

Mediatization and the ‘molding force’ of the media

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to contribute to the discussion surrounding mediatization by presenting some arguments on how we could include questions of media specificity in an appropriate way. The core argument is that we have to do this by integrating ‘media specificity’ into a theory of communicative practice or action. In doing so, we can grasp media in their institutional and technological sense as ‘molding force’ of communicative action and research them empirically as part of mediatization processes.

Keywords: mediatization, media technology, media change, media and communication theory

Introduction

‘Mediatization’ has very quickly become an important key concept of media and communication research. Having become such a “key” (Lundby, 2009a), it is considered to represent a relevant approach for present media and communication research (cf. for an overview Mazzoleni, 2008b and the chapters in Lundby, 2009c). However, the concept has also been criticized for its tendency to lean towards a linear understanding of process and change (Couldry, 2008b). Moreover, when we examine more closely how new media technologies are theorized in approaches of mediatization, the results are a little disaffecting. While we find many references to new media and technology, we find only a few reflections on how to incorporate a critical perspective on media technologies into mediatization research.

Hence, the aim of this article is to contribute to the discussion surrounding mediatization by presenting some arguments on how we could include questions of media technology in an appropriate way. The core

argument is that we have to do this by integrating ‘media technology’ into a theory of communicative practice or action. In so doing, we can grasp media in their institutional and technological sense as ‘molding force’ of communicative action and research them empirically as part of mediatization processes. To explain such an approach, I want to develop a three-step argument. First, in order to capture both institutional as well as technological moments of the media, I want to revisit the concept of media logic(s) that is traditionally used within mediatization research. By a critique of this, I come, second, to an understanding of mediatization not only as a ‘meta process’ but also as a ‘panorama’ of research. This leads me, finally, to a theorization of what I call the ‘molding force of the media’.

Media logic(s)

While reviewing the preceding mediatization research with regard to *how* mediatization is theorized and operationalized, a concept comes into focus that is also well known in the research on ‘mediation’, the way the latter was introduced by Jesús Martín-Barbero (1993, p. 227): the concept of ‘logic’. However, the use of the singular already indicates that ‘media logic’ is used with a different emphasis than that intended by Martín-Barbero. It is not so much used to capture the logics of interrelating media production and appropriation but instead to describe a media logic which would, with the growth of mediatization, influence further spheres ‘beyond the media’. As we will see, this refers to a very specific understanding of media, i. e. media as institutions of mass communication – especially television.

The term media logic is usually linked with a book of the same name written by David L. Altheide und Robert P. Snow (1979), which is still worthwhile reading today. The starting point of the book is a critique on the then established US-American mass communication research, focusing on media contents and their effect on various audiences. Based on more fundamental approaches of symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology and phenomenology, Altheide and Snow criticize such an approach as being inappropriate. The reason is that this approach reduces “the role of media in our lives” to single “‘variables’ of media impact” (Altheide and Snow, 1979, p. 7). However, to comprehend “the role of media” it is necessary to ask *how*, as a “form of communication”, they change our “way of ‘seeing’ and interpreting social affairs” (Altheide and Snow, 1979, p. 9). To describe this, the two authors consider the concept of media logic to be more appropriate. In their own words they define this as follows:

“In general terms, *media logic* consists of a form of communication; the process through which media present and transmit information. Elements of this form include the various media and the formats used by this media. Formats consist, in part, of how material is organised, the style in which it is presented, the focus of emphasis on particular characteristics of behaviour, and the grammar of media communication. Format becomes a framework or a perspective that is used to present as well as interpret phenomena. [...] Thus, the logic of media formats has become so taken for granted by both communicator and receiver that it has been overlooked as an important factor of understanding media.”

(Altheide and Snow, 1979, p. 10, emphasis in the original)

As Altheide and Snow stress in their reference to Georg Simmel, a media logic does not become concrete with reference to contents but to the forms of media communication by which this content is communicated. These forms have to be understood as a “processual framework *through which* social action occurs” (Altheide and Snow, 1979, p. 15; emphasis in the original) – in this case the social action of communication. This media logic as a form comprises especially the formats of mass communication which they consider – at this point comparable to Jesús Martín-Barbero and his understanding of ‘logic’ (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 227) – as mediating elements in the whole process of media communication. This basic understanding of media logic is also the reference point for the two authors’ later publications, in which they call for an analysis of the forms and formats of mediation (cf. Altheide 2004, Altheide and Snow 1988).

It is a logical consequence that, already at the end of the 1970s, Altheide and Snow – referring to James Monaco (1978) – characterize the US-American culture as a media culture. By this they mean that within this culture the media logic increasingly influences other institutions which are not media institutions in the core meaning of the word. As examples they name religion, politics and sports. For Altheide and Snow, in all these institutions – or, as we might say nowadays: in all these social fields – the realities are increasingly constructed alongside a media logic. To quote them literally: “The form and content of those institutions are altered [...], every major institution has become part of media culture” (Altheide and Snow, 1979, p. 11).

