19th and early 20th century to mass media arenas open to anyone and permitting the provision of content on political topics from a wide range of individual and collective actors (Habermas, 1962; see also Gerhards, 1998, p. 694; Krotz, 2017). Against this backdrop, the emergence of the internet and related technology, as well as the constellation of interlinked and emergent platforms, functionalities, devices, affordances, and social/cultural resources and relations are viewed as a fundamentally different phenomenon, one which scaffolds human communication in ways never before thought possible via conventional mass media systems (see Binder & Oelkers, 2017; Feenberg, 2011; Lievrouw, 2011).

5 There are, though, several similarities between different media platforms and their affordances in different eras. For example, when reading some of the old newspapers from the beginning of the 20th century in various European countries, one might notice that in some societies, especially local
Due to the changes internet-based media have produced in public discussions, one could go so far as to argue that there is no proper public sphere in the 21st century. This is because the media space has splintered and those media that function as the space for debate are mostly commercial (see Mutz, 2015; Pullinen, 2019). As Kreide (2016) argued, however, despite the problems that have emerged from the widening of media (not just the internet, but other media, too, such as television), the central characteristics attributed to the public sphere by Habermas (1964/1974), such as the openness to follow and participate, are still present in current media-based discussions. One is free to follow these discussions, and due to the expanded possibilities generated by the internet, there are more opportunities for ordinary citizens to participate (this is not all unproblematic, especially when it comes to social media companies, algorithms, misinformation, hate speech, etc.). As Feenberg (2011) argues: “In broadcasting a single source sends out messages to a silent mass audience. Computer networking restores the normal pattern of human communication in which listening and speaking roles alternate rather than being distributed exclusively to one or another interlocutor” (p. 5). The public media are no longer one or a few media outlets, for which a relatively small group produces the content. Instead, the public media have become networks, which also increases democracy of the public discussions, as more voices can be heard.

Hence, the definitive distinction between public and private discussions in media can be made by determining—instead of merely their location—their aim, their potential reach, and their communicative formats and topics (see Badouard et al., 2016). For example, statements made on Twitter by a politician concerning public matters can be considered part of a public discussion as they broach publicly relevant issues and are meant to—and often do—reach a public audience. In stark contrast, a cat video posted publicly to the same platform is not intended to comment on any matter of public concern but only to entertain and is thus not considered part of public discussions. How many people actually view a contribution to a media platform that is, in principle, publicly accessible to anyone is a substantively different question entirely. While there are some clear examples of what belongs to media-based public discussions and what does not, a grey area remains between clearly public and non-public discussions. This might even be characteristic of media-based public discussions as communication in between other areas of life and society, but it simultaneously makes it difficult if not
impossible to clearly demarcate the intended empirical object when speaking of “media-based public discussions.”

Often, exchanges in the public sphere have been discussed in terms of “debate,” not “discussion.” However, thinking about the possibilities of these exchanges in terms of discussion instead of merely debate raises and explicates the possibilities that provide alternatives to hostilities and polarization in public spheres. Debate also can be defined as one kind of a discussion (see Bridges, 1979). In practice, the public sphere might include both, and, as in the case of the empirical object defined above, it might be difficult if not impossible to distinguish between a “debate” and another kind of a “discussion” in concrete situations in the public sphere.

2.2 The informal educational angle

Media-based public discussions are informal situations in which no one is officially responsible for leading or guarding the discussions as a whole, no one is charged with setting goals for the discussions, and no one is considered to be an authority over others in the discussions. This means that the educational possibilities of media-based public discussions must likewise be informal. Thus, in this investigation, I focused on informal educational possibilities rather than any kind of formal or non-formal educational possibilities. Reflecting the scholarly discussions of the media-based public sphere, the particular informal educational situations discussed in this work comprised (a) informal learning by discussion, (b) changes in one’s sense-making, and (c) public dialogue. The term “educational” in this dissertation thus refers to the wide range of themes such as learning, gaining self-security, critical and motivational attitudes, building trust, being disrupted, letting go of the former views, attitudes, or habits, getting motivated, interested or exited, etc., which all may (and often do) occur in our everyday lives.

Within the field of education, educational formats and their corresponding educational situations, actions, and processes are often divided into three categories: formal, non-formal, and informal (e.g., Coombs & Ahmed, 1974). “Formal education” refers to the structured educational and training system otherwise, they would not be educational possibilities of media-based public discussions per se but instead possibilities to, for instance, use media-based public discussions in another situation, such as teaching in class.

7 The term “education” is multifaceted and complex, particularly as it denotes multiple phenomena: academic disciplines, practices, and accidental and informal processes and situations within our everyday lives. By “education,” I refer to these latter processes and situations.
predominant from pre-primary and primary school through to secondary school and on to university (e.g., Coombs, 1976; European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2008, p. 85; Kelava & Žagar, 2014). As a rule, formal education encompasses both general and vocational educational institutions and ultimately leads to the conferral of diplomas, degrees, and other certifications. Especially in Anglophone countries, the term “education” overwhelmingly refers to formal education (see, e.g., Hand & Levinson, 2012). “Non-formal education,” on the other hand, denotes any planned program or educational situation designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside of formal educational settings. More precisely, non-formal education includes, for example, workplace training, training in hobbies, and self-education (see, e.g., Coombs, 1976; Ivanova, 2016; Rogers, 2004). Finally, “informal education” refers to lifelong processes by and through which attitudes, skills, and knowledge are acquired and developed from educational influences and resources in one’s environment and from one’s daily activities and social encounters at work, in the home, among peers, and via news, entertainment, play, etc., without the conscious intention of actually becoming educated in these situations and contexts (see, e.g., Coombs & Ahmed, 1974; Cross, 2007; Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Informal education can be thought to happen to most people throughout their lives. Thus understood, informal education is education in the broadest sense. Such education can be described, as Biesta (2016) characterized it, as an intervention into someone’s life, which involves motivation, thoughtfulness, questioning the views of oneself or others, self-reflection, the acquisition of skills, attitudes, and/or knowledge, and other rather positive changes in the person.  

Conceived under the umbrella term “informal educational,” learning from media-based public discussions, changes in sense-making that occur due to these discussions, and public dialogue are not to be perceived as mere random actions or simple biological occurrences. Rather, these phenomena are social in nature (see

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8 Similar views of education can be found in Bildung, one of the central notions of the modern Western educational tradition, which investigates, roughly speaking, the question of what constitutes an educated and cultivated human being (see Gadamer, 2001; Klafki, 1986; Mollenhauer, 1968). Bildung is often characterized as a process of both personal and cultural maturation and is typically described in English with terms like “cultivation” or “self-cultivation,” “formation,” “self-development,” and “cultural process” (Siljander et al., 2012). As Siljander and Sutinen (2012) characterized the modern-day conception of Bildung, “Bildung is a creative process in which a person, through his or her own actions, shapes and ‘develops’ himself or herself and his or her cultural environment” and “contains the idea of a person’s ‘improvement’ or ‘consummation’; in other words, in the processes of Bildung, a person seeks a more advanced form of life” (pp. 3–4). However, as Bildung and informal education are far from synonymous, I will not discuss Bildung at length here.
Dewey, 1897, 1907, 1916) and embody a process whereby different potentialities are called forth by public discussion. These educational situations and processes may still be spontaneous and/or accidental. In public discussions, participants may not even be aware of their learning, let alone mere changes in how they make sense of something around them, and the dialogue itself may not be thought of in terms of “dialogue” or “educational” by the engaging subjects, but, from their perspective, they may simply be interested in understanding the other subjects.

By “learning,” I mean, simply put, a normatively positive change in the subject’s understanding and affective directedness toward the world (Meyer-Drawe, 2008; see also Maiiese, 2017)\(^9\) and in thinking and action (Dewey, 1910), of which the subject is aware and approves (Marton & Booth, 2018).\(^{10}\) This definition differs from more vague and general definitions that do not take into account normative aspects of the concept of learning, such as the one provided by European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2008): There, learning is defined as “a process by which an individual assimilates information, ideas and values and thus acquires knowledge, know–how, skills and/or competences” (p. 14). Learning certainly also includes these elements, but, according to investigations of learning that include the questioning of one’s earlier positions (Meyer-Drawe, 2008)—also described as disruption—and conceptualize learning as something of which the subject in one way or another approves and considers to be positive in some sense (Marton & Booth, 2018), learning is suggested to be more than mere assimilation. In the context of media-based public discussions, the central kind of learning is learning by discussion, as described here, which occurs based on others’ contributions to the discussion (see Bridges, 1979;\(^9\)\)

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\(^9\) Within the philosophy of education, there is a phenomenological/phenomenology-inspired discourse of learning as an experience, which has been discussed by, for instance, Meyer-Drawe (2008) and Buck (1989): “Only in experience, in its turning back on itself, which at the same time is a change in our capacity to experience, lies the actual educative power of experience” (Buck, 1989, p. 3). However, from the phenomenological perspective, this is an odd discourse, as the whole domain of investigation is experience. An educational situation that is not an experience should therefore be an impossibility. Thus, “learning as experience” seems to be a tautology.

\(^{10}\) This reflectivity is more precisely clarified by Friesen (2021). He argued that moments of learning are understood in terms of the broken expectations and disappointments that Merleau-Ponty sees as unavoidable in experience: “perception brings something new … something [which] can be a slap in the face to all expectation” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, p. 263; quoted in Friesen, 2021). As he argued, such moments can move us from un-self-aware “pre-reflective” experience to experience that is explicitly reflective, meaning that we become differently aware of ourselves, of others, of what we are experiencing as such.
Hand & Levinson, 2012). Moreover, as a part of informal educational processes, learning by media-based public discussions is primarily informal learning, as it transpires while engaging in actions predominantly aimed at something other than learning (see Cross, 2007; Field, 2015; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). As informal and even accidental, such education culminates in changes to one’s understanding that might manifest as, for instance, sudden comprehension, the sense of “getting it,” or the acquisition of vocabulary that helps to explicate one’s political views.

To clarify, in the Article I, I also rely on Dreyfus’s widely referenced theory of learning, most prominently articulated in Mind over Machine: The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986). In this work, they present a five-stage model of learning as the acquisition of types of “know how”—forms of expert but concerned engagement in the world (Feenberg, 2011). These stages begin with close adherence to pre-existing rules or plans, initially confirming rationalist empiricist accounts of mind and knowledge, but, through gradually increased situated awareness, progress to the final stages of “proficiency” or “expertise,” which are characterized by an intuitive grasp of situations based on deep, tacit understanding and by a kind of “ongoing mastery which… cannot be expressed in situation-free, purpose-free terms” (Dreyfus, 1992, p. 250). This model of learning also functions as informal learning and, in my view, is also compatible with the definition of learning provided above. Although this model and the abovementioned definitions of learning and informal learning describe different modes of learning from different perspectives, they are not necessarily mutually contradictory or exclusive.

11 Often, this form of learning is taken to be ideal or at least suitable for almost any educational setting (see Bridges, 1979; Hand & Levinson, 2012), but this idea has also been criticized recently by Drerup and Kauppi (2021).

12 An interesting related point is that for Meyer-Drawe (2008), learning cannot be noticed by the learner at the moment of learning but only afterwards. For her, the moment(s) of learning itself is situated between two moments, the “no longer” and the “not yet.” The learner does not have a preconception of the new ground or a presumption of the change (Roth & Friesen, 2014). According to this view, learning is at the margins of the lived conscious experience, somewhat similar to sleeping or forgetting; the subject cannot be aware of the moment of learning itself, however short the moment between the learning and the realization is. Thus, accidental and informal learning are closely comparable; if all learning is accidental in the sense that one cannot, despite one’s will, force oneself to learn something, but learning occurs somewhere in between reflective moments, either all learning is “accidental,” or “accidental” learning means that which occurs without the subject having intended to learn something. But, this is exactly what constitutes informal learning.

13 As with other texts by Dreyfus (e.g., 2008), this book is framed by a critique of the cognitive and computing sciences and artificial intelligence.
Following the views presented by learning psychologist Marton (2014; see also Marton & Booth, 2018) and the Husserlian philosopher of education Meyer-Drawe (2008), learning is always situated, altering the subject’s perception of the surrounding world. As Marton argued, the learned content is meaningful for the subject, otherwise, it would not be experienced as learned in the sense of defined above, as the learned content is typically related to something else in the subject’s life. Therefore, when one learns something, something else appears differently, too. In the case of learning through media-based public discussions, this would mean that by learning something from the discussions, the subject would come to understand something else differently, too, in the society. As Roth & Friesen (2014) have formulated the pattern, the subject’s lifeworld itself changes. As the subject is always already—to use the Heideggerian phrase—situated in the world, and always already in possession of pre-given assumptions, expectations, and beliefs about the world, the subject presupposes the existing intuitive everyday environment or world (Roth & Friesen, 2014; see Husserl, 1976b, p. 123).

Learning as including the normative attribute of approval can be contrasted with a mere change in one’s sense-making—that is, a change in how an object appears to the subject as meaningful, not necessarily including the aspect of implicit or explicit approval of the change. Sense-making means grasping something as a meaningful part of a larger whole, both reflectively and pre-reflectively, as explicated or implicitly assumed or presupposed. When something does not make sense, we cannot grasp its meaning. In the classical phenomenological framework, sense is related to the Husserlian idea of horizons of understanding, of what one conceives to be possible and meaningful (e.g., Husserl, 1976a). Change in the subject’s sense-making can thus be also viewed as a change in the subject’s understanding of (their or general) possibilities. Change in the subject’s sense-making is something less than learning, especially in the case of pre-reflective sense such as silent presuppositions, but thereby occurring more often than learning, including also, for instance, forgetting or being manipulated.

By “public dialogue,” I mean what Jezierska and Koczanowicz (2015)14 called “radical dialogue” in the public sphere. This is an exchange that is primarily aimed

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14 Jezierska and Koczanowicz (2015) argued that it is rather impossible to speak about dialogue in general. Indeed, we can enumerate and classify a number of distinctive features of the dialogical approach, such as openness to the other, taking into account the perspective of the other, constructing epistemological and methodological categories as emerging from the encounter with the other (Jezierska & Koczanowicz, 2015; see also Hirschkop, 1999). They state that dialogue as a term is tricky in being both a normative and a descriptive concept; dialogue is referred to as a description of existing relations of human beings, but also as a desired state of affairs.
at understanding others as such, at comprehending and/or incorporating their horizons, and not at any sort of consensus about or knowledge acquisition of an object (see also Bakhtin, 1986). Public dialogue differs from both the I–Thou relation and the dialogical Platonic model of gaining knowledge in that it occurs in between members of an open public. As the concept of dialogue always already involves the other subject, the concept of public dialogue involves other subjects as present in the public sphere.

As Evans (2001) argued, on the basis of Dewey’s works, dialogue in this extended sense is essentially characterized by two activities—speaking and active listening—both of which involve the will of the actors to participate. We can thus think of dialogue as not merely aiming at understanding others but, more specifically, as being directed at others on the basis of the explicit motivation and willingness to understand them as who they are; a particular way of turning toward others and what they are expressing and being willing to understand their world, their perspectives, and their origins. To use the Gadamerian terminology, in dialogue, the aim is the fusion of horizons as coming to share meanings, to share ways of sense-making (see Gadamer, 1960)—not to agree, but rather to share meanings of where we are and what we are talking about. This follows the idea shared by many classical phenomenologists (particularly Levinas and Gadamer) that one can never have an objective picture of another’s perspective and what another means but can come to grasp the sense of that of which another is speaking. Since the horizons of individual agents are structurally always open to an indeterminate future and are capable of merging in communicative exchanges, the common meaning-making process is always a dynamic process (Geniusas, 2012).

These three informal educational situations and processes (informal learning by discussion, change in sense-making, public dialogue) provide different perspectives on media-based public discussions. Learning by discussion provides the perspective of an individual attendant and relates to media-based public discussions as a specific kind of learning characteristic to this particular context. Change in sense-making is included in media-based public discussions in ways similar to learning by discussions but also include pre-reflective changes, without noticing changes in how one makes sense of something, as well as those changes one notices but which cannot be defined as learning or maybe even educational.

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15 Bakhtin is among the great theorists of dialogue, but I mention him only briefly here, as many of the later theorists of dialogue have used and further developed his work, and, in the interest of keeping my argument focused, I excluded his work from this dissertation.
such as forgetting or simply losing a skill. Dialogue, in turn, is closely related to
discussion as a setting in which multiple persons are directed at each other’s
expressions and in responding to them, but with a particular kind of directedness
toward the other and thus toward what the other expresses. Dialogue, as one
situation among many, by definition introduces the idea of plurality of perspectives.

I speak here of both educational “situations” and “processes.” This is because,
first, following Meyer-Drawe’s (2008) argumentation, learning is not an action but
a situation and, moreover, one in which we always both gain and lose something
and which alters our relation to the surrounding world to a greater or lesser degree.
We can also view change as a situation common in human life, and dialogue as a
situation that includes multiple persons being directed at each other with the aim of
understanding each other. Second, I contend that these three educational situations
are not static states but, on the contrary, processes in a wide sense of the term, such
that something new, something more, something different occurs due to these
situations. Roughly put, generalizing Meyer-Drawe’s argument of learning to other
educational situations, one gains something, one loses something, one’s relation to
something in the world changes more or less.

2.3 Research questions: Others in media-based public discussions

The core interest of the research in this work were theoretical possibilities. It is
clear that, at the moment, in the 2020s, many media platforms are commercial and
aimed at making profits by collecting user data and selling space for advertisements
at the cost of transparent democratic forms of communication (Franklin Fowler et
al., 2020; see also Friesen, 2010). Could media-based public discussions be
otherwise, have some other character, and serve other ends?

To investigate the informal educational possibilities of media-based
discussions, I inquired into their experiential conditions of possibilities.
Investigating an object as experienced means to take the perspective of the subject,
which in this dissertation means the perspective of the subject who contributes to
or follows the discussions. It is the other subjects and their contributions, as
perceived by the subject, that are central to media-based public discussions as
experienced.

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16 I acknowledge the arguments presented by Levinas about the directedness of the other but, in the
interest of keeping my argument focused, I excluded Levinas’s work from this dissertation.
Thus, the main research object of this study was the givenness of others in media-based public discussions as experienced. I used the term “givenness” in the phenomenological sense, which entails that the givenness of others in media-based public discussions is not to be taken as constructed by the subject, nor are the others actively chosen by the subject or introduced by the subject in the perceptual field. Rather, the others are already there, present in the world as perceived by the subject. The widely accepted thesis among phenomenologists is that, for the other to be given as another subject (sometimes expressed as “the Other” with the capital O), the other must be given not just like an object, but as a subject sharing the world with me while having their own perspective on the world, which is inaccessible to me as the other has it (e.g., Husserl, 1991, V; Staehler, 2008). However, in media-based public discussions, subjects are not given to one another in a straightforward and bodily sense, in “flesh and blood,” so to speak, but are instead given via or through their contributions in media. Moreover, they are also present as an anonymous (potential) audience to whom one speaks when one contributes to a discussion in media. The intentional object of such experiences are others via their expressions, which are taken as contributions or reactions to the discussions in any possible form: text, video, emojis, posts, etc.

The main research question was thus twofold, including the main object of the research and the implications that the research aimed to reveal: How are other subjects given in media-based public discussions as experienced, and what does such givenness imply for the informal educational possibilities of media-based public discussions?