It is this basic understanding of mediatization as a ‘success’ of a media logic emanating from institutions of mass communication and pervading other institutions, social fields and social systems which forms the core of many understandings of mediatization (cf. Lundby, 2009b; Mazzoleni, 2008b; Meyen, 2009; Schrott, 2009; Strömbäck and Esser 2009). The

most prominent of these approaches are maybe the theoretizations by Winfried Schulz and Stig Hjarvard, which is the reason why they shall be discussed in the following.

Referring in part to shared reflections developed together with Gianpietro Mazzoleni (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999), Winfried Schulz (2004) tried to reconstruct “mediatization as an analytical concept”. However, in his analysis the universal permeation of a media logic is only *one* moment of mediatization, and he goes on to distinguish four other aspects: “extension”, “substitution”, “amalgamation” and “accommodation”.

Using the term *extension*, Schulz expresses a thought already discussed in the frame of medium theory by Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan and Lapham, 1994), i. e. the media are an “extension of man”: enhancements of the possibilities of communicative acting in relation to space, time and ways of expression. Mediatization then means an increase of the possibilities of human communicative acting over time. *Substitution* entails that media can replace social activities and institutions either totally or in part. Schulz refers to video and computer games, which substitute other forms of face-to-face gaming. The point here is how mediated forms of communication (can) ‘oust’ non-mediated forms, which is a further aspect of mediatization. *Amalgamation* means that media-related and non-media related acting increasingly merge and mingle. You can especially have the everyday world in mind, in which non-media-related acting (driving a car) takes place together with media-related acting (listening to the radio) or in which as part of present occupations non-media-related work (handcraft) melts with media-related work (time management via the mobile phone). Mediatization is thus also a process of amalgamating media-related and non-media-related action. Finally, there is the *accommodation* – and this is where, for Schulz, the term “media logic” comes into play. Hence, he emphasizes that increasingly the acting in various parts of society (politics, sports, etc.) is oriented to a “media logic” he describes as a certain form of televisual staging (Schulz, 2004, p. 89). For him, mediatization then *also* represents the pervasion of such a logic, but not exclusively.

A further point of the reflections of Winfried Schulz is remarkable: He discusses the status which digital media possess within the ongoing process of mediatization. Do they decrease mediatization? This question is absolutely obvious for him, as he understands mediatization as a product “of the television era” (Schulz, 2004, p. 98). His own opinion is focused on mediating as he rejects an “optimistic answer” (the digital media herald the end of the mediatization by mass media) as well as a “sceptical answer” (we are confronted with new, possibly more problematic modi of mediatization) and he argues for a “moderate answer”:

New, digital media do not substitute mass media. Because of that “the mediatization effects of the latter endure in the new media environment” (Schulz, 2004, p. 98). Consequently he considers the concept of mediatization also to be appropriate for researching the recent media change.

In a slightly different way, the term mediatization is modelled around the concept of media logic by Stig Hjarvard. While referring more to Scandinavian media and communication researchers (especially Asp, 1990), Stig Hjarvard (2008) starts with exactly the same argument that we already know from Altheide und Snow. Moreover, Hjarvard emphasizes that it is not sufficient to capture the influence of media on culture and society by questioning the effects of media contents. In addition, we should focus on how culture and society are saturated by the media. It is exactly here that the concept of mediatization comes in, however in an “institutional perspective” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 110). Besides contrasting this perspective with Schulz’s understanding of mediatization, he emphasizes two points. First, he wants to analyze the relation between media as an institution and other institutions. Second, and related to this, with mediatization he wants to capture only a *certain form* of an institutionalization of the media, i.e. their “autonomous” institutionalization – which is the requirement that media institutions *as such* influence other social institutions. This has been the case for Europe since the 1980s when with an increasing commercialization, media – here understood as institutions of mass communication as well as of mobile and internet communication – became independent from a “public steering” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 120). In the perspective of Stig Hjarvard, this is the point of time when one can speak meaningfully of mediatization:

“By the mediatization of society, we understand the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic. This process is characterised by a duality in that the media have become *integrated* into the operations of other social institutions, while they also have acquired the status of social institutions *in their own right*. As a consequence, social interaction – within the respective institutions, between institutions, and in society at large – takes place via the media. The term ‘media logic’ refers to the institutional and technological modus operandi of the media, including the ways in which media distribute material and symbolic resources and operate with the help of formal and informal rules.”

(Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113; emphasis in the original)

Consequently, we are confronted here with a very specific understanding of media logic which has an *institutional* media logic (see also Hjarvard, 2009, p. 160): Media have developed a specific logic as ‘institutions in

their own right', which at the same time increasingly pervade our present lives. Mediatization then means the increasing dependence on and subjection to this logic.