By posing this question, the investigation excluded—but did not overlook—empirical questions concerning media-based communication, the public sphere, and education. More precisely, I did not offer answers to empirical questions but instead conducted my phenomenological-philosophical inquiry in close dialogue with contemporary empirical theorization about these topics. There has been much academic discussion on these questions in multiple academic fields, most importantly psychology, media studies, and pedagogy. For instance, there is a relatively widespread common assumption in the public that media-based discussions have been splintered into homogeneous “epistemic bubbles” or “echo

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17 I must emphasize that the interest was not in anyone’s particular, actual experience of media-based public discussions or in the other persons participating in or following the discussions, but rather in media-based public discussions as they might be experienced and as they might appear to the subject who, in one way or another, participates in the discussions—discussions that are public and take place in media.
chambers,” but, according to recent research in media studies, media users actually
do encounter a diversity of different persons and larger variations of views in
media, including the internet, than they would in their “offline” daily lives
(Barberá, 2020; Dubois & Blank, 2018). Social media and digital search engines
have been observed to increase the diversity of news consumption (Kleis Nielsen
& Fletcher, 2020). On the other hand, recent empirical studies have claimed quite
the opposite, that media-based discussions are polarized and further encourage
political polarization (Sunstein, 2018). For example, as Mutz’s (2015) study of
political conversations on television suggests, media-based debates might become
even more polarized and conflictual when a greater number of different followers
and participants enter the debate. Here, the problem would be precisely that we
actually share the media space with large segments of society rather than
communicate in homogeneous “echo chambers.” There are also other, mutually
contradictory results of empirical studies on media-based communication,
especially internet-based communication. For instance, Turkle (2011, 2015)
empirically investigated the anti-sociality of online communication, while
Papacharissi (2004, 2014) examined online affectivity and political action, taking
for granted that online sociality and the feeling of togetherness are common
phenomena. As media themselves change, new results continue to emerge.

Philosophical investigations offer an alternative account of the givenness of
others in media-based communication. There is a relatively novel
phenomenological-philosophical field of research that aims to explicate the manner
in which other persons appear in media. The main contributors in this field of study
include Dreyfus (2008), Waldenfels (2009), Friesen (2014a, 2014b, 2019), Fuchs
(2014), Staehler (2014), Svenaes (2021), Ward (2018), and Osler (2020), all of
whom have utilized classical phenomenological works in their analyses, from those
of Husserl and Stein to those of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas. The themes discussed
by these authors on the basis of classical phenomenological analyses include the
following: the bodily nature of our being, the perception of other persons founded
on the perception of their bodies, the limits of empathy, and the character of
affectivity, emotions, and feelings of togetherness in media-based contexts. Some
of these authors have argued that media-based experiences of other persons are not
genuine (e.g., Dreyfus, 2008; Staehler, 2014) or that they are not real but instead
based on imagination (e.g., Fuchs, 2014; Svenaes, 2021). In contrast, others have
claimed that media do not exclude genuine feelings of togetherness (Osler, 2020)
or even learning from others (Ward, 2018). Waldenfels (2009) and Friesen (2014a,
2014b), for their part, assumed a third position, introducing the concept of
“telepresence”—that is, the experienced absence of the other in the presence of the other in media (see Friesen, 2014; Waldenfels, 2009). As they both argued, while it may not be tenable to claim that there is no contact between subjects in media-based communication, it is difficult to defend the idea that the type of contact that media-based communication allows is truly or genuinely reciprocal (Friesen, 2019; Waldenfels, 2009).

On the basis of these phenomenological-philosophical debates and arguments, I divided my main research question into three sub-questions, each of which was investigated in one of the original articles comprising this dissertation. Thus, the three articles contribute to answering my main research question by each handling one of its different aspects. As such, each sub-question and each enclosed article concern one of the informal educational possibilities explicated above—informal learning by discussion, change in sense-making, and public dialogue—by means of one of three aspects in the givenness of others in media-based public discussions:

1. According to Husserlian and Steinian analyses, how is the experience of other persons constituted in media-based communication, and does this experience permit learning from media-based discussions?
2. According to the Husserlian and Steinian characterization of affectivity, what is the constitutive role of affectivity in the subject’s change in sense-making by media-based public discussions?
3. What do the Husserlian concepts of the “homeworld” and the “alienworld” imply about the possibilities of media-based public dialogue?

The first of these three research sub-questions relates to the discussion of the non-genuineness and imaginary nature of the media-based experience of other persons. As pointed out above, Dreyfus (2008), Fuchs (2014), and Staehler (2014) have argued that we cannot genuinely experience other persons by media because, according to them, the absence of the bodily presence of the other, in flesh and blood, does not allow for the formation of experiences of actual interpersonal understanding (cf. Friesen, 2014a, 2019; Waldenfels, 2009). What we experience instead, according to these authors, are either imaginary projections based on assumptions (Fuchs, 2014) or “derivative” forms of sociality (Staehler, 2014; see also Dreyfus, 2008). The implications for the main topic of my work—the educational possibilities of media-based public discussions—are far-reaching: the arguments made by these authors implicitly question the very possibility of learning from others in media-based public discussions since they reject the very possibility
of actually communicating with others or having any true experience of them (rather than a mere imaginary projection of them).

The second question arose from a further aspect in Dreyfus’s and Fuchs’s arguments, according to which the inability to have an empathic experience of other persons in media occurs in tandem with the assumption that we cannot be affected by each other in media—that is, actually by each other, and not some projection or imaginary views of others. This is a problem because affectivity—in both phenomenology and other fields—arguably pertains to how we feel about the world around us, and it motivates us to act or make sense of what we perceive (see, e.g., Ahmed, 2014; Husserl, 1966, 2001; Papacharissi, 2014). However, if we assume that mediation does not hinder empathic experience—as I argue in the Article I—then, following Dreyfus’s line of thinking and the Husserlian analysis of affectivity (Husserl, 1952, 1966, 2001), the mediation of communication also does not hinder the affectivity of other persons in media-based discussions.

Affectivity is a factor that has been extensively discussed with regard to media-based public communication (e.g., Papacharissi, 2014; Szanto & Slaby, 2020). To investigate affectivity in a phenomenologically precise and profound manner, and to also address the problems raised by Dreyfus and Fuchs, I proceeded with Husserl’s analyses of affectivity, but I added insights generated by Stein’s analyses. I took up the question of changes in sense-making (or meaning constitution), i.e., changes in how something appears to the subject as something, to gain insights into such changes while not implementing the concept of learning in order to also include pre-reflective and disapproved changes.

The third research question was grounded in the assumption that we are affected by what other members of society say or represent in media-based public discussions. A society that allows free and open public discussion is arguably plural, permitting the expression of multiple different perspectives from different segments of the society (e.g., Arendt, 1958/1998; Mouffe, 2005). Members of society might be affected by differences of opinions and/or beliefs in various ways, such as feeling attacked, curious, confused, worried, illuminated, or sympathetic. On the basis of such reflections and arguments, I formulated my third research question to address the subject’s first-person perspective on the plural public sphere. I applied the Husserlian distinction between the homeworld and the alienworld to conceptualize the differences between members of a society due to their various backgrounds, histories and habituated normalities, everyday lives, worldviews, etc. To take up an informal educational situation related to plurality
and differences in views, I investigated the conditions of possibilities of public dialogue in such a plural situation.

2.4 Method and source literature: Applying classical Husserlian phenomenological arguments

To analyze the givenness of others in the thematic context of media-based public discussion, I utilized on the classical phenomenological concepts and analyses of empathy, affectivity, and the homeworld/alienworld, and applied them in the context of media-based public discussion. The reason behind such operation is clarified by Fink (1981): In Fink’s characterization, phenomenological concepts allow for the intellectual operation needed to clarify the manner of givenness and the sense of the thematic object of interest; this happens by relating to the thematic object in a particular critical manner, which is made possible by the phenomenological methods of suspension. That is, phenomenology examines the ways in which the world is given to us. Phenomenology does not aim at confirming the objectivity or existence of the world but at understanding how our experiences of the world are constituted. The object is approached as it is given in experience, by suspending beliefs and assumptions concerning the matters outside the experience of the object. I explain the method of suspension in more detail below.

Since I drew from analyses already conducted by classical and contemporary phenomenologists, I not only employed phenomenological methods but also other methods pertinent to philosophical inquiries. Therefore, the methods utilized for answering the three research questions explicated above were manifold. On the one hand, when proceeding with phenomenological analyses, I thematized the objects of investigation as phenomena subjected to phenomenological scrutiny, which were descriptive, explicative, and analytical. On the other hand, I did not conduct phenomenological investigations in all of their steps and stages but instead built on the arguments provided by Husserl and Stein (and their interpreters) on the matters of empathy, affectivity, and the homeworld/alienworld distinction, together with Schütz’s analyses of societal experiences. Accordingly, this synthetic approach incorporated, in addition to phenomenological methods, general philosophical methods of argumentation and conceptual analysis, source criticism, and the basic methods of informal logic.

My approach was not philosophical-historical or exegetic but rather applicatory in the sense that I did not seek to provide the most proper or accurate interpretations of the works of Husserl, Stein, and Schütz. Instead, my goal was to
demonstrate the manner in which classical phenomenological concepts and arguments, together with their contemporary explications and elaborations, can contribute to contemporary investigations of the media-based public sphere. Husserl himself has argued that the phenomenologist is—and needs to be—a perpetual beginner (Husserl, 1976b, p. 138). I take this to mean that any philosopher who proceeds by phenomenological methods must not remain satisfied with repeating the proclamations and arguments of great authorities or cease their inquiries where others have stopped but must seek to venture beyond, to further develop the field, and to pose new questions. By incorporating the conceptual and analytical contributions of the three classical authors into contemporary discussions and by presenting their results from novel thematic perspectives, I sought to put phenomenology to actual work. Doing so may have done justice to Husserl’s own idea of phenomenology as an ever-new beginning rather than the proliferation of interpretations.

In the following, I will first introduce the central features of the phenomenological methodology. Then, I will clarify the way in which I utilized the phenomenological method in forming and demarcating the research object of this study.

2.4.1 Classical phenomenology

Phenomenology is, roughly put, an investigation of the constitution of experiences of the subject, of how something appears as something to the subject. As phenomenology is not interested in worldly objects per se or in any one particular topical area, many have argued that phenomenology is more a (philosophical) methodology than a theory (e.g. Aldea et al., in press; Luft & Overgaard, 2012). It has even been argued that classical phenomenology is not one discipline but a system of disciplines (e.g., Heinämaa, in press). However, there are several central points shared by phenomenologists from Husserl and Stein to contemporary phenomenologists.

First, the object of investigation in phenomenology is the structures that must necessarily be in play for particular experiences to take place. The question is not of a real, someone particular’s experience, but rather of experience as an

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18 Nevertheless, Husserl himself had a say about who had and who had not understood his works properly during his lifetime. This could be viewed as somewhat controversial considering his views about phenomenology.
epistemologically self-evident object, which is not founded on any further beliefs about the world. That is, the object of phenomenological description is experience as it can—ideally, not actually—be lived by any subject. Husserl called such a research object \textit{irreal} (Husserl, 1976a, p. 4), similar to numbers in mathematics or shapes in geometry. Thus, an irreal research object is not, for example, my actual experience of writing my dissertation, but an experience of a generic \textit{someone} (who might appear to themselves as I do to myself) writing a dissertation (as a caveat, a dissertation is likely not the best example of a research object in the classical phenomenological context, as would be, say, a larger type of an experience of work or production).

As Lee (2007) has pertinently noted, “experience is a basic concept of philosophy. But as is the case with most of the other basic concepts of philosophy, it is an ambiguous concept. It varies from philosopher to philosopher” (p. 231). This variety can be seen in the differences between the use of “experience” in, for instance, the works of Dewey, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Husserl. As a case in point, Husserl deployed two terms that can both be translated as “experience” in English: (1) \textit{Erlebnis}, which refers to the wide category of lived experience, to those mental episodes or events notable for “changing from moment to moment, connected and interrelated in different ways, mak[ing] up the internal unity of consciousness of each psychic individual. In this sense perceptions, imaginative or pictorial representations, acts of conceptual thought, conjectures or doubts, joys and pains, hopes and fears, wishes and willings, just as they occur in our consciousness, are \textit{Erlebnisse}” (Husserl, 1968, p. 347). (2) \textit{Erfahrung}, which refers to a much narrower category of perceptions, to the original experience of an individual existing in the empirical world, such as the experience of a tree, a flower, a stone, a media, and so on (Lee, 2007). Here, the various kinds of original experience include those acts that “posit something real \textit{individually}; they posit it as something factually existing spatiotemporally, as something that is at \textit{this} temporal locus, that has duration of its own and a reality-content which, with respect to its essence, could just as well have been at any other temporal locus” (Husserl, 1982, p. 7, §1). This latter concept of experience as an original act that empirically posits something individual can be distinguished from two other kinds of acts. On the one hand, it is distinguished from predicative judgments, including both pre-scientific and scientific judgments: “Experience in the first and most pregnant sense is accordingly defined as a direct relation to the individual” (Husserl, 1939, §6). On the other hand, it is distinguished from the intuition of an essence, since an essence is not a spatiotemporal individual. Both concepts of
experience are relevant when speaking of a complex worldly phenomenon, such as media-based public discussion, which includes both perceptions of objects in the world and assumptions, beliefs, habits of perceptions, etc.\textsuperscript{19}

The second crucial point shared by most phenomenologists is the idea that what is given is given \textit{as something}. The experience is \textit{about} something: a tree, another person, myself, etc. That is, experience of something to someone is \textit{intentional}, in one manner or other (see Husserl, 1984, §10). The idea of intentionality is that we cannot think of experience without intentional objects, “that something shows itself \textit{as something}, that something is meant, given, understood, or treated in a certain way” (Waldenfels, 2011, p. 21; see also Carr, in press). I can intend a computer, for example, to be a technical tool for use in information management, but I can also intend it as a heavy material thing in my bag. The experiencing subject always intends something under one intent (meaning) or another. In other words, consciousness is always consciousness of an object as intended by someone, i.e., the subject. Within this philosophical conceptualization, the human subjects is not separated from the world, but always necessarily experiences the world, has experiences of the world, is directed toward the world, and, at the same time, usually also toward oneself as part of the world.

Third, phenomenology can accordingly be said to deal with the first-person perspective—that of the experiencing subject. An object as experienced is always given to someone who is experiencing, to whom the object appears (Husserl, 1976a, p. 48). There is no appearance of something without someone being present to whom this something appears (not necessarily a human “someone”). The “first person,” the “I,” is someone to whom something appears (Luft & Overgaard, 2012). Husserl called this domain that of individual being, “pure mental processes,” or “pure consciousness.” In the broadest sense of the term, “consciousness” encompasses all mental processes in every modality: cognitive, emotive, and practical; perceptual, imaginative, and recollective; active and passive; reflective and pre-reflective, etc. (Husserl, 1976a, §33). The perspective taken by phenomenology is thus that of the givenness of something to someone, with the manners of givenness as well as the objects and subjects of givenness varying greatly, from real to imaginary to ideal, from human to non-human (e.g., animal), from cognitive to emotive, etc. In contrast, the perspective often assumed in

\textsuperscript{19} As experiences of media-based public discussions are so-called “natural experiences” carried out on the basis of the general thesis of natural attitude, I did not touch upon other kinds of experiences about which Husserl spoke, such as “transcendental experience” (see Husserl, 1976b).
scientific research is that of an outside observer, the so-called “third-person perspective.” For example, in contrast to neuropsychology, which examines what happens in the human brain during social contacts, phenomenology interrogates how another person appears and is given to the subject.

When we speak about concepts, perform empirical research, or converse about everyday matters, we are, surely, also having experiences of things, but we are not focused on the experiences as such but are instead involved with and concentrated on the experienced objects. From the viewpoint of classical phenomenology, we are thereby living in the so-called “natural attitude,” the one in which we are concentrated on the world and the surrounding worldly affairs, including ourselves and other persons as worldly things (e.g., Husserl, 1976a, p. 3). In contrast, phenomenology suspends our everyday and scientific interests in worldly objects and turns our attention toward the experiences of those objects. It thereby takes the “phenomenological attitude” in order to inquire into and clarify our manners of experiencing things and their manners of being given to us, and ultimately the conditions on which things, persons, and the world can appear to us in the first place. This is achieved by what Husserl called the methods of suspension of belief and the acts of positing more generally. The most important of these is the phenomenological epoché, which is an act of bracketing the basic and fundamental belief in the existence of worldly objects and the world itself (see Husserl, 1976a, §30). The point is not to negate or question existence in the manner of skeptical philosophers, but instead to turn away from all questions and arguments concerning the existence of objects in order, first, to study and understand their manners of appearing. Husserl explained this turn by writing: “I may accept … a proposition … not as it is in science, a proposition which claims validity and the validity of which I accept and use” (Husserl, 1982, §32, p. 62, emphasis in original).

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20 As Husserl (1952, 1973d, 1976a) argued, in the natural attitude, in our everyday life, as well as in empirical research and most other academic disciplines, there is a universal ground of belief in a world that all praxis presupposes. The being of the world in totality is that which is not first the result of an activity of judgment but which forms the presupposition of all judgment. Consciousness of the world is consciousness in the mode of certainty of belief (Husserl 1973d, p. 30). Husserl called this fundamental certainty of the world “protodoxa” (Urdoxa), emphasizing that this is the condition for the possibility of all further knowledge and certainty. All lived experience “rests at bottom on the simple pregiving protodoxa [Urdoxa] of ultimate, simply apprehensible substrates. The natural bodies pregiven in this doxa are the ultimate substrates for all subsequent determinations, cognitive determinations as well as those which are axiological or practical” (Husserl, 1976a, p. 59; see Roth & Friesen, 2014). In other words, there is the fundamental experience of being in the world, and knowing our way around the world.
The natural attitude is put out of action for the time of a phenomenological investigation, not in the sense that the investigator, as a human being sitting at a computer or reading a book, would deny the certainty of the world, but instead in the sense that the existence of the experienced object under investigation and everything involved in its being are not taken as part of the investigation. In the phenomenological attitude, the world is not “accepted as actuality” (Husserl, 1991, p. 32) but becomes, “in a quite peculiar sense, a phenomenon” (p. 152). The term “phenomenon” must be taken in a very literal sense. If something presents to us as real, then the experience of reality is part of the phenomenon under investigation. So, phenomenology investigates experiences by stepping back and taking the phenomenological attitude in order to clarify and explicate how they are lived and form themselves within the natural attitude.

To illustrate, by bracketing the belief in the existence of the object (and related beliefs), we put the object in quotation marks, so to speak (see Overgaard, 2015):

Assumptions based on the existence of the object → (the existence of) “the object.”

What is bracketed is the acceptance of the object as existing, as real or actual. All of this is now set aside, put out of action for the time of the phenomenological investigation. The remaining object under phenomenological investigation, the object as experienced, the object as it appears to someone, is the phenomenon. Nothing of what appears is negated—but also, nothing is added.

In the first volume of Ideas, Husserl formulates this idea by his famous “the principle of all principles”:

*Enough now of absurd theories. No conceivable theory can make us err with respect to the principle of principles: that every originary presentive intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originary (so to speak, in its “personal” actuality) offered to us in “intuition” is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there.* (Husserl, 1982, p. 44)

What is crucial here is the determination to set aside all theories that are not evident in the phenomenon itself, those that might hold, but also might not. We cannot know the validity of any theories by looking at the object of investigation itself. As Luft and Overgaard (2012) clarify, the principle exhorts us to simply take everything that presents itself to us originally in “intuition” as the way it gives itself, but also within the boundaries in which it gives itself. For example, theories that
provide the percentages of non-linguistic acts in human communication are not relevant to the very experience of communicating with others by media. The possible fact that something may be experientially ignored or neglected in media-based communication, without the participants themselves realizing this in any way, does not do away with their experience of communication and everything that the experience includes. The point here, as Husserl put it, is “not to secure objectivity but to understand it” (1976b, p. 189)—that is, understanding the phenomenon as it is given to us. The Husserlian phenomenology does not leave the natural, ordinary experience, but, instead of taking the natural attitude as a premise for inferring the existence or nature of what exists outside the natural attitude, it asks after the conditions of possibility of the natural attitude. As Carr (in press) has put it, in a sense, the natural attitude remains the constant subject matter of all of phenomenology’s investigations.

2.4.2 My use of classical phenomenological analyses

Over 100 years of development, phenomenology as founded by Husserl has developed in multiple directions. Phenomenology has therefore become a field delineated by several more or less related methods or methodologies and basic assumptions. We can distinguish, for example, between the approaches that primarily build on original Husserlian analyses (e.g., Heinämaa, Lohmar, Welton, and Zahavi) and those that follow and build on Heidegger’s line of investigation, which is concerned with the Being and our being in the world (e.g., Figal, Malpas, Sallis, and Sheehan). Moreover, there are approaches that utilize Gadamer’s ideas of hermeneutics and interpretation (one can debate the relation to Heidegger’s later work) (e.g., Fairfield, and Risser); those that build on Merleau-Ponty’s account of the body as a condition of all experience (e.g., Barbaras, Carbone, and Waldenfels), either sympathetic to or critical of Husserl; and discussions that concern Levinas’s ethics of fundamental otherness (e.g., Bernasconi, and Guenther). Finally, multiple recent developments have introduced new phenomenological methods, such as microphenomenology, developed by Depraz, and interdisciplinary approaches proposed, for example, by Zahavi and Gallagher or Fuchs. In addition, multiple empirically attuned phenomenological approaches in several fields (in qualitative research) have emerged, e.g., in education, psychology, sociology, feminist theory, political theory, and literary studies, to name but a few.

Phenomenology has also impacted educational theory and practices in multiple ways. For example, there is educational phenomenological psychology (van
Manen, 1989, 2007), hermeneutic phenomenology in qualitative educational (and related) research (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012), and many more (see Brinkmann & Friesen, 2018). For instance, phenomenography, utilized by Marton (2014), is a methodology developed for empirical research that was inspired by philosophical phenomenology. Phenomenology has also been employed elsewhere as a qualitative research method concerned with the lived experience (Friesen, 2021).

My own investigation remained close to the Husserlian line of investigation for several related reasons: (1) The Husserlian approach helps to guarantee the clarity, precision, and variety of analyses since its methods are well explicated. (2) Husserlian sources offer detailed analyses of empathy, affectivity, and communication, which are crucial for the topics under scrutiny. (3) Husserl’s analyses are also fundamental to several other phenomenological contributions—for example, Levinas’s discussion of the self–other relation and Merleau-Ponty’s investigations of embodiment (of course, original arguments have been put forth by these later phenomenologists as well). Therefore, even though authors such as Levinas (1969) or Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) have provided interesting and original arguments about encountering other persons, for my purposes, it was meaningful to proceed with Husserl’s precise and thorough analyses (adding Levinas and/or Merleau-Ponty to the theoretical framework would have expanded the study to a size unwieldy for the purposes of this research).

Deploying the givenness of others in media-based public discussions as a phenomenon in the phenomenological sense as the main research object allowed me to set aside questions concerning related empirical matters: This investigation was purely concerned with manners of givenness and thus did not include the empirical contents of experiences. To identify the object of investigation, I utilized the phenomenological method of bracketing assumptions concerning the existence of empirical matters related to the object of investigation that did not present themselves in the object as it appeared in the realm of experience (Husserl, 1976a; see Luft & Overgaard, 2012). Hence, others in media-based public discussions were examined as phenomena in the phenomenological sense of the term. After assessing the constitution of the givenness of others, I again addressed questions related to the attributes of media-based public discussions in the 21st century and discuss these attributes here from the perspective of the phenomenological analyses.

I employed classical and contemporary phenomenological analyses in an applied way. In Husserlian phenomenology, a set of reductions must be performed when accomplishing the phenomenological investigation: First, assuming the
phenomenological attitude by the phenomenological epoché as the negative step leading to phenomenology (Luft, 2012); second, proceeding further by (a) transcendental-phenomenological reduction as the positive step that leads back from the natural attitude to its constitutive origin—that is, the constitutive activity of pure consciousness (see Husserl, 1976b, §43)—and (b) eidetic reduction/ eidetic variation, in which one varies the parameters of experience in order to establish what is and is not essential to the experience (whether there is a proper order to these acts—and if so, what it might be—is debatable; see, e.g., Luft, 2012; Moran, 2005). Of all of these steps, I accomplished merely the phenomenological epoché to perceive the investigated objects as phenomenological phenomena, analyzed the phenomenon to find its constitutive elements, such as empathy and affectivity, and trusted the Husserlian, Steinian, and Schützian analyses to accomplish the rest.

Not everyone who is considered a phenomenologist has utilized both phenomenological and eidetic reductions in a strict manner or has clarified their mutual relations. In the current field of phenomenology, there is a variety of views about what methods make the study truly phenomenological (Aldea et al., in press; Luft & Overgaard, 2012; Zahavi, 2018). Some authors have used the term “phenomenology” to characterize approaches that do not include any methods of classical phenomenology, neither the phenomenological epoché nor any of the reductions (Gallagher, 2012). However, I refrained from discussing what phenomenology can and cannot be. Instead, I situated my study under the category of “phenomenological philosophy,” which emphasizes the philosophical character of the enterprise and sets it apart from empirical approaches (see De Santis et. al, 2021). That is, I embraced a philosophical study of questions for which the answers could be found with the help of existing phenomenological analyses and/or the utilization of phenomenological methods, such as bracketing, to the extent necessary for constructing the study.

The way in which I employed my arguments, characterized the phenomena under investigation, and conceptualized Husserl, Stein, and Schütz was thus purely philosophical but not necessarily phenomenological in all steps, or was so only to a certain extent. I analyzed the content of the works of the three classical contributors to the extent that it was relevant to answering my research questions and via the use of the general philosophical methods of argument and concept analysis, together with the basic methods of informal logic and reasoning. This means that I closely studied their analyses concerning the key concepts—empathy, affectivity, homeworld/alienworld—that were central to my research questions and applied the key points derived from these analyses to the arguments made about the
three phenomena related to the educational possibilities of media-based public discussions by examining the argumentative tools they can provide for experiencing other persons in these discussions.

Even though many of the arguments and conceptualizations in classical phenomenology relevant to my study can already be found in a rigorous and clear form in Husserl’s works, some analytical results central to my arguments can only be found—according to my knowledge, at least—in the works of Stein and Schütz. These results comprise insights about empathy in media-based encounters in Stein’s work (even though, for Stein, the media were letters, books, or radio) and about experiences of normality, stereotypes, and anonymity in our encounters with co-members of society in Schütz’s works. For this reason, I included their works in the source literature of this study: Without these sources, important insights into the topic of empathy and the experience of “normality” in the societal context would be missing.

The analyses I used from the three authors concerned the following. (1) Stein’s analyses of empathy in mediated communication in Zum Problem der Einfühlung (1917/2008) constituted my most important source in investigating the possibilities of empathy in media-based communication. Husserl’s investigations of empathy, unlike Stein’s, were not restricted to a few publications but rather covered an extensive collection of research manuscripts contained in Husserliana, volumes 1, 4, 6, 13–15. (2) The concept of affectivity: Husserl’s analyses in the second book of Ideas (1952) and his lectures on passive and active synthesis in Husserliana, volume 11 (1966). (3) The concepts of homeworld and alienworld: Husserl’s analyses of the lifeworld in Husserliana, volume 39 (2008), and his discussions of the homeworld and alienworld in Husserliana, volume 15 (1973c), together with Schütz’s investigations of the experience of normality and typification in encounters with other members of one’s society in his Collected Papers: 1, The Problem of Social Reality (1971) and Collected Papers III: Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy (1975). I chose these works based on their topicality and mutual compatibility.

At certain points, however, I was somewhat critical of or at least hesitant about the analyses and arguments proffered by these three classical phenomenologists. My cautious attitude stemmed from contemporary critiques targeted especially against Husserl’s search for universal structures of experience, particularly

21 I acknowledge that a new critical edition of Husserl’s second book of Ideas is in progress (Husserl, forthcoming).
presented by critical phenomenology (see Guenther, 2020). As Carr (in press) clarifies the critique, our experiences are located socially, culturally, and historically, begging the question, whose natural experience and in which historical situation are we investigating. Similar question applies, of course, to Stein’s and Schütz’s works. The works of Stein and Schütz, however, are not well known by contemporary contributors and have thus not been critiqued as often as those of Husserl. To avoid ending up in potentially problematic conclusions by utilizing the classical phenomenological analyses, I did not commit to any argument or insight provided by Husserl, Stein, or Schütz to which I do not explicitly refer in this dissertation, nor do I take a stand on the mutual disagreements of these scholars. In general, I assume no position on any argument that goes beyond the topics and purposes of my own dissertation, but, in line with the phenomenological ethos, put them aside or “out of action” for the duration of my arguments. Concerning Schütz’s argumentation, however, I explicitly express, in the Article I, my critique of his claim that media prevent one from genuinely experiencing the uniqueness of others.

It has been widely argued that many of the recent critiques leveled against phenomenology in general and/or Husserlian phenomenology in particular—as being egocentric, idealistic, rationalistic, or intellectualistic—are based on partial readings and gross misunderstandings (e.g., Aldea et al., in press; Zahavi, 2003). However, such arguments are beyond the scope of this dissertation and should therefore be discussed elsewhere.

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22 One can, though, argue that critical phenomenology is a kind of tautology, as Husserl’s epistemic motive for the whole phenomenological investigation was critical in nature (see, e.g., Husserl, 1976a, 1976b; see also Aldea et al., in press). Moreover, the hesitance to make conclusions about the universal structures of experience is also related to Husserl’s own insights according to which the appearance of something as something (to someone) may include cultural-specific, historically developed, and socially acquired meanings that are not given in the experience itself but shape the experience in an unremovable way (Husserl, 1976b). It was only in his later works that Husserl focused on and emphasized the cultural, historical, and social processes of meaning sedimentation (Miettinen, 2020).
3 The theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this dissertation consists of Husserlian and Steinian analyses of empathy, Husserlian and to some extent Steinian accounts of affectivity, and the Husserlian distinction between homeworld and alienworld. In addition, I applied Schützian analyses of typification in social contexts in the discussion of social phenomena. In the following, I will first present the concept of empathy, followed by that of affectivity, and lastly those of homeworld and alienworld.

3.1 Empathy

The phenomenon of media-based public discussion includes the experiences of other persons, all of whom have their own perspectives on the world and on the shared society, and potentially also on themselves as participants in the discussions. In phenomenology, the grasping of others’ perspectives as interpersonal understanding—the understanding that there is another minded person who has his or her own perspective on the world and maybe on “me”—is called empathy (distinguished from sympathy or other emotional states; see Szanto & Moran, 2015).23 In phenomenological analysis, other embodied minds can be grasped immediately and spontaneously, and this possibility founds more complex and cognitive forms of sociality (Jardine, 2014). That is, in empathy, other persons are grasped as other, having their own perspectives and being distinct from what is experienced as “my” perspective. As Husserl argued, if the other’s perspective were given to the subject as one’s own, then the experiences of others would become one’s own and would no longer remain those of others (Husserl, 1973c, p. 12). For Husserl, empathy in this sense is a sui generis experience of others. It is not a perception of a thing or a representation of something absent, but is instead similar to the perceptual experiences of physical things given originally (Husserl, 1976a, §75).

For the concept and characterization of empathy described in this dissertation, I drew from Stein and Husserl. There are many points of overlap between Stein’s analysis and Husserl’s account, but while Husserl’s account is, in certain respects, wider and more multifaceted, Stein’s account has an attractive conciseness and offers the abovementioned interesting analysis of mediated encounters with other

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23 As Szanto and Moran (2015) noted, there are many aspects of empathy that have been widely discussed both within and outside phenomenology. I will not dive into that discussion here because it concerns aspects that are not directly relevant to my study.
persons. As Zahavi (2014) argued, concerning Husserl’s account of empathy, there might not even be one single coherent theory, since over the years Husserl pursued different directions. Nevertheless, for the applicatory purposes of this dissertation, it was possible to utilize the concept of empathy in Husserlian and Steinian terms. Ultimately, I lean more on the concise characterization and analysis of empathy provided by Stein.

Empathy within this classical phenomenological framework is, as Stein formulates it, an other-directed intentionality, an intentionality directed at the experiential life of others (Stein, 1917/2008, p. 14; see also Szanto & Moran, 2015). This experience may merely marginally notice that other persons are there, but it may also entail a deeper understanding of the contents of their experiences, feelings, objects of their perception, styles of being in the world, etc. (Stein, 1917/2008, p. 12). One may simply realize that there is another person in one’s environment by seeing the person’s body or reading a message left by her or him, or, alternatively, one may also grasp their emotional states and further intentions (Zahavi, 2014; see also Husserl, 1973c). The possible resonation or response to another’s experiential state that may follow my insight about her or his presence is not included in the classical phenomenological category of empathy. Under this category belongs the immediate grasp of the presence, perspectives, states, and intentions of other intentional beings (that might not even be humans but could include other animals, or even other possibly sensing beings, such as plants; see Heinämaa, 2010, 2014; Ruonakoski, 2011). Thus, in the classical phenomenological framework, the meaning of the term “empathy” differs from the everyday uses of the term. Phenomenologically considered, empathy is not sympathy or an emotional state, such as pity. Nevertheless, the term captures something we experience in the everyday—namely, the grasping of another person as living and dynamic and her or his perspective, the givenness of the other.

Husserl uses the German term “Einfühlung” for our basic relation with another subject (a human, an animal, or another other). A better translation would be, as Depraz (1995) suggested, “immediate relation” (see also Bergo, 2020). There has been some discussion about this topic of translation, but I do not take a stand on whether or not the established translation of “empathy” is the best option. Rather, I simply proceed with the English term since it is widely accepted in the field of the phenomenology of interpersonal relations. Even though Husserl himself points out that the term “Einfühlung” is not quite a proper expression for denoting our original relations to others (1973a, pp. 335–339), it is nonetheless still the term with which most phenomenologists have for the most part operated (Scheler, 1950, for
instance, called the same experience *Fremdwahrnehmung*, “perception of other minds,” among other terms he coined, but neither Stein nor Husserl found this term to be any better).

As Zahavi (2014) argued, in contrast to other philosophical investigations of our relations with other subjects, classical phenomenologists offer a multilayered analysis of the intentional structure of this relation, one that differs markedly from recent attempts to explain it in terms of mirroring, mimicry, imitation, emotional contagion, imaginative projection, or inferential attribution. According to Zahavi, phenomenologists stand opposed to the dominant positions within the so-called theory-of-mind debate—that is, the theory of mind and the simulation theory of mind, both of which deny that it is possible to experience the minds of others and therefore argue that we must employ either theoretical inferences or internal simulations (see also Zahavi, 2012). By contrast, phenomenologists insist that we can experience the other directly as a minded being whose bodily gestures and actions are expressive of their experiences or states of mind, although we cannot directly experience their first-person perspective as they do. “Empathy” is the name for such relations.

Even though empathy is not sufficient to fathom all aspects and dimensions of social experiences, it nevertheless plays a fundamental role in the understanding of the phenomenon of others appearing to the subject in media-based public discussions. Although in philosophical investigations of social, societal, and political issues, other analyses of different forms of socialities or being together are crucial, empathy as interpersonal understanding lies at the conceptual core of discussions about our possibilities to communicate by media.

### 3.2 Affectivity

In investigating the givenness of others in media-based public discussions, the concept of affectivity is equally important as that of empathy. Since, in Husserl’s account, affectivity as a pre-reflective modality of experience binds us to the surrounding world, affectivity also binds us to other persons, from other individuals to larger groups (Husserl, 1952, 1966). Thus, affectivity is also a crucial constituent of sociality; other persons and their expressions that contribute to discussions affect us, capture our attention, evoke our reactions, and motivate our responses to them. Therefore, the concept of affectivity as a relation between the object and the subject explicates the experience of others in media-based communications as a relation to
The main reason for drawing from Husserl, together with Stein, instead of some other classical phenomenologists in the context of affectivity is that Husserl, unlike many other classical phenomenologists, provided detailed analyses of the basic nature and structure of affectivity.

Following the classical Husserlian and Steinian view on empathy explained above, I do not consider empathy to be an affective state per se (see Husserl, 1973c; Stein, 1917/2008). Building on the classical phenomenological foundations, especially those of Husserl, Scheler, Schütz, Walther, and Stein, Zahavi (2014) argued that empathy might be, instead of identical to mutual affectivity, conceptually and experientially required. Empathy and affectivity as understood in the classical phenomenological framework are thus not the same or equivalent concepts but are instead related concepts in the sense that grasping another person’s perspective in empathy enables being affected by it as another person, and, conversely, affectively noticing another person’s body or expression enables empathy. We might also have empathic experiences of others’ affective states, grasping what the other is affected by or what captures the other’s attention, which, in turn, might affect us in one way or another. For example, noticing that the other person is affected by something dangerous might evoke feelings of concern, irritation, or anxiety within us. Therefore, even though the affectivity of another person and empathic relating are both operative in our lived experiences of other persons, they are not the same form of relating but rather different constituents of the concrete experience of another subject.

Husserl viewed affect as a pre-intentional “force” that triggers the subject’s attention and suggested a turn toward an object (Husserl, 1966, §32). Husserl classically defined affect as the “allure” (Reiz) of or “invitation” by an object that evokes some kind of response from us: either turning toward or turning away, either

24 The essence of affectivity as relation makes affectivity essentially different from emotion. While emotions are subjective states of, e.g., happiness, sadness, anger, etc., affects are the attention-arousing relations. This is the reason I have not investigated the role of emotions in the givenness of others in media-based public discussions as experienced. While emotions surely are an important part of our experiences of media-based public discussions, emotionality as such does not necessarily provide means for investigating the relation between me and the other, but rather, emotionality provides the means for investigating particular responses to the other and the other’s actions. The latter topic is important in investigating media-based public discussions, but does not answer to the question of how others are given in the experience per se.

25 Elsewhere, it has been argued that empathy is essentially an affective state and that it requires “interpersonal similarity,” or a certain affective isomorphism between the empathizer and the target subject’s psychological and mental states (Jacob, 2011).
getting nearer or distancing further (Husserl, 1952, p. 217, p. 546, pp. 577–578; Husserl, 1966, p. 148; Husserl, 2001; see also Al-Saji, 2000; Bargetz, 2020; Lotz, 2007; Steinbock, 1995). The very receptivity of the subject is always and already affective, i.e., “being affected” (Affiziertsein) (Husserl, 2013). Thus understood, affectivity is the force by which we feel the world around us and that which triggers us to direct ourselves toward our surroundings in particular ways. In other words, affective objects attract and repulse us and yet also inform our sense of moving bodies and motivate us in different ways (Heinämaa, 2014).

According to Husserl, there is no experienced object that did not affect the experiencing subjects and touch their sensations and feelings in one way or another (Husserl, 1973c, p. 404). As Szanto and Landweer (2020, p. 9) put it, “our very experiential fabric or being-in-the-world is affective through and through, long before subjects take more complex evaluative or social stances.” As Szanto and Landweer further argued, almost all phenomenologists agree that any form of conscious experience has a core affective dimension, even on the most basic level of a simple perceptual experience. Husserl argued that affectivity is a pre-reflective and immediate modality of all experiences of the world, a condition needed for there to be any intentional experience, not a marginal modality characteristic of some experiences only (Husserl, 1966; see also Heinämaa, 2014; Lotz, 2007). Similarly for Stein (1917/2008), every conscious experience is always penetrated and modulated by some kinds of affectivity (see Stein, 1917/2008, pp. 48–49, 68, 100–101; 1922/2010, p. 145). According to these accounts, how an object affects us is how we pre-reflectively and immediately relate to it and how we feel about it when we turn our attention toward it. Hence, affectivity participates in how the world, including society and other members of society in the media, presents itself to us.