Reflecting on this, Hjarvard distinguishes two forms of mediatization, one being "strong", direct and the other one being "weak", indirect mediatization (Hjarvard, 2004, pp. 48 f.; Hjarvard, 2008, p. 114). *Direct mediatization* describes such moments in which a formerly non-mediated acting becomes a mediated form, that is, an acting through a medium. One of his examples is the chess game which becomes a computer and online game. *Indirect mediatization* happens when an acting in its form, content or organization increasingly becomes influenced by media-specific symbols or mechanisms. In such an institutional perspective, an example for this is the mediatization of politics (Kepplinger, 2002; Mazzoleni, 2008a; Strömbäck, 2008). Stig Hjarvard argues that direct and indirect forms of mediatization occur together again and again, which is the reason why it is so hard to distinguish them (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 115). Think for example of playing poker, which is mediatized "directly" as it takes place as television poker, and as online poker within the media. But at the same time it is mediatized "indirectly", as the way poker is played in groups of friends in pubs and bars is marked by the various forms of media staging of this game (cf. Hitzler, 2010b, p. 15–17). At this point, a connection with the aspects of mediatization distinguished by Winfried Schulz crops up, as a direct mediatization refers to a "substitution", an indirect mediatization to an "accommodation" and the blurriness of both illustrates the "amalgamation" described by Schulz. The reason for Hjarvard not to reflect the moment of "extension" is the institutional focus of his understanding of mediatization. "Extension" in his argumentation is a general moment of the "mediation" of media communication and therefore not specific for the process of mediatization starting in his terms in Europe after the 1980s.

However, these further stages of understanding mediatization as the pervasion of an (institutionalized) media logic have been criticized. Maybe the most prominent critiques were articulated by Nick Couldry and Knut Lundby, while there is a clear difference in the vehemence of their respective critique.

Coming from the concept of mediation, which – as we already have seen – pronounces the openness of communication as a matter of principle, Nick Couldry has criticized the idea of mediatization as a pervasion of a media logic especially in respect of two points. First, the influences of the media are too heterogenous "to be reduced to a single 'media logic', as if they all operated in one direction, at the same speed, through a parallel mechanism and according to the same calculus of probability" (Couldry, 2008b, p. 378). The term media logic indicates for

him – expressed by the use of the singular – a consistency of media influences, which can hardly be the case. This is especially true for the further differentiation caused by the establishment of internet-based media. Thinking Couldry's arguments a step further, one can say that present politics are confronted with various and contradicting moments of 'media influence', not only in the form of certain staging strategies of visual television communication but also in the form of new moments of questioning the confidentiality politics, Wikileaks for example.

Second, the term media logic suggests a certain "linear nature" of change (Couldry, 2008b, p. 377). Couldry attached this by way of example to the idea of "substitution" by Schulz, an idea we can also find with the concept of "direct mediatization" in the work of Stig Hjarvard. Mediatization as the diffusion of a media logic in various parts of societies tends to be a narrative of linearity – in some moments there seem to be high parallels to modernization theories of the 1970s (Hepp 2006; Lerner 1977). But the dialectics of the interrelation between media communicative change, on the one hand, and further social and cultural changes, on the other, seem to be more complex than can be captured in such a narrative.

Not so pronounced, but in its tendency also critical, is the discussion of an understanding of mediatization as a disseminating media logic proposed by Knut Lundby. Lundby supports Stig Hjarvard's arguments insofar as they are much less linear as they might seem at first glance (Lundby, 2009b, p. 106). Nevertheless, he also reminds us that the use of the term media logic can be misleading if one links this to a *unifying* logic behind the media and forgets that the constraints of the media constantly alternate as they change (cf. Lundby, 2009b, pp. 104 f.). Starting with such a moderate critique, he pleads for returning to the roots of the concept of a media logic, that is, the sociology of Georg Simmel from whom Altheide und Snow borrowed the term 'form'. In the work of Simmel, 'form' refers to the structuring of social interaction alongside characteristic patterns. Taking this seriously, someone concerned with questions of mediatization must ask much more openly for the influence of different forms of media communication; or, in the words of Knut Lundby:

"I conclude that it is not viable to speak of an overall media logic; it is necessary to specify how various media capabilities are applied in various patterns of social interaction. It is not that a media logic does not involve social action, which, not least, Stig Hjarvard's works make clear. My argument is rather that a focus on a general media logic hides these patterns of interaction. [...] Hence one has to study how transformations and changes in the mediatization processes take place

in communication. Mediatization research should put emphasis on how social and communicative forms are developed when media are taken into use in social interaction". (Lundby, 2009b, p. 117)

One can only follow such an invitation to a more open mediatization research, especially as ideas of a media logic lead to many further problems. So this model is implicitly grounded in a differentiation model of society in which 'the media' as an institutionalized social system have a certain function which is to produce public communication for a social and cultural self-understanding-discourse. Only based on such a fundamental presupposition does it make sense for other institutions to subordinate to the 'logics' of the media. While, for sure, the institutions of the media *also* support the communication of a (national) state as such, they are much more than its functional system. Society, culture but also media communication are too manifold to reduce mediatization – in whatever nuance – to the pervasion of a media logic.

Mediatization as meta process and panorama

As the last section demonstrates, to understand mediatization as an increasing diffusion of a media logic does not do it justice. But if one shares the argumentation developed up to this point, one question arises: How can we then capture mediatization? As I want to argue in the following, 'mediatization' does not describe a closed theory of media change but, much more openly, a certain panorama of investigating the interrelation between media communicative change and sociocultural change. This becomes evident if we follow another understanding of mediatization, a concept developed by Friedrich Krotz, that is, mediatization as a meta process.

Friedrich Krotz (Krotz, 2008b; Krotz, 2009) uses the term meta process as a fundamental concept to describe a certain kind of theory. In his argumentation, meta processes are a conceptual construct by which we describe long-term processes of change. These processes are – as they occur over a long time – not just measurable in the sense that one investigates a certain phenomenon at an initial point in time along defined variables and again at a second point in time, then compares the results and characterizes the differences as change. Already for practical reasons, this is impossible: The processes focused on reach back historically to a time which is too far away for any such a viable design to be realized. But also conceptually, such an approach would be inappropriate, as different meta processes happen on different dimensions, that is, they are multidimensional. Therefore, Friedrich Krotz defines meta processes of social and cultural change as follows:

“By using the term meta process we want to point out that these are long-term and culture-crossing changes, processes of processes in a certain sense, which influence the social and cultural development of humankind in the long run. More in detail, they are *conceptual constructs*, by which science as well as persons in their everyday life sum up certain developments, their causes, forms of expression and consequences and therewith make the world manageable”.

(Krotz, 2007, p. 27; emphasis in the original)

In such an understanding we know various meta processes of change: the meta process of individualization as an increasing ‘release’ of the individual from status and class (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001, p. 30) and related insecurities, politics of choice and new forms of community-building, as well as sub-processes like eventization (Hitzler, 2010a; Hitzler and Honer, 1994); the meta process of globalization as a long-term increase of global connectivity and related processes of dis-embedding and re-embedding (Giddens, 1990; Hepp, 2008; Tomlinson, 1999); the meta process of commercialization with its formation of different consumer cultures (Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 1990; Urry, 1995); and finally the meta process of mediatization.

Such an understanding of meta process refers to a certain understanding of theory that differentiates it from its empirical foundation (cf. for the following Krotz et al., 2008, p. 12). We can distinguish three kinds of theory based on their relation to empirical phenomena (while the latter paradoxically become such phenomena themselves only in the perspective of a certain theoretical standpoint). These are, first, “mathematical theories”, second, “substantive theories”, and third, “meta theories”.

Table 1: *Types of empirical-based theories.*

Type 1: Mathematical theories	Type 2: Substantive theories	Type 3: Meta theories
Theories are propositions that describe a delimited domain of mathematically formulable (functional) relationships	Theories are propositions that typify a delimited domain of phenomena in terms of structure and process	Theories are narratives that go beyond particular domains of phenomena and which tend to general explanation
Quantitative-based methodological design	Qualitative-based methodological design	Explanations and structurations with selective empirical foundation

Source: Extended, based on Krotz (2005, p. 70) and Krotz et al. (2008, p. 12).

The first type of empirically-based theory is a form of statement which is understood as valid as long as it is not falsified in the way of hypothesis-building and -proving by quantitatively-based methods (for example standardized surveys, content analyses etc.). The foundation of this is the falsification principle as formulated by Karl R. Popper (1974). Theories of the second type are based on a qualitative research design as an overall frame, being oriented to certain “fields” with the aim of a “grounded” theory development. Commonly, the methodological approach is to develop a system of categories by comparing various parts of the field data (which can also include ‘numbers’). The most well-known approach for this might be the grounded theory approach (cf. Glaser and Strauss, 1999). Meta processes like individualization, commercialization and mediatization correspond to the third type of theory. These theories are theoretical narratives that cross various areas of phenomena. Parts of them are based on empirical research: However, the theoretical building in its totality is not empirically provable in the sense that it can be broken down to a certain experiment, survey or field research. Rather, it is a general theoretical pattern of reference for concrete empirical research. The relation of this type of theory to the theories of type one and two is of the kind that these other theories are or might be ‘modules’ of theory type three.