Affectivity is therefore not opposed to but rather underlies all intentional and all reflective action, such as learning from another person or explicitly trying to understand the other’s view. In other words, affectivity precedes the moment when one attentively turns toward an object and consequently also the moment when one can explicate what one experiences. For example, another person’s looks affect us without us being able to first decide how we are going to relate to the person (Ahmed, 2014). It is not the case that everything related to media-based public discussions could be analyzed in terms of affectivity, but, following the Husserlian analysis, we can assume that there is no factual (not an abstract hypothesis) experience related to media-based public discussions for which affectivity does not play some constitutive role. While in media-based public discussions, emotions
have a crucial role, affectivity in general, which also includes attention-arousal or bodily feelings, is essentially at stake in such discussions.

This does not mean that all of our experiences are emotional. Affectivity is a more basic category than emotion, and it is operative in all kinds of experiences of the world, not just the axiological experiences of emotions but also the doxic experiences of perception and cognition and the practical experiences of willing, deciding, and acting. As an allure or pull of the subject’s attention, in the classical phenomenological framework, affect and affectivity can be said to be a condition of possibility of emotional and other responses to objects in the subject’s experience, preceding the emotional and other responses.

According to the Husserlian analysis, as preceding the actual responses to objects, affectivity is a spectrum ranging from notions of contrast to the arousal of strong feelings of pleasure, resentment, something inviting to us, or something pushing us away (Husserl, 1952, 1966). Following this definition, affectivity is a constant dynamic comprising several levels: something either affecting the background of a situation, merely catching our attention, or evoking strong feelings. We are mildly affected by some objects around us and strongly affected by others, and different objects might affect us differently (Lotz, 2007).

However, both within and outside phenomenology, in scholarly discussions, the meaning of the term “affect” is somewhat ambiguous, as it is sometimes taken to be synonymous with “emotion” or “passion.” For instance, Ahmed (2014), building on both affect theory and phenomenology, claimed to utilize “affect” and “emotion” synonymously, despite the abovementioned distinctions. In contemporary phenomenological discussions on affectivity, too, affect is sometimes discussed as synonymous with “emotion” (see Drummond, 2020; Fuchs, 2020; cf. Fuchs, 2016). While there certainly are different views on the

26 In classical phenomenology, we can make multiple different kinds of distinctions between different levels or kinds of affects. More precisely, there are different grounds for distinguishing, at least conceptually, between various manners of being affected: Stein, partly drawing on Scheler, distinguished five different categories of being affected: an object evoking (a) sensory feelings, (b) non-intentional affective states of the lived body, i.e., general or “common feelings” (Gemeingefühle), such as tiredness or weariness, (c) moods (Stimmungen), (d) emotions, and (e) sentiments or affective attitudes directed at other persons (Stein, 1917/2008). I have not utilized any precise distinction of affects, but the idea, which suffices for my argument, that affectivity comprises a wide spectrum including different inviting, attention-stimulating, and emotional feelings of the environing world and of oneself.

27 For instance, in The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Emotions (Szanto & Landweer, Eds., 2020), “emotion” is taken to be an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of diverse affective phenomena, even those phenomena sometimes subsumed under the concepts of moods or attunements. However, here, the affective states are conceptually distinct categories: “short-lived fear or disgust,
relations between "affect" and "emotion" in the contemporary literature on affects and affectivity, especially after the so-called "affective turn," these two phenomena are often clearly distinguished (see, e.g., Seigworth & Gregg, 2010).

It is notable that the role of the body in affectivity is especially crucial in the context of media-based communication. In contemporary discussions of affectivity, the role of the body is often emphasized. Ahmed (2014), as a post-phenomenologist (she does not commit her account to the phenomenological methodology) has summarized the discussions well by stating that affects are not simply located in individuals but also move between bodies. As Seigworth and Gregg (2010) have put it, within affect theory, “affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise)” (p. 1). Since we, who are able to communicate by media, are physical and material bodily beings, we are always bodily affected and embodied beings. It is another question in which way affectivity is related to the body. Within phenomenology, as I cover in the Article II, the affective body-to-body relation is seen more widely than in affect theory; the affective force comes to the subject from an experienced object, which is often some kind of a body in the wide sense of the term. However, the experienced object can also be a non-physical or non-material object. Moreover, one’s own body or something else in the subject can be affective, “auto-affective,” in the sense that this something—the body, a body part, or a subjective possession—affects itself.28

distinct episodic emotions such as indignation or anger, sentiments, affective dispositions or affective attitudes such as Ressentiment or hatred, and affective character traits such as being disposed to humility or jealousy” (Szanto & Landweer, 2020, p. 1), which are emotions rather than affects according to the classical phenomenological or affect-theoretical view. In other places, emotions are defined as the feeling categories that can be named (see Ahmed, 2014). As Stein argued, emotions are intentional states, as feelings of something, in contrast to non-intentional affects (Stein, 1917/2008). Emotions as intentional is a widely used idea within phenomenology (e.g., Drummond, 2020; Goldie, 2000; Slaby, 2008; Szanto & Slaby, 2020), which, in turn, suggests an important conceptual difference between affect and emotion.

28 Phenomenologists disagree about the question of whether or not all affectivity is embodied. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) argued that we can only be affected by the world if we have bodies of some kind such that worldly affectivity requires embodiment: “Factual situations can only affect me if I am first of such a nature that there can be factual situations for me. In other words, I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, inspect them, and walk around them” (p. 93). In addition, contemporary phenomenologist Fuchs (2014, 2016, 2020) argued that affectivity depends on the body on a very fundamental level and that the experienced space is always charged with affective qualities given to the subject by bodily resonance. On the other hand, it can be and has been contended on phenomenological grounds, as Stein, whose analyses I utilized in this context alongside those of Husserl, argued in On the Problem of Empathy, that there are affects that do not have a bodily nature (leiblicher Natur). These are moods and emotions or “spiritual feelings” (geistige Gefühle) (Stein, 1917/2008). As Szanto and Moran (2020) interpreted this, for Stein, moods and emotions do not “fill
Scholarly discussions of affectivity have reached far beyond phenomenology. Even though phenomenology has been, and still is, an important field in studies of affectivity (Al-Saji, 2000; Bargetz, 2020; Steinbock, 1995; see also Ahmed, 2014), it is notable that phenomenology is often forgotten in contemporary scholarly discussions on affect (see Massumi, 2011; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). In the 21st century, the dominant approach to affectivity has been affect theory, which draws from the philosophical works of Deleuze and Spinoza. As I argue in the Article II, phenomenology and affect theory investigating affectivity share several common points, but also several differences in their emphasis and precision; phenomenological accounts are rather precise and provide a deeper and manifold philosophical understanding of the basic operations of affectivity from the perspective of the experiencing subject. The ignorance of phenomenological investigations of affect in contemporary academic discussions provided an additional motivation for utilizing the analyses of affectivity provided by Husserl and Stein.

3.3 The homeworld and the alienworld

In media-based public discussions, we come across multiple different others, as media-based public discussions involve perspectives from different segments of a society. To investigate the effect of coming across differences in media-based public discussions and its impact on the followers’ or discussants’ ability to understand others in the discussion from the involved subject’s perspective, I utilized the co-relative Husserlian concepts of homeworld (Heimwelt) and alienworld (Fremdwelt). Further, I employed the distinction homeworld/alienworld to address the plurality of the public sphere from the first-person perspective. More precisely, by these concepts, I addressed the experience of differences in the backgrounds, normalities, everyday lives, worldviews, etc., in media-based public discussions.

out” the felt body as, for example, sluggishness does; hence, a “purely spiritual” being could in principle be a subject of moods and emotions of some sort (Szanto & Moran, 2020; see Stein, 1917/2008, p. 65). 29 In affect theory, affects are the “forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relationships, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world’s apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1).
These concepts refer to normatively structured social-cultural and practical realms in one’s life, both those one perceives as “normal” and those one perceives as “abnormal” but of which one is still aware. Roughly put, the “homeworld” refers to the familiar realm (see Steinbock, 1995, p. 138), the world closest to us, where we are “at home,” while the “alienworld” refers to a realm of which one is aware but which nonetheless remains unfamiliar and strange, such as a foreign culture (Husserl, 1973c, p. 627ff). These two concepts form a constitutive dynamic, albeit an asymmetric one, since one always perceives the world from the perspective of one’s homeworld and views something as an “alienworld” from the stance of the homeworld (Husserl, 1973c, 214ff, 428ff). The constitution of a homeworld develops and appropriates a sense of a normal lifeworld, thereby co-constituting a sense of an alienworld as that which falls outside “normality” but nonetheless continues to belong within the limits of the experience of the world (see Heinämaa & Taipale, 2018). Because our homeworld is all that we experience as usual in our everyday lives, it is, as a structure of experience, originally and usually invisible to us, only becoming visible when contrasted with an alienworld. In other words, while it is only from the homeworld that the alienworld can be encountered as such, it is in the encounter with the alienworld that the homeworld can be disclosed. Husserl introduced his concepts of homeworld and alienworld to illuminate the structures of “normality” and “abnormality” as modalities of sense constitution (see Heinämaa & Taipale, 2018). His main examples concerned our relations to our own society or culture in a practical realm or a geographical area, in contrast to other societies or cultures practically or geographically elsewhere (see Husserl, 1973c; Heinämaa & Taipale 2018). I have applied these concepts in the investigation of the encountering of difference within one plural or multicultural society and not in

30 In this context, Heinämaa and Taipale (2018) argued that “‘normal’ does not refer to what is empirically general or average, nor to what is quantitatively common or statistically noteworthy. Nor is it about the standards of the social behavior of human beings as described and interpreted by anthropology and the human and social sciences. In the context of Husserlian phenomenology, normal is what contributes to sense-constitution, and abnormal is whatever disrupts the lattices of sense” (p. 285). As Husserl put it: “[N]ormality is a mode pertaining to constitution” (1973b, p. 68). As Steinbock noted, in his early genetic presentation of normality and abnormality Husserl treated the abnormal as an intentional modification of the normal. Steinbock argued that later, Husserl was led to break with this one-sided description (Steinbock, 1995).

31 The move from empathy and affectivity to homeworld/alienworld can be compared to the Waldenfelsian turn from the mere “other” to the “alien.” For Waldenfels (2007), unlike “the other,” the alien does not arise from a mere process of delimitation of self and other. What is alien does not simply appear to be different but is also perceived as arising from elsewhere. What appears in the way described by Husserl as “alienworld” looks different from “us” in the same way that an apple is different from a pear.
the investigation of the relations between several different societies. This is because, even within one society, there may be communities that differ from each other so much practically, axiologically, or cognitively that they seem unfamiliar and alien even to some other members of the same society. In a plural society, there might be social-cultural groups that another member of the society might experience as living in an “alienworld,” to use the Husserlian term. My utilization of these concepts is still not totally unorthodox. According to Waldenfels (1990), when Husserl contrasted the familiar, the common, and the accessible homeworld with the alienworld as “accessibility in genuine inaccessibility” (Husserl, 1973c, p. 631), he had in mind heterogeneous people and cultures. The alienworld may thus be an unfamiliar group, subculture, or area within one’s society, being alien in, for example, its visibility and simultaneous inaccessibility. As we can see from Steinbock’s (1995) argumentation and from Husserl’s manuscripts (1973c), the structure of the home and the alien can be characterized on many different levels of experience related to other persons, such as in the case of the home family/alien family, hometown/alientown, homeland/alienland, etc. Thus, it may not be too far from the original Husserlian idea of the home and the alien to think of different social-cultural groups within one society in terms of the homeworld and alienworld, as the term “world” here does not necessarily refer to a whole society but might instead refer to a lifeworld that does not include one’s whole society.

These concepts are part of Husserl’s explications and analyses of the historically developing structures of social and cultural existence. For Husserl, a homeworld was a sociocultural environment constituted by certain historical traditions that intrinsically shape the constitution of meaning, world, and self (see Steinbock, 1995; see also Miettinen, 2020). That is, when we acquire the parlance, language, habits, etc., of our community, we simultaneously acquire ways of thinking and acting that have developed over the course of the lives of previous generations, although we do this in our own personal ways. In other words, how objects, such as societal matters, appear to us is not independent of our social-historical contexts, our own personal histories, or of the ways in which our environment affects us. Instead, these appearances involve sedimentations or institutions of meanings (Sinnstiftungen) of our own and previous generations’ experiences to which we are socialized in our social-cultural environment(s) (Miettinen, 2020; see also Jacobs, 2016). As Husserl put it, “I am what I am as heir” (Husserl, 1973b, p. 223).

Utilizing the conceptual pair homeworld/alienworld builds on the assumption that historicity, culturality, and sociality have a constitutive role in how the world
presents itself to us. Since the object of the present investigation was the givenness of others in media-based public discussions, a social and cultural phenomenon that implicitly includes the historical developments of society, it was meaningful to incorporate the idea of the social-cultural-historical sense constitution. If I were to solely operate from the framework of the Husserlian and Steinian analyses of empathy and affectivity, I could have, in theory, investigated the constitution of the experiences of other persons in a media-based environment in an ahistorical context without taking into consideration social, cultural, or historical differences. The concepts of the homeworld and the alienworld introduce the idea that the world appears to us as shared on many levels and as a generationally inherited acquisition. It is a world that includes both familiar and anonymous others—others whom one has, in one way or another, encountered or can encounter—and an objective world perceivable by other subjects.

To further develop my analysis of differences between the participants of media-based public discussions, I used Schütz’s account of stereotyping other members of one’s society. What he called “stereotypes” of other members of society refers to the perception of a person as merely representing a reference group instead of being a unique individual. This concept of stereotype relates to Schütz’s interpretation and elaboration of Husserl’s analysis of types (Schütz, 1975; see Husserl, 1939, p. 139; 1973b, p. 121). Type is here understood as a specific form of pre-predicative experience, one that provides the subject with particular expectations and assumptions of the perceived objects (Lohmar, 2003). As Lohmar argued, “a type is generated through a series of homogeneous experiences and can then guide our synthetic combination of the singular, intuitively given elements of an object. The type is thus a transcendental condition for the possibility for the constitution of objects” (p. 106). Types relate to the process of constituting the experienced “normal” qua typical, which is called “typification.” This process is selective and exclusive in the sense that it prefigures concordant features of an object—another person, a thing, a place, a phenomenon, etc.—making precisely those and no other aspects that are foreshadowed as particularly prominently affective as expected (Steinbock, 1995). For example, even if one had never been in a particular situation before, the “typical way” of the situation and of one’s or others’ acting can be anticipated. Thus, one can perceive something, even without encountering this particular something before, as “typical,” i.e., of a certain, familiar kind.

For the purposes of this dissertation, Schütz’s analyses were important and also compatible with Husserl’s later views of the constitution of social-historical
meaning. These analyses allowed me to develop more detailed analyses of differences in society on the basis of the concepts of homeworld and alienworld. I therefore introduced the Schützian view of stereotypes to support my analysis of the homeworld and the alienworld within one society, as both stereotypes and the homeworld/alienworld relate to perceptions of “normality” and “abnormality,” vague everyday notions that are laden with presuppositions. This is what the Schützian stereotypes are, too, according to my understanding: relatively stable but also vague notions permeated with presuppositions about other people. One “knows” the kind of person a particular person represents, and accordingly interprets and treats the person solely based on a stereotypical concept. For example, one views a person as representing the stereotype of a “woman” instead of as a unique person with personal features that might not fit the stereotype. What is affective in the person is thus the stereotype or the personal features interpreted in the frame of the stereotype, not the person as a unique individual. Moreover, Schütz elaborated the Husserlian idea of everyday “normality” as possessing a social-cultural nature, thus participating in, and expanding upon the so-called “generative” phenomenological analysis of meaning constitution. For Schütz, the experienced normality, including stereotypes, was based on our former experiences and on our social-cultural environment (Schütz, 1967, 1971). In Schütz’s words, the “constructs of typified knowledge are of a highly socialized structure” (1971, p. 13). This idea provides a fruitful tool for analyzing encounters with and being affected by differences in media-based public discussions.

While in Husserl’s analyses, types are a form of pre-predicative experience in general, Schütz related the concept to experiences of the social world. Schütz presented the Husserlian concept of the type and typicality by associating them with the normal and the optimal (i.e., the optimal form or state of a type) (see Schütz, 1971, 1975). Therefore, for him, the process of typification was highly normative in that the typical meant the normal, the optimal, and even the familiar. The process of the constitution of the normal qua typical is selective and exclusive. Typification prefugures similar concordant features, making precisely those and not other aspects that are foreshadowed particularly prominent and affective as expected; even though we have never been in this particular situation before, we can anticipate a “typical way” of acting. This is one way in which the subject is able to etch out a familiar world (Steinbock, 1995).

It should be noted that as a possible form of critique against my utilization of Husserl’s conceptual pair homeworld/alienworld, Hannah Arendt’s argument could be presented, according to which classical phenomenology has remained fixated on
the tacit attempt “to conjure up a new home from a world perceived as alien” (Arendt, 1946, p. 165; see also Loidolt, 2018). She argued that unless one appears to others, one is not part of the “common world” and thus cannot have a homeworld to which to relate an alienworld—such a person is therefore fundamentally worldless (Arendt, 1946, 1958/1998). Living in a homeworld would thus not be a prerequisite for experiences as such. Rather, it would form our experience of the world in contrast to the possible experience of the worldless. However, even if the homeworld were not a necessary structure or prerequisite for all experience, as Arendt argued (1946), I believe that the concepts of homeworld and alienworld still describe the structures of the experience in which we are already socialized to a certain tradition or traditions and perceive one thing as “normal” and another as “abnormal.” Factually, we are always born into a social community. And in this social community, we are socialized into the surrounding social and cultural environment (Jacobs, 2016). Socialization means that the social and cultural environment shapes the ways in which we perceive the world around us, affecting both our perceptions and evaluations of encountered objects, others, situations, and other aspects of the surrounding world (Miettinen, 2020). This makes us not ahistorical subjects who possess a “view from nowhere,” as we always perceive the world from within our cultural-social perspective.
4 Original articles constituting the argument

In this chapter, I will present the core of the original articles explicating the three analyses constructing the argument of this dissertation. Each original article examines one of the three phenomena central to the givenness of others in media-based public discussions that function as the experiential conditions of the informal educational possibilities of these discussions: The Article I explores the authenticity of media-based empathic experiences as the condition of the possibility of learning from others in media-based public discussions; the Article II examines affects as constituting changes in sense-making in media-based public discussions; the Article III addresses the challenges and possibilities of media-based public dialogue by analyzing public discussions in terms of the homeworld and alienworld within one society.