Besides that contextualization, such a definition of meta processes is remarkable in that it understands them as “conceptual constructs, by which science” *and* “persons in their everyday life sum up certain developments” (Krotz, 2007, p. 27). Also in our everyday life we apprehend transition by generalizing narratives of change in which different single processes cumulate. In this sense, globalization is not just a scientific construct but at the same time a term of our everyday language to describe a long-lasting and at various localities experienceable change of ‘experiencing the world’. In this perspective, the term meta process has a certain proximity to the concept of “panorama” used by Bruno Latour (2007, p. 188).

As is known, with his Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) Latour tries to develop a new form of sociology that respects the materiality of things in a new way and at the same time does not understand society as something given. He wants to take the ‘old question’ of sociology seriously and asks by which association a ‘(re)assembling of the social’ takes place and, therefore, how ‘society’ becomes possible or is constituted. Against this background, Latour refuses to state ‘the society’ as something being just given on the macro level. In contrast, he claims to research the articulation of the seemingly macro phenomena by focusing on empirically describable associations. But he also argues that in everyday life as well as in science we find “clamps” (Latour, 2007, p. 187) or “whole

stor[ies]” (Latour, 2007, p. 189) which in relation to a certain area of phenomena “solve the question of staging the totality” (Latour, 2007, p. 188). Latour uses the concept of “panorama” to characterize these “stories”. Panoramas “design a picture which has no gap in it, giving the spectator the powerful impression of being fully immersed in the real world” (Latour, 2007, p. 188). This happens by representing a certain perspective on this world in a totality.

Therefore, we can say that meta processes are something like panoramas of long-term changes. As such, they are important in everyday life as well as in science because they offer us a whole impression of what we might ‘look for’ in empirical research. However, we have to be careful when we reduce ‘the world’ we are confronted with to these panoramas. This is the case for all panoramas of scientific meta theory:

“Durkheim’s ‘sui generis society’, Luhmann’s ‘autopoietic systems’, Bourdieu’s ‘symbolic economy of fields’, Beck’s ‘reflexive modernity’ are excellent narratives if they prepare us, once the screening has ended, to take up the political tasks of composition; they are misleading if taken as a description of what is the common world.”

(Latour, 2007, p. 189)

For sure, the language used by Latour for theorizing is highly metaphorical. However, with his concept of panorama he accentuates an aspect which is also in Friedrich Krotz’s perspective highly relevant for conceptualizing mediatization. It is not helpful to understand meta processes in general or the meta process of mediatization in particular as pure ‘macro phenomena’ because they concern culture and society in general – starting from the acting of single women and men and ending with general processes of articulating society and community (in Max Weber’s terms: *Vergesellschaftung* and *Vergemeinschaftung*). This is also the reason why a formal and a historical definition of mediatization seem inappropriate. What we call mediatization varies in the various concretizations of this meta process itself. Krotz formulates this as follows:

“A differentiated and formalised definition of mediatization cannot and shall not be presented here; also because mediatization is qua definition in its particular form always bound in culture and time. Therefore, a definition must be based on a certain historical analysis. Mediatization as a process should not be historically, socially and culturally decontextualised. Presumably, there are also specific processes of mediatization which concern only certain population groups [...].”

(Krotz, 2007, p. 39; emphasis in the original)

Does this mean that we have to leave totally open what mediatization is? For sure not, otherwise it would not make any sense to speak of mediatization as a meta process or a panorama. However, such statements have to be understood as a signal that we have to be careful to think about mediatization in a context-free way. At this point it is helpful to refer to the thinking of Norbert Elias.

Based on various (historical) data, Norbert Elias reflected one long-term process of change he called civilization (Elias, 2000), while later in the frame of a symbol theory he integrated questions of (media) communication (Elias, 1991). There is something very fundamental we can learn from Elias; that is what characterizes processes of social and cultural change. Elias reminds us that processes of change – or, as he calls them: developments – cannot be described usefully as an evolution. The reason is that the “instrument of transmission and change” (Elias, 1991, p. 23) is a different one within a biological evolution and a sociocultural development. In the first case, it is “an organic structure called the ‘gene’”, which modifies as such in the process of evolution and which is in its materiality much more static. In the second case, the “chief instrument of transmission and change are symbols in the wide sense of the word including not only knowledge but, for example, also standards of conduct and sentiment” (Elias, 1991, p. 23). In contrast to a gene, these symbols are much more changeable in quite a short time, irrespective of the fundamental ability of humans to speak, which is evolution-based. Symbols are specific for certain groups of women and men, for certain cultures and societies. Therefore, there is no uniform cultural and social change, in the same way that withdrawals, revolutions or other ‘erratic breaks’ are part of them: “[I]n contrast to the evolutionary order, the developmental order is in a qualified manner reversible” (Elias, 1991, p. 33). According to that, a linear perspective on cultural and social change is not sufficient, which is the reason why we cannot understand mediatization as an ‘evolution of communication’.