4.1 Authenticity of empathic experience in media and learning by discussion

The aim of the Article I was to determine whether it is the mediatory nature as such that hinders genuine empathy and thereby impedes learning from others in particular and media-based public discussions in general. Basing on Stein’s and Husserl’s analyses of empathy, I argue that media-based communication as such does not hinder genuine empathic experience and thus does not necessarily prevent the possibility of learning from media-based public discussions. I do not claim, however, that it would be exactly the same to learn from a discussion in the physical presence of others as it would be to learn through media-based communication. I do not take a position on this empirical claim, especially since empirical studies continue to generate a variety of different results about learning via media-based communication.32

The motivating point of departure for the Article I were arguments made according to which what we encounter in media-based communication is not

32 E.g., in Bączek’s study, no statistical difference between face-to-face and online learning was discovered in terms of opinions on the ability of the learning method to increase knowledge, while e-learning was considered to be less effective than face-to-face learning in terms of improving skills and social competences (Bączek et al., 2021). It has also been shown that distance learning has benefits but does not effectively develop interpersonal skills (Leo et al., 2021). According to S. Kauppi et al. (2020), the most emphasized challenges in online learning concerned the combination of creating knowledge (1) together, (2) virtually and (3) in a multidisciplinary group, with the three factors being equally challenging for learning together.
authentic but rather an imaginary or derivative view of others (e.g., Dreyfus, 2008; Fuchs, 2014; Staehler, 2014). Dreyfus (2008) further argued that the mediated, necessarily inauthentic encounters of others permit only superficial learning, such as mimicking, and not deeper learning, which requires fuller understanding, such as learning by discussion. Such arguments would negate the possibility of any learning from others—or any other essentially communicative educational situations—in media-based public discussions (they would allow, however, superficial learning, such as simply repeating without deeper understanding).

4.1.1 Authentic empathy in bodily presence

Here, an “authentic empathic experience” means a genuine experience of another person as another person, one who possesses his or her own perspective on the world, according to the above-presented phenomenological definition of empathy as Einfühlung. The term “authentic” in the Article I comes from one of the central sources, from Staehler’s (2014) argument, in which it was used synonymously with “genuine” and “real” but was also connected to Heidegger’s analysis of existential authenticity. Article I is a critical response to Staehler’s argument and to analogous ones presented by Dreyfus (2008) and Fuchs (2014). For this reason, I chose to keep the term “authentic” for strategic argumentative purposes, even though I omitted all reference to Heidegger’s technical discussion of existential authenticity in my own presentation. So, like Staehler, I utilized the term “authentic” in its most basic and everyday sense. This sense is well described by Varga (2011), who remarks that to say that something is authentic is to say that it is what it professes to be, or what it is reputed to be, in terms of origin or authorship. An authentic empathic experience is really or truly an empathic experience (“truly” and “really” in the basic epistemological rather than empirical sense, as we are speaking of experience in the phenomenological key). On the other hand, in Staehler’s use, the concept of authenticity also echoes the deep-existential sense that Heidegger gave to the German term “Eigentlichkeit” in his Being and Time (1927/2006). But, as said before, these fundamental ontological and existential resonances were not the focus of my argument.33

33 This Heideggerian term “Eigentlichkeit” is usually translated into English as “authenticity.” The term stems from the ordinary language term, “eigentlich,” which means “really” or “truly” and is built on the stem “eigen,” meaning own or proper (thus another translation could be, for example, “ownedness”). The term is at the core of Heidegger’s analysis of human existence or being, Dasein—not an object among objects, but a relation of being, of caring about what one is at any moment and what one can and
In my use, the term “authentic” thus implies the idea that our relations to others and to ourselves involve our personhoods, individualities, and possibilities. All phenomenologists, from Husserl and Stein to Heidegger and Arendt, have shared the idea that our being in the world is always a being with others, and that we relate to others not only as actualities but also as subjects of possibilities. The problem Staehler identified in media-based, especially internet-based, communication is that we may not be looking at each other or attending to each other as unique individuals (similar to Schütz’s idea of a proper encounter of another person), but merely as numbers representing our own popularity or visibility in media insofar as others respond to our contents with likes, views, etc. While this would not necessarily make our being with others inauthentic in all online circumstances, such as having a one-to-one discussion, Staehler argued that, ultimately, the problem in online communication boils down to the fact that, in her account, the relation is not a body-to-body relation. Rather, she argued, since we are bodies, and since we do not share the bodily space when communicating by media, all of our social interactions by media are derivative and inauthentic.

Dreyfus’s (2008) argument comes close to that of Staehler. He did not explicitly speak of authenticity (his thinking is known to be influenced by Heidegger’s),34 but he clearly argued, based on Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s analyses of our experiences being bodily conditioned, that our communication by media, especially online, is disembodied and thus not genuine social interaction. Moreover, he claimed that not sharing the bodily space hinders the possibility of learning from a discussion, of learning from others. As he noted, citing N. Dye, “Learning is a deeply social process that requires time and face-to-face contact” (p. 32), which he contended does not occur in media-based communication with others—or, at least, not “without an experience of their embodied successes and

will be. Heidegger held that we are always essentially and inescapably social beings, but, in average everydayness, we are as a rule adrift, acting as one of the “herd” or “crowd.” So, he suggested, we fail to own up to who we are. We do not take over our own choices as our own and, as a result, we are not really the authors of our own lives (Varga, 2011). To the extent that our lives are unowned or disowned, existence is inauthentic (uneigentlich), not our own (eigen). To realize the capacity for authenticity, then, one must undergo a personal transformation, one that tears one away from the average everydayness and toward encountering oneself as a future-directed individual responsible for oneself (Heidegger, 1927/2006, §60). To get a fuller picture, the reader should go through the second part of Being and Time, Chapters 1–3.

34 Dreyfus’s approach to Heidegger, as well as to learning as “skillful coping,” proceeds from an important and bold interpretive claim that our nature is to be world disclosers, meaning that Dasein is individually embodied, situated, and directed by everyday concernful coping, and consequently the disclosure of open, coherent, distinct contexts or worlds in which we perceive, feel, act, and think (Dreyfus, 1992, 2008).
failures in actual situations, [as] such learners would not be able to acquire the ability of an expert” (p. 68). In Dreyfus’s theory of learning, “expertise” is among the highest stages of learning, and media-based communication does not constitute actual situations nor include embodied successes. He also viewed the public sphere in general as superficial and as a space in which no proper discussions and thus no learning from discussions can occur.

Lastly, Fuchs (2014) presented an argument on the possibilities of empathic experience in media-based communication. According to him, in media-based communication, as we do not share the same physical space and thus do not perceive the other person’s physical body, the empathic experience of the other person is imaginative: “Disembodied [i.e., media-based] communication … shifts the modes of empathy towards the fictional pole at the risk of merely projecting one’s own feelings onto the other” (Fuchs, 2014, p. 152). In other words, for Fuchs, media-based communication cannot involve an actual empathic experience.

All of these arguments are based on the classical phenomenological argumentation according to which our relations to the world and others are enabled by our bodies (e.g., Husserl, 1976b; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). In classical and contemporary phenomenology, it is often argued that the perception of another person is based on the perception of their living body (e.g., Fuchs, 2016). In media, however, we, by definition, do not perceive others’ physical bodies here and now, but only traces of them, such as pictures, messages, or videos.

4.1.2 Wortleib and Wortkörper: A heretical use of Stein’s argument

Answering the contemporary authors discussed above, I argue that grasping another person’s perspective is not necessarily bound to the perception of their physically present bodies. More precisely, I contend that the authenticity of the empathic experience is not necessarily restricted to the physical presence of another person, and that perceiving the other’s physical body is not necessary for an empathic experience. In some contexts, it suffices to perceive a message of some kind from others, either in the public or the private sphere. By contrast, it is not given that we can always have an empathic experience even when others are physically present. I do not deny the constitutive role of our bodies in our being in the world or being

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35 The “heresy” refers to Ricoeur’s (1986) argument that phenomenology is the school of heretics, meaning that many of the classical phenomenologists have applied the analyses of their predecessors in a novel manner.
together, but I do argue that our bodily nature of being does not hinder authentic empathic experiences in media-based communication. On this basis, I question the validity of Dreyfus’s argument that advanced learning from media-based communication would be impossible due to not sharing the physical space.36

First, I utilized the analysis that Stein offered in her early work Zum Problem der Einfühlung (1917/2008) (in English, On the Problem of Empathy, 1989) and combined it with Husserl’s investigations of basic empathy. Here, it is crucial to notice that according to classical phenomenological analysis, perceiving the other’s lived body in its physical presence is essential in the so-called “primary” form of empathy (see Fuchs, 2014, 2016). However, as we can see already from Husserl’s analysis (1976b), this is an essential requirement only for the very basic level of experiencing another living being. Basing on Stein’s analysis, I contend that there are also other, more complex ways to experience others than basic empathy and that, in some of these more complex alternatives, we never perceive the other’s actual physical body. In these experiences, the importance of the other’s physical lived body loses the crucial importance that it has in basic empathic experiences.

To make my point, I utilized Stein’s (1917/2008) concepts of the physical word body (Wortkörper) and the living word body (Wortleib) (also translated as “verbal physical body” and “verbal living body” by W. Stein in Stein [1989]). These concepts entail the distinction between Körper and Leib (the physical body and the lived body) that Husserl used to distinguish the mere physical thing from the living, experiencing, and self-experiencing bodily subject (e.g., Husserl, 1976b) and applied this distinction to verbal encounters. Thus, “Wortkörper” for Stein denoted the physical, thingly part of a particular word—a piece of text or a sound—and “Wortleib” denoted the word as a bearer of meaning. Stein distinguished between Wortkörper and Wortleib and emphasized the fact that each word puts forth in one way or another both a physical side and a meaning, and that these two are not separable in reality, only distinguishable in analysis (unlike in the case of signals, e.g., the beeping noise, which may have multiple functions and meanings in different contexts). Stein utilized the concepts of the physical word body and the living word body to explain the general nature of words as bearers of meanings, not as physical things. For her, due to the nature of the word, no word operates as a physical body or a mere material thing, but instead each word is a living word

36 An argument with a similar conclusion to mine was made by Hamilton and Feenberg (2011). Based on an analysis of historical developments of online education and an early experiment in educational computer conferencing, they made the case that effective online teaching, like effective face-to-face instruction, is fundamentally relational and not merely a matter of information delivery.
body—that is, a body as a bearer of meaning. In other words, she utilized the terms as hypotheses, not as objects of worldly experiences, to argue that there cannot be a *Wortkörper* in lived experiences of words. For her, there was no such thing as a mere physical word body because every word is a bearer of meaning, and thus the moment a material body (ink on paper, noise, etc.) is perceived as a word, it appears as a living word body. She only utilized these terms briefly to make the described point, but I believe that they are more fruitful than she seemed to realize. Therefore, I made the heretical move to extract these concepts from their original context.

Unlike Stein, I utilized these terms to designate objects of lived experience. Based on Stein’s analysis, I assumed that words are always bearers of meaning, but I brought these terms closer to the original Husserlian distinction between the (mere) physical body and a lived physical body. Thus, I used (a) *Wortkörper* to designate the verbal body that is not experienced as someone’s expression similar to the non-lived physical body, as lexical, and (b) *Wortleib* to designate the verbal body experienced as an expression by someone, similar to the lived body of the other. While in both cases (a) and (b), words are bearers of meaning, in my use, they refer to different meanings: (a) something other than someone’s expression, and (b) someone’s expression. For example, the words “dream” and “plan” on the cover of my paper calendar are physical word bodies in this sense because they are mere words, not anyone’s expression. The same words expressed by my friend in our discussion, either face to face or by media, are lived word bodies because they are part of her expression as another experiencing subject. In this strategic move, I first analyzed Stein’s argumentation and then applied it to serve my argument.

Stein provided a crucial argument to the effect that it is possible to have an empathic experience while not perceiving the other’s actual body. First, she pointed out that words do not (merely) signify, they also express (Stein, 1917/2008, p. 92). For her, this also applied when something psychic is expressed. For example, when someone says that they are sad, I, as the hearing subject, understand the meaning of their words as an expression of their feelings. However: “The sadness I now know of is not an ‘alive one’ before me as a perceptual givenness. It is probably as little like the sadness comprehended in the symbol as the table of which I hear spoken is like the other side of the table which I see” (Stein, 1989, p. 92). That is, as I interpret it, the verbal expression “I am sad” is not identical with sadness, unlike

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37 One might counterargue this by bringing up the case of meaningless words (but are they words, and not mere signals, then? see Stein, 1917/2008, Chapter 5), but this is not the point here.
the sad countenance (Stein, 1917/2008, p. 87). The possibility of lying lies here, in the non-identity of the verbal expression and the expressed experience, since one may say that one is sad without actually being sad. Of course, one may act like one is sad too, even when one is not, but it is possible to argue that such feigning is a different act than an actual sad countenance.

However, as Stein continued: “The expression released from the connection with what is expressed is no longer the same object” (1989, p. 92). That is, when a verbal expression is separated from the expressing subject, it is no longer part of that person’s expression, but something else, such as an abstraction or an example. For Stein, one could neglect the speaking individual in the word, unlike in the case of a bodily expression, since there is no bodily expression without the subject. Even in the case of a speaking individual, Stein contended that one can detach the expression from the actual speaking subject and comprehend it as an abstraction or an example (Stein, 1917/2008, p. 93). For example, announcements about the next station on a bus can be recorded by an actual person but utilized by separating the recording from the original person. In this case, the words do not appear to the hearing subject as expressions of that person but instead as mere information about the next station.

The important point for my argument from Stein’s analysis is derived from the following: “Only if I want to have the intuition on which the speaker bases his statement and his full experience of expression, do I need empathy. Therefore, it should be clear that one does not arrive at experience by the path leading immediately from verbal expression to meaning, that the word, insofar as it has an ideal meaning, is not a symbol” (1989, p. 82). A symbol here means that in something perceived there is something else, particularly something psychic (Stein, 1917/2008, p. 86). Thus, by saying that a word is not a symbol, Stein meant that a word does not necessarily point at another psychic life, at another person’s experience of the world. Words can be, however, perceived in empathy (Stein, 1917/2008, p. 93). Another person can appear to be externalizing or communicating something verbally, and possibly communicating that to me. In this case, the words point out something, the foreign consciousness, the other person’s experience. They are no longer something objective, “but at the same time are the externalization or the announcement of the person’s meaningful act as well as of the person behind, such as perception” (Stein, 1989, pp. 82–83). When I suddenly hear the bus driver saying that the bus is on an exceptional route today, from the same speakers who gave the pre-recorded announcements just a moment before, the words appear to
To be clear, for Stein, it was not the same to have the other’s experience being mediated by words as to be “mediated” by their immediate bodily expressions, but, in both cases, there can be a genuine empathic experience in question. In her analysis, words as the other person’s expression were given in a different manner than bodily expression, which, she argued, were given symbolically: “At most one could say that in speaking the externalization of self steps into view with the same animation as an affect does in expressive movement, but not the experiences themselves to which the speech testifies” (Stein, 1989, p. 83). But, words can still be given as mediating the other’s experience in their own way: “the transition to the speaking person and his acts can also begin in the meaning of the words. A question, a request, a command, a greeting is always directed at someone and thus refers back to the relationship between the speaker to the hearer. Here the speaker’s intentions substantially assist in making the words intelligible. From the viewpoint of [the speaker] we comprehend, not what the words mean in general, but what they mean here and now.” And further: “We see that we experience this proceeding of what is outwardly perceived on the level of empathic projection from what was ‘co- perceived’ on the first level. This was missing in the cases considered earlier.” (p. 83). The “cases considered earlier” refer to the cases in which a verbal body was taken not as someone’s expression but as an abstraction or example.

Based on Stein’s analysis, I have distinguished these two kinds of perceiving words: (a) perceiving words non-empathically as mere words not expressing anyone’s experience, or (b) empathically perceiving words as someone’s expression of their experiences. In my use, “the physical word body” (Wortkörper) refers to case (a) and “the lived word body” (Wortleib) refers to case (b). In my use, Wortleib is the object perceived as a verbal expression by someone pointing at their experience with which I, the subject, can empathize. Wortleib is not the actual living body of the other, but the other can still be seen as if behind the expression, having put forth that particular expression and providing something of oneself in that expression. In perceiving a verbal object as someone’s expression, it appears as

38 As Svenaeus (2021) argues, though, we can distinguish the actual lived bodily objects from mere verbal objects, when discussing empathy in media-based communication. For him, Stein’s theory is open to interpret telephone or Skype conversations in terms of empathy since they include mediations of the lived, expressive human body that is seen and/or heard in the encounter. This distinction is related to the difference between the empathy constituted by perceiving another person’s lived body, or parts of it (telephone), and the empathy constituted by perceiving another person’s expression as a lived word body.
someone particular’s expression and no one else’s, even if we do not know the name, the looks, or other attributes of that person. For example, anonymous confessions are someone’s particular confessions, not confessions in general as examples or abstractions. Moreover, as verbal objects can, at least in some cases, be perceived both empathically and non-empathically, we might sometimes be confused about whether or not a verbal object is someone’s expression of their experiences, or whether our perception of the object might change from non-empathic to empathic and vice versa as we find out more about the verbal object.

Building on this idea, I argue that while we are bodily conditioned beings and perceive other persons as lived bodies, we can grasp others through something that is not themselves but that they intentionally produced as an expression of their perspective. In addition to direct perception, we can also grasp others’ perspectives through their communicative products, such as letters and photos. These, too, are physical bodies in communicative function, which I must grasp through my senses as a corporeal being. This was captured by Stein as follows:

Is it essentially necessary that spirit can only enter into exchange with spirit through the medium of corporeality? I, as psycho-physical individual, actually obtain information about the spiritual life of other individuals in no other way. Of course, I know of many individuals, living and dead, whom I have never seen. But I know this from others whom I see or through the medium of their works which I sensually perceive and which they have produced by virtue of their psycho-physical organization. We meet the spirit of the past in various forms but always bound to a physical body. This is the written or printed word or the word hewed into stone—the spatial form becomes stone or metal. (Stein, 1989, p. 117, emphasis added)

4.1.3 Media-based empathic experience and learning by media-based discussions

When receiving a message on social media, one does not see the other person’s body but does grasp the other person’s thoughts, feelings, etc., expressed in the message. Applying the above analysis, the message is a physical body functioning as a lived word body in the sense that in and through it, one can grasp the other person’s perspective, even if one does not perceive the other person’s physical lived body. The words we read or listen to become “lived” for us insofar as we intuit another person behind the words. The basic mechanism of media-based
communication that can be identified on the basis of Stein’s distinctions remains
the same: We grasp another person not in his or her physical bodily presence but
rather in her or his mediated expression in some form.

Another important point can be made here on the basis of Husserl’s analysis:
The body of a person operates as an expressive organ, as is often argued in classical
phenomenology, but the expressive relation can be extended so that it also informs
means other than the physical lived body of the person in question (Husserl,
1973b).39 According to Husserl’s analysis, comprehension of the other’s
subjectivity—its own concrete and intentional directedness—can be prioritized as
a goal over the simple sensory experience of the other’s body:

I am, in empathy, directed to the other Ego and Ego-life and not to
psychophysical reality, which is a double reality with physical reality as the
founding level. The other’s body is for me a passageway (in “expression”, in
intimation, etc.) toward the understanding of the Ego there, the ‘he’ … The
human being appears, but I am focused on the human subject and on the
subjectivity in its subjective comportments. (Husserl, 1952, p. 347)

For Husserl, it seems, our experience of others includes, as an essential component,
comprehension of what transcends purely sensorily given factors—namely, the
other’s subjective life. This happens in the other’s expression—or something
appearing as an act of expression, such as speaking, recognizing something, and
the communication of feelings (the acts by which another person informs us about
something, whether on purpose or by accident). When we experience others, we
are directed toward their lives as presented to us through their bodily expressions,
which are not reducible to psychophysical realities. That is, we grasp the other’s
intentional directedness at the world when we perceive their expressions in some
way or another. The other is not grasped primarily as a mere material body, but also
as an expressive intentional being.