However, as Gebhard Rusch (2008) emphasized, understandings like these are inherent in the concept of media change as evolution: The “concept of evolution within humanities is obviously marked by the idea of a cultural progress, that is the idea of a development of human ability and knowledge, of social structure and technology, in an interlaced path which leads nevertheless in the direction of a growing (self-) cognition, better and enlarging competences of the (self-) construction of the world and the predominance of nature” (Rusch, 2008, p. 99). There is no need to go as far as Bruno Latour (1993) with his hyperbolic thesis ‘we have never been modern’, when we argue in the sense of Norbert Elias much more carefully by remembering the fundamental difference between biological evolution and sociocultural change. An ‘evolutionary perspective

on media change' prevents an access to the complexities and contradictions of the changes we are confronted with in the present. The concept of mediatization tries to capture these with a historical sensitivity.

If we narrow such a general frame of understanding mediatization as a meta process and panorama to Europe since modern times, further statements on the concretization of mediatization become possible. Helpful for this is the heuristic differentiation of quantitative and qualitative aspects of mediatization.

In a first approximation we can describe the *quantitative aspects* of mediatization with the word 'more'. It is obvious that the pure number of technical communication media increased – while not linearly – within the mentioned period of time. The same is the case for the different ways of appropriating these media, which additionally break the linearity in such a process. In more detail, we can describe mediatization as an ongoing process of dispersing media communication on a (a) temporal, (b) spatial, and (c) social level (Krotz, 2007, p. 37–41):

- On the temporal level, the increasing number of technologically mediated communication is becoming more and more accessible all the time. In the present, television, for example, has no closedown anymore but is an ongoing, never-ending flow of technologically mediated communication. The internet makes it possible to surf all the time, and so on and so forth.
- On the spatial level, we can say that media communication is more and more accessible across different localities. The telephone, for example, is no longer a media technology related to a certain place of communication, either the office, private home or public telephone box. As a personalized mobile phone it is available virtually across all spaces. The same can be said for television, which has as 'public viewing' again left the private home.
- These examples refer already to the social level of mediatization, which means that more and more social contexts are shaped by media communication. To take a further example for this, computer use is no longer something that is done in work contexts. Rather, computer use ranks over the very different social spheres of the private and public, the work time and spare time and so on.

Reflecting these three aspects of the quantitative perspective on mediatization together, it becomes clear that this perspective encompasses more than a linear process of increase: With the dispersal of media communication in human life in general, we have a synergetical process, which is a reason why the meta process of mediatization is marked by certain 'pushes' or 'jumps', for example when via 'digitalization' and

‘cross-media content production’ media communication changes in very various contexts.

However, more important is that this refers to *qualitative aspects* of change. We can comprehend these qualitative aspects of mediatization when we think about the way in which technical media ‘structure’ the way we communicate or, *vice versa*, how the way we communicate is reflected in a technological change of media. It is this moment which needs a more careful focus if we want to understand how mediatization becomes concrete in various fields. This is the topic of the following section.

Communication and the molding force of the media

We can describe the outlined qualitative aspects of mediatization using the concept of the ‘molding force’ of the media (cf. Hepp, 2009). Media as such exert a certain ‘pressure’ on the way we communicate. Television, for example, at least in its present form, has the ‘pressure’ to present certain ideas in a more linear mode and with a suitable visual presentation. Print, to take another example, makes it possible to develop more complex argumentation as it can be read more slowly and offers the chance of complex ways of structuring text (and especially: with a higher degree of self-control). And the mobile phone, as a last example, makes it possible to stay in ongoing communicative connectivity with a group of people while being on the move – and exerts a certain ‘pressure’ to do this. However, all these examples also demonstrate that this is not a direct ‘effect’ of the ‘material structure’ of the media. The molding force of the media only becomes concrete in different ways of mediation – that is: via certain forms of communication.

Therefore, the concept of the molding force of the media sticks to the idea of medium theory that there are specificities of certain media and that we *also* have to focus on them when we investigate questions of communicative change (cf. Meyrowitz, 1995, 2009). However, these specificities are produced in human practice or human acting, because of which these specificities are highly contextual and do not result in one media logic. We have to focus very carefully on this contextuality in multi-level transformation processes.

To make this idea of the molding force of the media as part of processes of communicative acting more concrete, it is helpful to refer to the ideas of Latour a second time; however, without saying that, an analysis integrating the molding force of the media might be an actor-network-research. Nevertheless, the actor-network-theory offers some insights which may be integrated in the outlined approach. Doing this, some relations between the traditions of ANT and cultural studies are striking.