Putting the argument another way around, the physical body of the other also
becomes “lived” when it expresses the life of the other. A mere body does not yet
appear as another person. It is thus the manner of our intending and not any object
as such that constitutes the experience of the other. In other words, what is decisive
in our experience of others is not that we perceive their bodies but rather that we
perceive them as expressing their subjective lives in one way or another. When

39 In my analysis, my main source for investigating expressivity is Stein. Therefore, I have not deeply
analyzed the Husserlian analyses of Ausdruck (see Husserl, 1973c, Blg. LVI).
perceiving others’ bodies, we perceive their bodily expressions, such as gestures, facial expressions, and directions of interest, and this is how they become constituted in our experience in the first place. The other is not experienced and encountered as a physical body but instead as an expression of actions, intentions, and lived experience. By experiencing another’s expression, we can also grasp some aspects of what the other is going through. For example, we can perceive the other’s expression of their feelings through their smiles, their voices, or their words.

An analogous manner of givenness is operative in grasping the others’ perspectives in media. It is not the mere string of words that constitutes the appearance of another person but also the expression of another person as if in those words (or other actions, such as noises, posting pictures, or emojis). The intending of another’s subjectivity is so fundamental to our lives that the sensuously given immediately appears as that which expresses a subjective life, whether it is the other’s physical body or something else through which we encounter them.

In my interpretation, Stein’s and Husserl’s distinctions allow for the argument that when we have an empathic experience via media, the relation is not imaginative or inauthentic. This is in direct contrast with what Fuchs (2014), Dreyfus (2008), and Staehler (2014) have argued (see also Svenaeus, 2021). So, I argue that it is the perception of others’ expressions that constitutes our experience of their perspectives, both in the others’ physical presence and via media. It is the others’ expression, rather than our perception of the others’ bodies, that is the primary factor in authentic empathic experiences. As I argue in the Article I, this has crucial implications for the possibility of grasping others’ perspectives by media. If the decisive constituent of the possibility of encountering another person

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40 From Ideas I onward, Husserl analyzed pictures, not as a type of expression, but as a sui generis manner of intending. He distinguished pictures from expressions and from linguistic signs, arguing that they have their own intentionality, which he called picture-consciousness (see Husserl, 1980). In short, Husserl argues that when we look at an image of an individual we do not directly perceive the subject depicted in the image nor the material object that depicts the image (unless we are inspecting this material as an object), e.g. the photographic paper or canvas. Instead, Husserl claims that we are turned to the object depicted by the image as the “image object” (see Osler, 2021). However, this argument concerning pictures might not hold for more complex ways of expressing oneself with pictures analogically to text or audio in the 21st century, in, e.g., selfies and video. In this sense, when communicating by pictures, we are not necessarily having an empathic experience of the objects in the picture, but with the person presenting the picture. Similarly, when someone uses emojis for expressing herself, we mostly do not have an empathic experience of the emoji, but of the person putting forth the emoji. That is, it is not the emoji who is happy, but the person using the emoji as an expressive means. Moreover, while Stein does not consider the examples of painted pictures or photographs displaying living bodies (Svenaeus, 2021), one’s expression by the means of a picture, saying, e.g., “hey, look at this”, could, in my use of her terminology, be considered as a lived word body.
is not their bodily presence, but rather their expression, then the absence of the other’s physical body does not undo the possibility of having a genuine empathic experience (questions concerning spatial closeness may be raised when discussing the presence of the other’s physical lived body, but these are not relevant in the context of the public sphere, where physical intimacy is excluded).41

Regarding the possibility of learning from media-based public discussions, the following can be concluded: If we can genuinely grasp others’ perspectives in media, then media-based communication \textit{per se} does not necessarily hinder the possibilities of coming to view something of others’ viewpoints and thus learning from others or from discussions in media-based environments. Following Stein’s analysis, it is not necessary that we have empathic experiences when perceiving verbal objects. Therefore, we may also not learn from the discussion when we do not perceive the contents in media as expressions of others’ views. However, the media-based nature itself is not necessarily a hindrance to learning from others in discussion.42

It is also notable that among the contributions of the Article I of this dissertation is that I took up Stein’s distinction of the physical word body and the lived word body and utilized these concepts in an applied manner. Thereby, I demonstrated that the full potential of utilizing Stein’s early work and all its implications remains unnoticed.

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41 Waldenfels’s (2009) argument, not utilized in the Article I but introduced above, sheds further light on my argumentation: According to him, the difference in the givenness of others in media versus in their physical presence is also constituted by the experience of the presence of their expression and their simultaneous physical absence. As he argues, media technology seems to erase the difference between the “here” and “there,” the presence and non-presence, and constitute a telepresence. However, he continues, the mediation in question does not erase the distance, but rather creates a teleabsence, which is a particular kind of access to the other. The experience of communication by media would not be an experience of communication at all if it did not include the experience of different locations, with me being here and the other(s) being somewhere.

42 Some researchers, such as Friesen (2011), argued that the structural, technical, and material characteristics of media systems and technologies are so dominant that they shape what can be thought and expressed by media (see also Burbules, 2016). Less categorically, I contend that the material, structural, and systemic characteristics of media operate as conditions for the possibility of collective and personal knowledge and of social organization. Different material tools provide different kinds of possibilities and affordances. Moreover, the manners and possibilities of communication also vary according to the types of signs and potential significations provided by the platform. Also, the manners in which different media structure space and time differ greatly, as do the quantities of space and time that they offer: the speed of communication can vary, as can the length of the messages. Due to the technical and material differences of media platforms, some may be better suited for public discussions than others.
4.2 Sedimentation of affects in media-based public discussions: Changes in sense-making

Several investigations of the public sphere have shown that feelings and emotional responses decide much of what happens in the media-based public space (e.g., Fan et al., 2014; Knuutila & Laaksonen, 2020). For instance, Papacharissi (2014) explored several real-life situations and events during the 21st century. According to her, while technologies network us, it is the various narratives in the communication—due to their affective force—that emotionally connect us to each other, making us feel close to some and distancing us from others.

The point of departure in the Article II is the notion that, in media-based public discussions, when we turn attentively toward something that appears as an expression in the discussions, we are affected by the contributions that others make to the discussions. As emphasized in the Article II, it is different to be affected by a non-living object than by a person, because it is different to perceive something as an inanimate thing than as a foreign consciousness. The object affects us differently when we perceive it as another person than when we perceive it as a thing with no intentions of its own. For example, it is different to be affected by a laughing emoji considered in abstraction from all users than a laughing emoji that someone has purposefully put forth as an expression in a discussion. What can affect us in other persons are not only their bodies (see Ahmed, 2014) but also their perspectives, their experiences, and their views that we can grasp in their expressions. That is, another person is affective as a body but also in having a perspective on the world, and potentially also on me. In media-based public discussions, the primarily affective feature of others are their perspectives, which can be grasped in their opinions, actions, and other expressions in media.

In the Article II, I argue that, in line with classical phenomenological investigations, affectivity is the relation between the experiencing subject and the experienced object, how the object affects the subject and appears to the subject in lived experience. Accordingly, changes in sense-making by media-based public discussions can be analysed as contingent sedimentations of the object’s affective relation to the subject.

In the Article II, the informal educational situation discussed is change in sense-making that allows for the inclusion of pre-reflective changes. Basing on Husserl’s mature analyses, I take sense to be in part socially, culturally, and historically constituted, so that “the earlier sense gives something to the later sense, enters it in a way” (Husserl, 1976b, p. 373). On the basis of this idea, we can
content that in every constitution of sense, something of the original constitution and experience is re-lived and re-enacted. That is, earlier sense-making circumscribes the source of sense on which other, newly acquired sense is built in a continuous expansion and transformation (Roth & Friesen, 2014).

In a communicative situation like media-based public discussion, we are not only affected by what another person says or does at the moment, but we are also mutually affected by each other more or less directly; by what the other person and their expression represent in the societal context, by the additional others who contribute to the discussion, by the (potential) audience, and by the tensions and the ongoing processes in the society represented in the discussion. Here, affective situations emerge that are not reducible to any party’s individual affects.

4.2.1 Sedimentation of affects

In media-based public discussions, we can sometimes see how the meanings given to objects under discussion sometimes change over the course of the discussions. That is, the ways in which the members of a society make sense of these objects become somewhat altered. In the Article II, utilizing the classical phenomenological analyses of affectivity, I explicate the alternation and change of the sense of the objects under discussion as sedimentations of affects. For example, when the laughter emoji is used often enough in the context of public and political ridicule, it gains a complex negative meaning for the subjects participating in the discussion. It starts to carry the sedimented affective weight in the subject’s experience. Moreover, likewise with learning, when the sense of an object changes for the subject, the meanings given to related objects may change as well, more or less. For instance, also the meanings the particular contributors to the discussions have for the subject may change together with the discussed objects.

The Husserlian concept of sedimentation (Sedimentierung) refers to the way in which new acts build on and are dependent upon the accomplishments and products of earlier acts but are marginal or forgotten in the present acts (Husserl, 1976b, § 9h, app. VI). That is, the accomplishment of an act remains in operation even when the act has been completed. In Husserl’s mature analyses, our present experiences imply past experiences of others that together have constituted the sense of the historical-cultural-social situation in which we find ourselves. The meanings of objects and situations as well as the ways in which the world and oneself can be conceived develop in the course of one’s own experiences and the experiences of others. We acquire the meanings and habits of meaning from our contemporaries.
and also from past generations. In other words, every meaningful experience includes more or less complex layers of the past, and this process of meaning sedimentation extends beyond the individual subject’s past. This applies also to long-term public discussions. Implicit and explicit meanings that we give to our surroundings are thus not merely abstract semantics but are the results of manifold experiences that may have occurred over several generations.

I build on Husserl’s argument, according to which every experienced worldly object is affective for the subject in some manner, and suggest that the sedimentation of experiences also entails the sedimentation of affects of different kinds. An affection that an object has on us motivates a particular response from us, and, when a particular kind of response toward our environment has been confirmed often enough, it becomes “privileged” for us. While, for Husserl, affections only occurred in the present and in retention (Husserl, 1966, §32), the affective experiences do not vanish but remain in our experiences of the world, others, and ourselves, even if we are not aware of them at all moments. That is, affects that are experienced often enough ultimately shape subsequent experiences (Drummond, 2020; see Husserl, 1991, pp. 66–67). When a sedimented experience is part of a current experience, something that had been affective becomes affective once again in the present object, participating in the determination of how the present object—a person, a statement, a thing, a term, etc.—appears to us (Husserl, 1966, p. 159).

By being in the world with others and mutually affecting each other, we participate in the sedimentation of experiences that participate in the constitution of our future experiences. Thereby, we participate in the constitution of the historical world and, more particularly, in the formation of our own social spheres. Put another way, how others affect us has an impact on how we make sense of the world, and this influence continues even after the affective moment. Although this may not require direct acquisitions from others, without the affects others evoke in us and without being socialized into the affective backgrounds of the cultural-social sphere, the world would appear different to us. What is strongly affective to many, what captures the attention of many, directs discussions toward particular questions or views. When particular objects have appeared affective in a particular way and evoked particular responses for often enough (what is “enough” here is another discussion), such objects involve these particular affective and responsive (e.g., emotions) elements for the experiencing subject. This can be seen, for instance, in populist forms of discourse that direct tensions, and thus affectivity, and target them at particular topics, terms, persons, etc. (not necessarily affecting everyone in the
same way but directing the affections to include the affective background of the particular tension).

**4.2.2 Changes in sense-making by media-based public discussions**

In the Article II I note that the fact that sense-making includes the sedimented past experiences of the subject and those of previous generations does not mean that past experiences would simply determine the ways in which we perceive the world. The past always weighs on us, creating the sense content of the present and influencing current experiences (Stein, 1922/2010, p. 15), but changes in the meanings of objects in our experiences are not simply cumulative but always open to revisions as well. As Husserl put it, our habits and the cultural-historical frameworks in which we live provide us with certain “horizons” of possibilities and anticipations, but since the future has not yet occurred, our actions are characterized by what he called a determinable indeterminacy (Husserl, 1976b, p. 323). In the context of the present work, then, developments in the potential changes of meanings given to objects or even meanings emerging in society through media-based public discussions cannot be decided in advance or controlled by anyone; these changes are indeterminate.43

Somewhat similarly, referring to Husserl’s analysis of intentionality, Buck (1989) described the structure of experiences as involving cycles of experiential anticipation and fulfilment—or alternatively, disappointment or negation. The horizontal structure of experience is always based on previous experience, but it is also open to what is new or different—what can be apprehended through its extension or expansion (*Horizontwandel*). Insofar as our horizons change in experiencing, future anticipations also change, as do our understandings of experiences from the past.

Following Husserl’s account, we can contend that when new situations emerge that affect the subject in a new way, the affects present in that situation may become sedimented into the subject’s experiences in a manner that alters how particular objects underlying or related to the discussions appear to the subject in future experiences. Earlier experiences and their sediments do not vanish but are instead present in future experiences, even if in an altered way. In media-based public discussions, the process of sedimentation might be more or less gradual; new ways

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43 Saying this does not refute Stein’s account of psychological causality (see Stein, 1922/2010, pp. 6–17) or Husserl’s account of determination of contempt (see Husserl, 1991, pp. 49–50).
of speaking about something may change the ways in which this something appears to members of society either immediately or after the discussions have been ongoing for some time. That is, in media-based public discussions, subjects may gain new sediments from various experiences and in many different temporal orders.

In the Article II, I conclude that, even though all actual worldly experiences are affective in one way or another, media-based public discussions offer a unique situation for changes in how particular objects appear to members of a community or society. This is because of the peculiarities of media-based public discussions, particularly their temporal and social width. Media-based discussions are temporally unlimited and may continue even for years, and therefore they gain or may gain new sediments of affects over long periods and in alternating social constellations, thereby altering the meanings that objects have for members of society. Contributions to these discussions can be made all the time, and participants can affect one another daily, in between other daily activities. Moreover, since contributions in public media (be it social or news media) are in principle open for everyone to access, the potential exists for every member of society to participate as either a contributor or a follower. Potentially, “everyone” also participates in these discussions even when they do not follow particular contributions or platforms since they have the potential to be part of the audience for whom the contributions are directed. This means that novel contributions that affect the subject might appear at any time and in any place, even constantly and everywhere, and from multiple segments of society, directing the discussions in new ways.

In an ongoing discussion, the participants mutually affect each other in a wide and sometimes even chaotic or messy sphere comprising multiple simultaneous discussions on numerous platforms, more or less visible to all members of society. Especially in the 21st century, in many societies, a variety of simultaneous and distinct platforms exist on which discussions are held, with these discussions sometimes extending beyond the boundaries of the platforms themselves. By continuing endlessly and on multiple, even simultaneous, platforms, these discussions are shaped over time, occasionally even in multiple different directions. As Marchart (2018) noted, due to the differences in the personal and social histories of the members of society, the associated sediments might allow for some degree of variation. Changes in how objects underlying or related to the discussion appear to subjects may also vary. Such changes never occur in a void but are related to the surrounding world, the established sediments, and social-cultural spheres. In
media-based public discussions, with different members of society participating to variable extents, some people may be differentially affected by the same contributions, and thus the objects underlying or related to these discussions may present different, altered meanings for them while the changes themselves would still possess the same root.

4.3 The “homeworld” and the “alienworld”: Possibilities and challenges for public dialogue

In a diverse and plural society in which differences and disagreements occur about what constitutes the common good and good society, the communicative practice of public dialogue is an important informal educational possibility (e.g., Evans, 2001). Based on the characteristics of public discussions as constituted by many, “public dialogue” means a dialogical directedness at others during an exchange. Still, just like the media-based public sphere itself, the concept of public dialogue also remains vague, especially in media-based communication. It is impossible to fix certain places, moments, or specific numbers of contributors and participants in public discussions that must be directed at others with the aim of understanding them for media-based public discussions to be considered dialogue. We may think of public dialogue as sporadic moments, here and there, every now and then, and as informal educational moments not intended for acquisition, but instead for understanding others’ world(s).44

Within classical—and contemporary—phenomenology, it is widely accepted that our actual, lived being in the world and meaning constitution are always cultural, social, and historical (Husserl, 1976b; see also Miettinen, 2020). For members of different segments of society to engage in public dialogue, they must acknowledge the differences in their “worlds”; how they perceive society, how they view the world, what they value, and what they consider normal, common, and right. In the Article III, I look more closely at the social, cultural, and historical nature of how we perceive the world around us—which, in this specific case, is the social world. I do this by investigating two challenges to the third informal

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44 The shifts from regular discussions to dialogue can be unpredictable and fleeting, but we might also want to make dialogue our goal. How to actually do this might fall outside philosophy, but there are multiple presentations of how to apply the ideas of public dialogue in the public sphere in practice. To provide a few examples: Alhanen (2019) offered detailed instructions about what constitutes a dialogue in practice and how to engage in and lead a dialogue in multiple different settings, including in the public, and Englund and Sandström (2015) outlined views on how to turn the ideals of dialogue into practice in governance.
educational process possible in media-based public discussions—that is, public dialogue. These two challenges are (a) misunderstanding and (b) stereotyping. I treat both as examples of the types of problems encountered in public discussions and thus do not imply that they constitute an exhaustive group of possibilities. I also discuss two political-philosophical arguments concerning dialogue and democracy, one from the deliberative point of view and the other from the agonist viewpoint. I do not take part in the controversy between these two approaches, but I do provide a third alternative conception of the possibilities of dialogue in the public sphere by applying the Husserlian concepts of homeworld and alienworld. Toward this end, I analyzed the homeworld/alienworld phenomenon from the perspective of the subject participating in media-based public discussions.

My reason for taking up the topic of public dialogue in the Article III was that dialogue is valued positively, not only in academic discussions but also in many policy areas (see Englund & Sandström, 2012). In the media-based public sphere, dialogue is used to refer to situations in which we are directed toward others with the aim of understanding them in general, and not only for explicitly educational or emancipatory reasons, such as acquiring ideas or information from them, arguing with them, or compelling them to change their views. Taking up the idea of public dialogue and investigating its possibilities, conditions, and challenges is crucial—especially, when public spheres are burdened, and political polarization is growing in many societies.

Even though dialogue is often thought of in terms of rational speech (e.g., Habermas, 1991; Wahl, 2018), there are no principled reasons why cries or other spontaneous kinds of expressions of one’s perspective cannot be part of a dialogue. In the media-based international public sphere, the #MeToo campaign in 2017 provides an example of a collective and partly emotional expression of not necessarily anything other than the everyday struggles of women in many societies.

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45 Dialogue has been a much-discussed topic in the history of philosophy as an exchange in an I–Thou relation by, for instance, Buber, or as a group activity by, for instance, Yankelovich, or as a form of formal education, not to mention the use of dialogue in the history of philosophy by giants such as Plato, Confucius, and Mencius. Moreover, several phenomenologists who have clarified the phenomenon of radical alienness or otherness, Levinas perhaps most importantly, have convincingly argued that we cannot understand the phenomena of human life, human beings, and/or human selfhood without investigating the category of “the other.” In the context of democracy or the public sphere, the possibilities and needs of dialogue have been investigated by authors such as Dewey, Arendt, and, in recent years, Jezierska and Koczanowicz. To concentrate on the function of the experiences of homeworld and alienworld in the possibilities of public dialogue, I operate primarily by the definition and characterization provided by Jezierska and Koczanowicz involving the analysees of the more classical authors.
As a large discussion occurring around the world, #MeToo naturally assumed different shapes, and further arguments behind the actual action of declaring “me too” on one’s social media could be observed, but the collective saying of “me too,” the statement of having been a victim of sexual harassment, can also be seen as a mere collective expression of one’s experiences, which was not formulated as rational arguments. #MeToo could thus be seen as a partly dialogical situation, one which is not a communal deliberation.