It is worth considering these as we find in both cases the argument to take a 'middle' way reflecting the interrelations of media-technological and socio-cultural change.

Raymond Williams, with his approach of media as a technology *and* cultural form, tried to avoid a technological determinism and symptomatic technology at the same time. For him, technological determinism is marked by the conceptualization of the relationship between technology and social change from the side of technology. In this perspective, new technologies are discovered in an internal process of research and development and then finally made accessible to the public, while they set "the conditions for social change and progress": "New technologies [...] create new societies or new human conditions" (Williams, 1990, p. 13). Within the approach of symptomatic technology, technologies are symptoms of a further social change. Each technology then is "a by-product of a social process that is otherwise determined" (Williams, 1990, p. 13). Technologies concern socio-cultural change "in a more marginal way" (Williams, 1990, p. 14).

Both approaches are insufficient for Williams as they isolate media as technology from further processes of change, in the first case by handling technology as an independently developed, but driving, force; in the second case, as a marginal phenomenon, determined by socio-cultural change. In contrast to this, Williams argues for a more integrative perspective:

"[I]t may be possible to outline a different kind of interpretation, which would allow us to see not only [the] history but also [the] uses in a more radical way. Such an interpretation would differ from the technological determinism in that it would restore intention to the process of research and development. The technology would be seen, that is to say, as being looked for and developed with certain purposes and practices already in mind. At the same time the interpretation would differ from symptomatic technology in that these purposes and practices would be seen as direct: as known social needs, purposes and practices to which technology is not marginal but central."

(Williams, 1990, p. 14)

It is possible to see clear parallels to the venture of actor-network-theory within these reflections by Raymond Williams. However, the context of Latour's work is a different one as he does not primarily reflect media technologies but "things" or "objects" in general, or, as he calls them, "non-humans" (Latour, 2007, p. 72) as part of the social. Like Williams, he is driven by the idea to look for an approach in-between "technologi-

cal determinism” and “social determinism”. So he criticizes both positions:

“It is fair to say that social scientists were not alone in sticking polemically to one metaphysic among the many at hand. [...] To avoid the threat of ‘technological determinism’, it is tempting to defend adamantly ‘social determinism’, which in turn becomes so extreme (the stream engine becoming, for instance, the ‘mere reflection’ of ‘English capitalism’) that even the most open-minded engineer becomes a fierce technical determinist bumping the table with virile exclamations about the ‘weight of material constraints’. These gestures have no other effect but to trigger even moderate sociologists to insist even more vehemently on the importance of some ‘discursive dimension’.”

(Latour, 2007, pp. 144 f.)

His own position tries to mediate between these extremes by understanding (technological) “things” themselves as “actants” (Latour, 2007, p. 71). “Objects”, especially as (media) technologies, are part of “chains which are associations of humans [...] and non-humans” (Latour, 1991, p. 110). In a certain sense, the core of Latour’s idea is that things are in the end ‘coagulated actions’ of human actors. A balustrade, for example, is in a certain sense nothing different than the guarding action of a human who wants to protect somebody else from falling. Because of that we have to understand objects themselves in “association” – that means in “chains” – with actions as actors. To quote Latour once more:

“Social action [...] is also shifted or delegated to different types of actors which are able to transport the action further through other modes of action, other types of forces altogether. [...] implements, according to our definition, are actors, or more precisely, *participants* in the course of action waiting to be given a figuration.”

(Latour, 2007, pp. 70 f.; emphasis in the original)

For Latour, “things” or “objects” as actors have the potential to stabilize power relations and inequalities by these kinds of reification. He wants to analyze power and domination with reference to “the multiplicity of objects” by which they become “empirically visible” (Latour, 2007, p. 83). This approach of understanding “things” or “objects” as actors explains the name of ANT. However, the term network takes on a slightly different meaning at this point. While it is usual to use this concept within media and communication research to name networks of communication or social relations, here the term is used to name networks or to chain different actors and actions. Or, as Joost van Loon

explains: "ANT does not presuppose that order, or perhaps better continuity, is a reflection of some reality 'out there', but instead that it is the consequence (a construction) of a (temporary) stabilisation of a particular set of farces that can be conceptualised as a *network*". (Loon, 2008, p. 114; emphasis in the original).

Referring these reflections back to questions of media communication, we can now grasp media in a completely new way as 'mediators'. The idea is not to understand media as 'transparent' instances of communication but as institutionalized *and* reificated objects that have moments shaping the process of communication. If we understand media as institutionally and technologically 'coagulated actions' of humans, Latour's reflections offer a first answer which we have to bear in mind for an analysis of molding forces of the media. As mentioned several times, it is not a question of a 'causal effect' of a certain media (technology). Media as such only become concrete in communicative action; however, they offer a certain 'potentiality of action' in such a figuration, which can be called the 'moulding force' of the media, and have to be analyzed in a contextualized way. The "certain purposes and practices already in mind" (Williams, 1990, p. 14), that for Williams define the horizon of meaning of media technological development, are 'modified' in the processes of their appropriation.