In the Article III, I argue that certain challenges of public dialogue can be illuminated by studying them as tensions or confrontations between different homeworld experiences of members of the same society. From the perspective of individual subjects, the whole society may operate as their homeworld, even though for those subjects living in different social-cultural circles and subcultures, one and the same society may actually be very different as their homeworld, in both content and form. Two persons might thus perceive the same society as a homeworld, but how they experience this society might be very different.

Subjects with different homeworlds within the same society may not always be conscious of this difference. In other words, the subjects may not be aware of the crucial differences in their experiences of the familiar and the normal and would therefore treat one another based on the assumption that they perceive the society in the same way. When turning one’s attention to someone else’s everyday life, the others’ “homeworld” might appear to the subject as an “alienworld,” such as an agricultural area to an urban dweller or a very different social-economic group in the same city, but when discussing societal matters on the same platforms, these different “worlds” of the participants are not evident (today, this may even be the case in international discussions on social media). On the other hand, we may well be aware of crucial differences between our mutual “worlds” but may not recognize our lack of knowledge of the other’s world and thus harshly and/or unfairly tend to stereotype them. That is, the alienworld within the same society may be genuinely unfamiliar such that we do not actually take our ignorance of others into consideration. Thus, misunderstanding and stereotyping in this context are both related to typifying the other with a different homeworld experience. Whereas in misunderstanding, the difference is not acknowledged, in stereotyping, the difference is acknowledged, but without acknowledging the uniqueness of the particular another individual.
4.3.1 Misunderstanding

Based on the argument that we might not be aware of the differences between our homeworlds within the same society, I continue by arguing that the assumption that another person shares one’s standards of experiential normality may lead one to misjudge the other person as having the same social, cultural, and historical context of experiencing as oneself. This can, in turn, lead to even harsher misunderstandings because, based on such assumptions about normality, one may contend that other persons act from the same background as oneself when, in fact, they do not. This situation is analogous to one in which two people use the same words without noticing that they mean different things by these words. When neglecting the context from which the other person is coming, one can easily misunderstand what the other actually wants to express. The case of word use can even constitute a real situation: in different social circles, the same words may be used for very different purposes.

I assume here that understanding others is based on our ability to connect their expression with what we already know or believe about them or about social groups or human beings in general. Schütz studied such phenomena by what he called “typification” (for more details, see Sub-chapter 3.3): We constitute types through our everyday experiences, relations with others, and the culture in which we live (Schütz, 1971; cf. Husserl, 1939; Steinbock, 1995). This means that we tend to associate objects, situations, and others around us with other phenomena on the basis of what we experience as normal and familiar. In the case of misunderstanding, the relevant types we project onto others and what they say are false from the other’s perspective: We think we understand something because there seems to be something we recognize based on our conceptions of normality, but we do not notice that the context from which the other person comes is actually different.

Schütz (1967) explained typification in the social world by arguing that in our everyday communication based on our normalities and typicalities, the general assumption of reciprocal perspectives leads us to the apprehension of objects and their aspects known by us as if known by everyone. Such knowledge is conceived to be objective and independent of our personal perspectives, typified as “common sense.” In the everyday, it is often assumed that others perceive the world in approximately the same way as we do ourselves, which in most everyday cases is quite right but might lead to problems in understanding when also assumed in media-based public debate. In our everyday experiences, we often simply take for
granted that others understand what we say and vice versa. We assume that everyone associates words and concepts with the same contexts or things and that we have some sort of common understanding of how to behave and what to expect from others. However, in contexts in which we communicate with people from different sociocultural backgrounds, such as society-wide media-based public debates, we might unexpectedly discover that we do not share some sociocultural features.

4.3.2 Stereotyping

Based on Schütz’s phenomenological investigations of types and typification in social world, I argue that in a plural media-based public discussion, another challenging feature, in addition to misunderstandings related to differences in homeworlds, is what Schütz analyzed as “stereotyping.” On the basis of Schütz’s analyses, stereotyping is something we may do without explicitly noticing it, and we do it in order to make sense of our social environment. Since we acquire our types primarily in the contexts of our homeworld, we also first typify others from the perspective of our homeworld. Based on the Schützian analyses of typification, I argue that in our encounters with others—also in mediated encounters—we form a construct of their typical ways of behavior, a typical pattern of their underlying motives and typical attitudes of their personality types, and do so in order to make sense of their actions (Schütz, 1971, 1975; see Gurwitsch, 1975). In the case of stereotyping, however, unlike in the case of misunderstanding, the experience of another sociocultural group as alien is explicit. The other is not assumed to share one’s conception of normality. The other is not viewed as a unique individual but instead through a stereotype that operates as a simplifying and generalizing lens. The problem here is, naturally, that stereotypes may mislead us into interpreting what another person has to say since stereotypes ignore and neglect, by definition, what is specific and unique to particular persons.

According to Schütz, types related to persons permit varying degrees of “anonymity”—that is, types permit detachment from the unique experiences of particular persons (Schütz, 1971).46 Further, Schütz argued that in increasing the anonymization of the typifying construct, general types supersede subjective

46 Here, I refer to Schütz’s concept of anonymity, which differs from the one used by Husserl. For Schütz, anonymity took place within our normality; whereas for Husserl, anonymity referred to total unknownness, which can even not be known as foreign.
personal types, which are based on the experiences of particular persons. In complete anonymization, individuals become interchangeable, and general types refer to “whoever,” defined as typical by the construct. We can thus no longer perceive a person included in a group as a particular and unique individual but only as “anyone” in that group, interchangeable with anyone else in that group. Schütz described such situations as being characterized by “increasing anonymity of the relationship among contemporaries” (p. 17). In such situations, a particular person is viewed and judged by a stereotype. Thus, they appear to us as a representative of a group defined by some properties that we believe dominate their personality and actions completely and in all respects. If it is commonly believed in our social group that another group of people—for example, a minority or an ethnic group very different from one’s own—is of a certain kind and defined by certain traits, we can easily assume that each individual included in this group has the same traits.

The problem with stereotypes is that they operate like general types by which we make sense of our experiences when we need to rely on small bits of information. Unlike general types, stereotypes are not open to experiential revisions but are more rigid and simultaneously simplified. When we are not aware of perceiving others by stereotypes, we view the stereotyped others not as unique individuals but merely as representatives of the groups to which we assume they belong. This, then, affects the way we perceive them and interpret their contributions to public discussions in the media. In other words, when stereotyping others, we project onto their communication something they may not really mean, or we are unable to understand them as deeply as our peers in a shared homeworld. This, then, challenges our abilities to engage in public dialogue, as our abilities to understand the others coming from different background or social group are superseded by our own preconceived assumptions of them.
5 Conclusions

My dissertation is composed of three original articles in which I provide analyses of the givenness of others in media-based public discussions from the angle of the informal educational possibilities of these discussions. I accomplished this by investigating the constitutive roles of empathy, affectivity, and the “homeworld” in the givenness of others in media-based public discussions. As can be concluded based on the three original articles and on the research explicated above, the givenness of others in media-based public discussions is constituted by others’ expressions in their physical absence, in the societal context of the public discussions. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, none of the three informal educational possibilities—informal learning through discussion, change in sense-making, and public dialogue—are hindered by the mediality of these discussions. Rather, as argued in the Article III, the characteristics related to the publicness of media-based public discussions, such as openness and plurality, may challenge to the actualization of these informal educational possibilities. Moreover, based on the above explication of the characteristics of the public discussion, I conclude that out of the three possible informal educational situations in media-based public discussions, public dialogue as a mutual aim for understanding is most compatible with the idea of media-based public discussions. In the following, I will present these conclusions in more detail, starting with the constitutive roles of mediality and publicness in the givenness of others in media-based public discussions. Then, I will present in more detail the conclusions concerning the informal educational possibilities.

5.1 Givenness of others in media-based public discussions: Mediality and publicness

As the three original articles demonstrate, in media-based public discussions, others are given not just in simple empathy or affectivity. Rather, based on the aspects of the media-based public discussions identified in the above explicated investigation and on the arguments presented in the three original articles of this dissertation, we can conclude that the specific kind of givenness of others in media-based public discussions is constituted by two factors: by the mediality of the discussion and by its publicness. Publicness has the particular role of allowing others to appear to us in a particular frame, whereas mediality enables multiple different kinds of social framings and settings.
5.1.1 Mediality

In Sub-chapter 4.1, I argued that, in media, others are given to the subject differently than in their physical presence. In others’ physical presence, their bodily expressions present their being in the world, and their experiences and perspectives on the world. In media, others appear in their verbal expressions (including expressive signs such as emojis). The appearance of the others’ expressions may entail much variation depending on what kind of media they use and the particular context in which the communication occurs. In audio, one hears the other’s voice, and in video, one sees the other person’s body, which thus brings into experience symbolic relation, to use the Steinian term, with the expressed being one with the expression (see Stein, 1917/2008, p. 87). One may, for example, hear the nervous laughter or the self-secure peacefulness in a person’s voice. In mere written text and other expressive materials, such as emojis or memes—as something someone else has made but which one presents as expressing one’s own experiences, too—the symbolic is not given, and the other person’s expression is merely verbal.

As I argue in the Article I, despite the others’ physical absence, the givenness of others in media-based communication is still constituted corporeally. As embodied subjects, we can have no perception of any object without perceiving something material.47 In the other’s physical presence, the perceived matter is the other’s body; and in media, the perceived matter is content on screen, paper, audio, etc. Related to our ever-remaining bodily nature as human beings, the affective relation between persons even in media remains a body-to-body relation, even though there is another mediating matter in between. In media-based communication, the affective relation is not between two physical bodies (Körper in phenomenological terms) reciprocally affecting each other in the flesh, but, since the existence of human beings extends beyond the boundaries of their skin, across space and time, they, as bodies, can be in mutually or unidirectionally affective even by media, without being physically in the same space.

As can be concluded based on the Articles II and III, the experience of others in media-based discussion is complex. We perceive particular moments or aspects of media contents in original acts positing individual objects in the empirical world (as Erfahrung in Husserlian terms), together with an intuition presenting precisely these kinds of objects as someone’s contribution to a particular media-based public

47 Except, maybe, a perception of godly and otherworldly objects (see Stein, 1917/2008), but my argument concerns objects in this world.
discussion and not as private or mere impersonal content. The appearance of others’ contributions in media as others’ contributions cannot be reduced to sense perceptions of particular material objects, such as screens, voices, papers, or the particular contents on the screens, audio, or papers. The publicness, the discussion, and the others cannot be perceived directly in the sensed object, but are instead given as a wider situation exceeding the particular perceived individual object(s).

Concerning the informal educational possibilities of media-based public discussions, as I argue in the Article I, as long as the contents in media appear to the subject as contributions to a discussion, mediated communication \textit{per se} does not hinder the actualization of the three informal educational possibilities investigated in this dissertation. As I have explicated in Sub-chapter 4.1, the contents in media may appear as either impersonal, not expressing or indicating anyone’s perspective on a topic, or as an expression or indication of someone’s perspective, something another person has put forth in order to express their views on something. In the case of media contents appearing as someone’s expression, empathy (as \textit{Einfühlung}) is constitutive in how the contents appear to the subject. In other words, although it is possible, it is not necessary that media contents appear to the subject as someone’s expression in media. When something in media appears as someone’s contribution to a public discussion (appearing as spontaneous, lived, expressing a personal perspective), in line with Husserl’s and Stein’s phenomenological investigations of empathy, the empathic experience is not necessarily any less genuine or less real than empathic experiences in the other’s physical presence.

5.1.2 Publicness

On the basis of the three original articles and the investigation explicated above, we can see that media-based communication allows for both situations in which others are given as unique individuals, as particular persons not representing anything other than themselves, and situations in which others appear as parts of comprehensive social units, such as a particular group, an identity, or an opinion. In what appears to the subject as the public sphere, however, others always appear not just as unique individuals but also as members of larger societal objects. This is the case in the media-based public sphere as well as in a physical public space. For example, a politician or a virologist speaking to the public on television does not primarily appear to us as a unique individual person, but instead as a representative of a particular position or role in the society. An anonymous person
who speaks up in the public sphere similarly appears as a citizen representing particular views or interests and not as a unique “you,” and is as such taken to present a view not merely as an expression of their personal experience but as a general statement about a societal matter. As argued in the Article III, the extent to which another person appears as a unique individual and as a member of a larger societal object may vary, leading to different possibilities to interpret the person’s contributions to the public discussion.

In the experience of public discussion, in addition to particular others given to the subject in their expressions in media, the experience of media-based public discussions includes anonymous others as an anonymous manifold of gazes. I have argued in Sub-chapter 2.1 and throughout the original articles that public discussion is by definition a situation that is open for every member of the society. This means that one crucial constituent of the experience of media-based public discussions is the subject’s assumption that potentially anyone can see the contributions to the discussions. That is, the experience of publicness includes an implicit belief that the contributions to public discussions appear to other members of the society, too, but one cannot know exactly to whom and when.

In the Article I, I state that media-based public discussions are, on the general level, like any other large-group discussion, except that in media-based public discussions, everyone has, in principle, the possibility to participate in the discussions. However, after continuing with the investigation of the topic, I have come to the conclusion that precisely the publicness of these discussions makes them different from non-public group discussions. This is because, as I have argued throughout the dissertation, what is said or done in the public appears in the context of the society, the city, or a larger international unit, and thus comes to represent something more than just the individual or the individual’s personal views. In the public discussion, one therefore always represents something more than what one is, such as an identity, a reference group, an interest group, or a political opinion. Therefore, as I note in the Article II, in the context of the public sphere, the objects appearing as parts of a discussion affect the subject differently than they would in the non-public space; in media-based public discussions, however, we are not only affected by what another person says or does in the moment, but we are also affected by others in the context of public discussion less directly; by what a contribution represents in the societal context, other contributions to the discussion perceived by the subject indirectly, implicit to the directly perceived contributions, and by the potential anonymous audience, other members of the society.
In the Articles II and III, I argue that the givenness of others in media-based public discussions also relates to the fact that communication in public or quasi-public media brings or may bring together subjects with different conceptions of normality and familiarity/unfamiliarity. That is, one society may include multiple different experiences of the environing social reality or what Husserl called the “homeworld.” Differences between homeworld experiences, however, may not always be evident to the participants when they communicate in the public sphere. As I have argued, this invisibility of the differences in homeworlds may be related to situations such as misunderstandings and stereotyping others. I have argued that these situations may be especially challenging for dialogic media-based public discussions, but, based on all three articles and the investigation explicated above, the publicness as the nature of media-based public discussions may be challenging for other informal educational situations in these discussions, too. In the following, I explicate this in more detail.

5.2 Informal educational situations in media-based public discussions

In each original article, I investigated one of the three informal educational possibilities in the context of media-based public discussions: (a) informal learning through discussion, (b) change in sense-making, and (c) public dialogue. In the Article III, I argue that the invisibility of the differences in the homeworld experiences of the contributors may challenge their possibilities to lead a dialogue in the public sphere. In addition, based on the characteristics of the public discussion explicated above as including a plurality of views, values, identities, etc., of which some might be mutually contradictory, I conclude that it may be problematic to define which acquisition of contents or changes can be viewed as learning and which cannot. Moreover, as I will explicate in the following, the possibility of learning through media-based public discussions is not separate from the possibility of the problems faced by society, such as political polarization or the sharing of misinformation. Therefore, I conclude that it is more meaningful to think of the informal educational processes of media-based public discussions in terms of public dialogue, even if, as I argue in the Article III, there are several challenges to the public dialogue, too.
5.2.1 Informal learning through media-based public discussions

As I have argued in Sub-chapter 2.2 and in the Article I, the term “learning” is both descriptive and normative. In the above explicated investigation, I described mostly the form of learning because, in principle, there is an endless variety of possible contents of learning. I have argued that the difference between learning and mere change—both conceptually and as experiences—is that the concept and the experience of learning are normative in that conceiving or experiencing something as learning includes the approval of the acquired contents. Such approval of the acquired contents is not an essential attribute of the concept or of the experience of mere change in sense-making. When one experiences learning, one feels that one possesses something more and/or better than one did before, even if one does not explicate the situation as “learning” to oneself. The normativity implicit in the concept and in the experience of learning excludes changes considered negative. For instance, forgetting or believing in fake news cannot be considered “learning” by definition because, in both cases, the change has not brought any addition to the subject’s understanding of the world.

However, based on the characteristics of learning explicated above, a person may experience acquiring something reflectively and approvingly—that is, a person may experience the acquisition as learning, even if in someone else’s opinion or according to objective metrics, the person might have acquired false information or wrong values, or misunderstood something. The difference lies in the perspective from which the situation is defined as learning. If the person genuinely believes that the content—skills, information, values, etc.—is accurate and approves of the acquisition of the content, then the experience would by definition be an experience of learning. As presented in the Chapter 2, an experience is what it is regardless of any empirical matters that are not present in the experience; an experience may be an experience of learning, even when the acquired content were actually false, if the learner genuinely believes the content is accurate. In media-based public discussions as open and free public communications from different sides of the society, there cannot be a moderator of the discussion, and no one can set particular learning goals for the discussion—unlike a teacher can do in the classroom. Therefore, the experience of learning from media-based public discussions does not exclude the acquisition of information that is false according to objective metrics but appears accurate to the subject.

Moreover, even if no false information were acquired, informal learning through media-based public discussions may even deepen political polarization, as
people in different groups learn from those to whom they are not opposed and thereby move further away from another group within society. As can be concluded based on Sub-chapter 2.2 and the argumentation in the Article I, when learning from others in media-based public discussions, one does not necessarily learn from those with whom one fundamentally disagrees. According to Marton and Booth’s (1998) argument, presented in Sub-chapter 2.2, that the learned content is meaningful to the subject and relates to something the subject already possesses, we learn from those with whom we already share some values or worldviews. Based on their argument, the idea of learning from those with whom one fundamentally disagrees, whose views one considers to be meaningless or untrue, is absurd. Thus, in media-based public discussions as including a plurality of political opinions, values, identities, etc., the contents the members of society learn can be separated by different value groups or worldviews. For example, feminists might learn from the queer society about how to be more inclusive and mindful of different gender or sexual identities while simultaneously remaining hostile toward conservatives, and vice versa.

5.2.2 Public dialogue

Based on the characteristics of media-based public discussions explicated throughout the dissertation and on the characteristics of public dialogue explicated in the Article III and in Sub-chapter 2.2, I conclude that, in media-based public discussions as plural and open to all, it is more meaningful to primarily aim for an understanding of others than to aim for learning something from them. As I argue in the Article III, the goal of dialogue is not consensus, and dialogue does not exclude even fundamental disagreements among participants. Based on the characterization of dialogue in Sub-chapter 2.2, dialogue does not exclude learning from the discussion, though. However, when we speak of dialogue instead of learning from the discussion as the primary informal educational aim in media-based public discussions, we emphasize the kind of directedness at others that aims for an understanding of their world, not the acquisition of content. But, dialogue also does not necessarily include learning. One may grasp the other’s world as an ambiguous intuition of the other’s homeworld or build trust without acquiring any explicated information about the other’s life.48

48 The differences between informal learning through media-based public discussions and public dialogue in media-based public discussions can also be demonstrated by examining the results of
As I argue in the Article III, in the public sphere, the idea of dialogue is rather applied. Media-based public discussions are so wide that it is impossible to include everyone as an active contributor to the discussion. In the context of the media-based public sphere, the particular directedness at others and one’s possible contributions to the discussion are split between multiple different moments of attending the discussion. As I have explic ated in Sub-chapter 2.1, exchanges in media-based public discussions are not strictly a reciprocal situation. Moreover, as I have argued throughout the dissertation, those contributing to public discussions are not given to the subject as unique individuals but as members of society representing something more than just themselves: an identity, political opinion, values, etc. Therefore, public dialogue is not only between individuals, but also between views, identities, values, etc. In the public sphere, dialogue is a never-ending task of media-based public discussions, as the discussions are themselves never-ending, the society continues to exist, and new issues and members of society emerge.

empirical research on media-based public exchange. Karlsson’s (2015) study of political blogging as open and free communication among the members of a society suggests that media-based public discussions in the age of the internet might not be very constructive concerning particular topics. He presented statistics from a questionnaire, according to which only 37% of almost 600 bloggers agreed that the discussions on their blogs were mainly constructive. However, if we take the concept of public dialogue presented above, the constructiveness of the discussions becomes a less important factor in the discussions. The point is then not so much to find an agreement, a consensus, or a solution, than to understand the other’s viewpoints. Karlsson also measured the respectfulness of the comments, the novelty of the information gained through the discussions, and the seriousness of the comments. Here, he presented, in the same order, the percentages of 72, 59, and 68, which corresponded to the numbers of bloggers who thought that discussions in political blogs mainly contained respectful and serious comments and provided novel information. The percentages were not 100, but the relatively high numbers suggest that media-based public discussions can be educational in a sense other than learning.
6 Further discussion of the argument

Above, I have presented the conclusions of the investigation. This chapter will outline the wider horizon in which these conclusions are meaningful. The investigation of the informal educational aspects of media-based public discussions generated various new insights about public discussion and its contexts, some of which I found meaningful to explicate for future research. In this chapter, I will shed some light on these themes, without providing new arguments. These themes cover, on the one hand, the characteristics of democracy as the context of public discussion and, on the other, specific actions related to informal educational situations, such as discussion and reflection. My purpose is not to provide arguments but to present an overview of the most central topics that arose from the investigation. I will start by briefly discussing democracy as the context of media-based public discussion. Then, I will discuss the concepts of discussion and reflection in the everyday sense of informal educative action, which emerged in various ways via the multiple sources used in this dissertation.

6.1 Democracy as the context of media-based public discussions

The link between public discussions and a healthy democracy is formidable. By freely discussing societal matters in public, members of society can take a stand on political and governmental questions in the society/community and can meaningfully form political opinions and act accordingly. Democracy is the wider context and a characteristic of media-based public discussions. We can approach public discussion both as a part of the democratic society and as a democratic situation per se. Even though democracy in the contemporary world is often linked with state-governed parliamentary institutions, within the theory of democracy, democracy is also viewed as a social situation actualizing equality (e.g., Rancière, 2010) or as a way of life in communities and other groups (e.g., Dewey, 1927).49

49 “Democracy” as modern democracy can be defined in multiple different ways. To provide just a few examples, democracy can be thought of as a societal order or as a system of government by which citizens govern themselves in terms of popular sovereignty (e.g., Dryzek, 2005; Habermas, 1981; Mouffe, 2005). Radically different views are provided by, for instance, Rancière and Derrida: Rancière characterized democracy as sporadic moments of the breakdown of power hierarchies (Rancière, 2004, 2010), whereas Derrida (1994) viewed “democracy” as a never-ending process of democratization. As a third option, for Dewey, “democracy” was primarily a way of life, and as such it can be, in practice, a form of a state, a community, or other collective action (see Rondel, 2018). For him, democracy was deeper than a mere “majoritarianism”: “Democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 1916, p. 93) and “a social,
Following the wider view of democracy as a particular situation in various social groups and forms, we can think of media-based public discussions in the context of democracy even though these discussions might also to some degree occur in societies that are not democratic in terms of government; following the Deweyan idea of democracy as a way in which a community, a group, or a society is organized, public discussion is a discursive space in a democratic manner and may occur as long as it is not prohibited.\textsuperscript{50} However, the existence of the public sphere in non-democratic societies is a complex issue, which I cannot discuss further in this dissertation.

“Democracy” is often viewed as a concept centered around the ideas of equality and plurality (e.g., Arendt, 1958/1998; Dewey, 1927; Habermas, 1981; Mouffe, 2000, 2005), which closely relate to media-based public discussion as plural and open to all. The attributes of equality and plurality of democratic spaces and societies also relate to the controversies of democracy, which in turn relate to the challenges of media-based public discussion. For instance, for Mouffe, the democratic paradox lies in the “democratic” being simultaneously a form of rule and a symbolic framework of democratic ideals, values, and practices (2000). Moreover, democracy as an equal and plural organization of shared matters is a demanding and never-ending task, because a plurality of views, identities, values, and political opinions may include even mutually contradictory stands on societal matters. When everyone has the right to have their say, not everything that is said probably is agreeable or satisfying for everyone else. In a democracy, however, there is no need to dismiss or dodge conflicts, as they are implicit to the ideals of

\textsuperscript{50} The scholars of the contemporary political philosophy of education often follow either one of the currently dominant approaches of democracy: (a) the deliberative theory, especially the works of Habermas (Englund, 2010; Fleming, 2010; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996), Fraser (Huttunen & Suoranta, 2005), and Dryzek (Wahl, 2018) or (b) the radical pluralist theory, especially the works of Mouffe (Ruitenber, 2009, 2015; Tryggvason, 2018; Zembylas, 2018) and Rancière (Bieta, 2012; Ruitenber, 2009, 2015). The discussion is often about which approach to follow and, thus, about the further educational possibilities of the public sphere (see Dybel, 2015; Leiviskä, 2020; Robertson, 2008). Those following the deliberative approach often discuss civic learning and call for decreasing polarization (e.g., Englund, 2010; Fleming, 2010; Wahl, 2018), while those following the radical pluralist approach often concentrate on raising one’s voice via action in the public sphere (e.g., Bieta, 2012; Ruitenber, 2009; Tryggvason, 2018). To some extent, applying any theory in educational praxis is never fully straightforward and to be completely “loyal” to a theory might not be the main point. For instance, Zembylas (2018), who utilized the radical pluralist approach to democracy in his philosophy of formal education, argued for a “tamed” version of the approach. As the deliberative or radical pluralist arguments are related to politics and the public sphere, they might be difficult to apply as such to education, especially to formal education.
equality and plurality of positions and identities. As Mouffe (1999, p. 755) has put it: “I must respect others right to disagree with me.”

The different angles to democracy can also be seen in how the internet has introduced more reciprocity between what formerly has been “politics” and the “audience.” Especially in the case of media-based public discussions in the internet era, society as such comes together in media and is visible in discussions in media. As Kreide (2016) argued, access to internet-based media allows more people to participate in discussions that concern public matters, whereby public discussions have become less of a one-way communication from the media elite to the masses. In turn, as Feenberg (2011) argued, “politics is no longer the exclusive affair of traditionally constituted political groups debating the traditional issues. The range of issues and groups is constantly widening in the most unpredictable ways. New groups emerge through struggles to constitute an identity as they simultaneously work to redescribe and reinvent the ‘world’ in which they live” (p. 16; see also Callon et al., 2009).

While the right to disagree both thematically and concerning manners of expression is inherent to public discussions as democratic, many of the problematic situations related to digital media technologies are rather hostile to democracy. These include the use of digital media for authoritarian surveillance, voter manipulation, and silencing political opposition (see Persily & Tucker, 2020). The existence of these problems in the 21st century does not mean, however, that media-based public discussions as such could not be democratic and support democratic society. Political action is needed to retain media as a means to support democracy.

6.2 Discussion

Having a proper discussion in the 21st century media-based public sphere is far from obvious. Many followers of communications in various media might have noticed the often hostile and tense atmospheres in media-based public discussions. For instance, Mutz (2015) argued based on her empirical studies that the political content on television is felt by the viewers as hostile, far from a decent and mutually respectful exchange of ideas. To emphasize the negative affectivity of this kind of content, Mutz called the phenomenon “in-your-face-politics.” Concerning social media communication, Crockett (2017) showed that many of those who express their moral outrage online do not direct their contributions to those at whom they are mad but instead to a wider audience in their networks. Moreover, as Crockett
found, the persons who participated in the study might even enjoy expressing their outrage publicly.

There are multiple critiques that have viewed 21st century media-based public communication as superficial, insignificant, or even trivial. One of the most widely known critics of internet-based communications is Dreyfus, particularly in his book On the Internet (2008). There, he particularly dismissed online discussion as trivial because it is not conducted with sufficient expertise or commitment, unlike in quality journals or newspapers. As Feenberg (2011) noted, though, this might be not so much a critique of the internet as of democracy itself. As he commented about critics:

[T]hey fail to realize that without opening a channel for trivial speech, there can be no serious speech. We have no record of the conversations in those 18th and 19th century pubs and coffee houses idealized (perhaps rightly) as the birthplaces of the public sphere, but no doubt in their precincts much time was wasted. Rather than comparing the Internet unfavorably with edited cultural products like newspapers, it would make more sense to compare it with the social interactions that take place on the street. There the coexistence of the good, the bad and the trivial is normal, not an offense to taste or intellectual standards because we have no expectation of uniform quality. (p. 8)

Following Bridges’s (1979) seminal characterization, “discussion” is a word applied to an activity involving a number of (minimally reasonable) persons or to a product, such as a scholarly article or newspaper editorial. According to him, there are four conditions that constitute a discussion:

a) Putting forth more than one point of view on a topic.
b) There is a topic, a subject, a question, a matter, or an issue that is under discussion, around which the discussion is centered.
c) The situation requires those engaged to be prepared to examine and be responsive to the different opinions put forth—that is, there must be a minimal disposition to understand what is talked about, to appreciate (take into consideration) the contributions, and to be affected by them (see also Hand & Levinson, 2012).
d) Participants have the intention of developing their knowledge, understanding and/or judgment on the matter under question.

Different viewpoints may be expressed by different persons or by one person, either in speech or in a medium. For example, an article includes a discussion if it presents
pros and cons on an issue or presents an alternative view. Condition (c) means that in different contributions put forth, there must be mutual responsiveness in the sense that what has been said affects what is said next. In this sense, a discussion might be seen to differ from, for example, a prepared symposium or a play.

Bridges also argued that one central function of a discussion is the improvement of knowledge, understanding and/or judgement of the topic under discussion. Condition (d) might be interpreted in the strictly Habermasian sense of those communicating with the aim of consensus (see Habermas, 1981), or the condition might also be interpreted more widely as those participating with the aim of developing a mere judgement OR understanding OR knowledge. Both for Habermas and for the latter possibility, the aim is implicit, not necessarily explicated by the subject.

Defined this broadly, “discussion” may even include various kinds of actions, such as debate or dialogue. A discussion might thus turn from a debate into a dialogue and vice versa. Bridges, however, separated a playful conversation from a discussion, and as such a conversation might rather be seen as gestures, not an actual exchange of viewpoints on a topic. Bridges’s definition of discussion thus excludes from media-based public discussions communication that is not intended at any shared or discussed topics or does not put forth a viewpoint that is (implicitly) aimed at developing into a discussion—that is, mere entertainment or personal expressions not expressing any viewpoint on any public or political topic.

Bridges also presented various ways to participate in a discussion, to attend or follow a discussion, to contribute to a discussion, such as offering one’s opinion or engaging in the discussion, and to give and take reciprocally. A media-based public discussion might include those who merely follow, those who contribute once, and those who actively contribute multiple times as the discussion goes on.51

If the debate develops into a fight, however, it is no longer a discussion, as the participants might refuse to listen to each other (Bridges, 1979). Here we come to the point at which a media-based public exchange might no longer be a discussion. If the contributions do not reflect each other or the contributors do not intend to take others’ contributions into consideration or even willingly misinterpret them,

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51 Bridges was rather fond of oral discussions, not written ones, and thus those in immediate situations, not those that are mediate. This relates to the natural speed of oral discussion and to frankness in the sense that saying something to someone’s face might be harder than doing so without direct contact to the other. However, since he published his work, communication technologies have developed to the point at which oral and mediated discussions might not differ in terms of either speed or proximity due to the development of real-time direct relations to other persons.
then the situation devolves into a media-based public fight. The online outrage studied by Crockett (2017) is thus not included in the category of media-based public discussion, as this kind of expressions of outrage are rather performative. It is notable, though, that an emotional discussion, even an angry, outrageous, and heated one, may be a discussion if it meets the above conditions. Discussions do involve emotions.

6.3 Reflection

In the Article III, I suggest that a reflective (in the non-phenomenological sense) and non-defensive approach in public discussion is required to bring out one’s own prejudices, expectations, and conceptions of normality that do not hold for others in society with different backgrounds, etc. The point itself about reflectivity as a factor that enables fruitful media-based communication is not very original. However, what is interesting in this context is that Turkle, whose work is cited by some of the authors I counter-argue, also did not refute the possibility of genuine and fruitful media-based communication. Rather, she argued that reflecting on our own ways of communicating with others and expressing ourselves is the best cure for badly functioning mediated communication (see Turkle, 2011). That is, according to her, we learn to listen to others and take into account their backgrounds by reflecting on ourselves, our ways of communication, and our prejudices. The problems in media communication, for her, can be overcome by becoming aware of our ways of action and thinking and changing them (her argument also supports my suggestion in the Article I that the reason for the problems in media-based public discussion is not media per se).

However, as Shusterman (2009) argued, we are not able to reflect the whole time, but we need to concentrate on the situations in which we are engaged. In the case of media-based public discussion, this means that to be able to actualize any educational possibilities of the discussion, we need to actually engage in the following or contributing to the discussion, not only to reflect on our ways of reacting and responding to the expressions of others. In other words, reflection on an action and the action itself are mutually exclusive. The shift between these two can be quick and smooth, though, and one might reflect on one’s actions in short moments between engaging in the actions. By temporary moments of reflection, we can habituate ourselves to react and respond differently to the expressions in media-based public discussions and thereby make the discussions more fruitful.
Another question is, of course, whether we wish to reflect and change our responses and reactions or not.
7 Limits and further investigation

In this dissertation, I have opened up the possibility of investigating media-based public discussions by the means of classical phenomenology. There remain many possibilities for further research in this regard. In this last chapter of my doctoral research summary, I will discuss the study’s limitations and questions for further research.

7.1 The limits of the study

To ensure that the study remained sufficiently deep and did not devolve into a superficial overview of political theory related to the public sphere, I narrowed the research topic by excluding several investigations and scholarship that, in other contexts, would have been particularly productive for examining phenomena related to media-based public discussion. When operating within the phenomenological-philosophical framework, we refrain from prescriptively arguing for or against factors such as consensus, dissensus, or empirical claims about the existence of commercial algorithms and other contingent factors of media-based discussions. While this frees us from the limitations that would otherwise be imposed by empirical approaches and methods, such as the impact of algorithms in digital media (Barberá, 2020) or the attention economy on television (Mutz, 2015), the phenomenological framework also excludes questions about the reality or existence of these factors.

In this study, according to the phenomenological methodology, I assumed the perspective of the following or participating subject. This does not mean that public discussion was not regarded as an essential social phenomenon constituted by a plurality of perspectives. In truth, there are multiple different levels on which the phenomenon of public discussion can be studied, but the perspective of the participating or following subject promised to yield a deeper understanding of the phenomenon—and did so. This perspective, however, precluded the simultaneous investigation of the macro perspective.

Examining a real-life phenomenon like media-based public discussion was accompanied by the need to consider so many crucial and essential elements that there was the actual risk of the study becoming far too expansive. As a topic in the context of the media-based public sphere, affectivity especially could constitute an entire doctoral dissertation itself. In relation to affectivity, it would be interesting to investigate political emotions in the media-based public sphere or their political
affects. Some investigations in this regard, in the phenomenological framework, have already been performed (e.g., Szanto & Slaby, 2020) yet could be elaborated in further research.

Concerning Stein’s investigations of the state, I could have employed them in the Article III to illuminate the differences between society and community from the phenomenological perspective. However, at the time I was writing the Article III, I had not considered that possibility. Therefore, Stein’s investigations may be incorporated into my future studies in the context of the public sphere. I believe that by deploying her analysis of the state and different collectives, I may generate more interesting arguments of enhanced relevance to contemporary political-philosophical discussions both inside and outside academia.

Concerning other authors, Arendt would have been a clear option both for an analysis and for the definition of public discussion, as her work is highly relevant to the topic of the public sphere. Also, as Loidolt (2018) argued, her work can be read as political-phenomenological. However, in this dissertation, I did not often refer to Arendt’s work, even though it influenced the dissertation in multiple ways. First, her influence is present in the Habermasian definition of the public sphere, in my careful and even critical approach to the Habermasian and Husserlian argumentation, and in the notion of plurality as an essential aspect of public discussion and the social world. However, in the definition of public discussion, I utilized Habermas’s work instead of Arendt’s because Habermas precisely defined public discussion in addition to discussing the public sphere in more general terms. Habermas also made arguments concerning media-based public discussions in the 21st century (see Habermas, 2006), and his argumentation has been applied in later arguments about internet-based debates especially (e.g., Kreide, 2016). Comparing the argumentation of, for instance, Schütz and Arendt, would be very interesting in the field of political philosophy, but this pursuit is left for future research to explore.

Together with bringing Schütz into the picture, especially in the Article III, I could have discussed the dialogue as it is conceived in sociology, as Schütz was a sociologist-phenomenological philosopher. The dialogical approach has also found its way into the methodology of the social sciences, which can be seen, for example, in Camic and Joas’s book The Dialogical Turn. However, pursuing this angle would have extended the scope of the research well beyond its limits.
7.2 Questions for further research

As this study combined multiple fields of philosophy—phenomenology, the theory of the public sphere, and the philosophy of education—and was related to multiple phenomena, questions and directions for further studies comprise multiple topics. First, the suggestion that the meaningful educational possibility of media-based public discussions is public dialogue rather than learning from the discussions points to other educational possibilities. What about Deweyan growth? What about Bildung in the context of media-based public discussions? What would they reveal in this context concerning individual development and personal growth in relation to others?

Second, as the Article I suggests, the problems of media-based public communication do not emerge from the mediality of the communication as such. Rather, we could say that the width of media-based public discussions reveals problems in society. The question remains, however, of what, exactly, these discussions reveal: Underlying antagonisms in society? Hostility toward other members of society not visible in news media, manifesting as, for instance, sexism or racism? A further question is how we should act when something that opposes the fundamental value of democracy—equality—is revealed by these discussions. What could we do to reduce, for instance, hostile attitudes in society?

Third, if problems encountered in media-based communication are not directly related to the mediation as such, and if we can encounter others in media as genuinely as we could in their physical presence, why are online meetings known for so quickly tiring the participants? What is the role of the physical presence or nearness of the other? Is the role of physical closeness only related to intimacy, or is another factor at play? What can media reveal about our communications or ourselves? For instance, investigating online dating based on the findings and discussions in the Article I would be an interesting research topic. In this pursuit, Osler’s (2020) investigation of questions of feeling togetherness online may be useful.

Lastly, it can be said that understanding the possibilities of public discussion also helps us to understand its threats. Understanding the possibilities of public discussion can assist us in comprehending the possibilities of politics in a modern democratic society. Plot (2012), for instance, described the relationship between politics and public communication by arguing that the goals and means of politics are communicative, both attainable and implementable only in dialogue, debate, and symbolic struggle with others—that is, in making sense and creating meanings.
As he claimed, politics’ “milieu” is the milieu of meaning and the genesis of meaning. Thus, in a modern democracy, where anyone can (in theory) participate in public discussion, the possibilities of public discussion are the possibilities of democratic politics. It is another question entirely of whether we wish to actualize these possibilities—and if so, how we could do so.
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EDUCATIONAL POSSIBILITIES OF MEDIA-BASED PUBLIC DISCUSSION

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE GIVENNESS OF OTHERS