However, we have to bear in mind that a 'media technology' is always rather a 'bundle' of various techniques than the homogeneity of a certain apparatus. An example for this is Ivan Illich's deconstruction of the 'technology' of the printed book, the formation of which is the history of various socio-cultural "inventions":

"This breakthrough [of the printed book] consisted in the combination of more than a dozen technical inventions and arrangements through which the page was transformed from score to text. Not printing, as frequently assumed, but this bundle of innovations, twelve generations earlier, is the necessary foundation of all the stages through which bookish culture has gone since." (Illich, 1996, pp. 3 f.)

Similar things can be said for other media technologies, for example film, television or the internet – in all these cases, various 'bundles of inventions' come together in what is then, at the end of a reification und institutionalization process, called a single media technology. This said, we find in Illich's work – concretely in the example of the book and comparable with the work of Latour (who is reflecting more generally on technological objects) – arguments to focus on the "combination of those elements" (Illich, 1996, p. 3) by which communicative action gets reificated in certain media forms. Therefore, our task is to analyze empir-

ically how communication is articulated in various associations of human action with media as institutions and technologies. In such a perspective, ANT offers “an effective antidote to functionalism” (Couldry, 2008a, p. 99), which dominates main parts of media and communication research.

If we refer this back to the discussion about the *specificity of media as molding force*, it becomes obvious that also in relation to present media technologies it makes no sense to describe the specifics that a certain medium might have ‘on its own’ – in this sense, there is no “message” of a medium, as parts of the medium theory indicate (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967). We have to analyze the molding forces of the media always in their netting with human action, especially (but not exclusively) with communicative action. Or, as one would say in the terms of a culturally-oriented media and communication research: The specificity of media can only be articulated in their appropriation as a process of cultural localization (Hepp, 2006, pp. 248–263). Being materialized and institutionalized totalities of a plurality of (communicative) actions, media only get ‘powerful’ in nettings with practices, at this point not understood as a causality or itself as an action but as a ‘power’ of shaping actions – this constitutes molding. Media as ‘coagulated nettings of action’ are suitable for various purposes, while these potentials can only ‘come to life’ by processes of appropriation that are marked by manifold practices, which include much more than the frequently so-called ‘use’ of media. A contextualized research on the forces of the media analyzes exactly this.

If taking these considerations seriously, one then has to reflect more in detail on the *concept of communication*. Generally speaking, under communication we can understand any form of symbolic interaction, consciously and planned as well as habitualized and situatively performed. This means that communication is related to the use of symbols, which we as human beings learn in our process of socialization and which are mainly ‘arbitrary’ in the sense that they are based on socio-cultural rules. Interaction means interrelated action of humans. At this point, the term communication is based on symbolic interactionism, as it is adapted in media and communication research (Krotz, 2008a). Communication, then, is constitutive for the human constitution of reality; that means we ‘construct’ (however not solely) our social reality in manifold communicative processes. This has been discussed by various academics, not least by Peter Berger und Thomas Luckmann (1991) in their theoretical reflection on the social construction of reality.

When speaking here about communication as action it is important to keep in mind some aspects of (social) action in contrast to further behavior (Weber, 1978, pp. 22 f.). Without going into too much detail concern-

ing the discussion about human acting following Max Weber (cf. especially Lenk, 1978; Luckmann, 1992; Schütz, 1967), it is necessary to accentuate some points in order to avoid misunderstandings in the following argumentation. The main difference between action and other kinds of behavior is that the first one can be defined as a “‘meaningful’ and ‘goal-oriented’ doing or omission that is a manageable and responsible behavior” (Holly et al., 1984, p. 288). The term ‘act’ commonly describes an unreflected doing – in relation to communication: the communicative practice –, while the term ‘action’ names the performed act (Schütz, 1967, p. 60). Acting is thereby based on social rules, which are internalized in the process of socialization.

This fundamental reflection is insofar important as it shows that a characterization of communication as action does *not* imply that this is described in an appropriate way by the concept of intentionality and an understanding of that intention (cf. Reichertz, 2009). Basically, the question is one of manageability (“*Kontrollierbarkeit*”): “If one understands an action as meaningful, this implies that it is ‘goal-oriented’, but not necessarily that it is always intentional, willful and even conscious” (Holly et al., 1984, pp. 289 f.). In this sense, the description of a doing or a practice as action is always a “construct of interpretation” (Lenk, 1978), that is, an attribution in a certain observation perspective. Communication as doing and practice is highly habitualized or – to borrow a term from Anthony Giddens (1989) – based on “practical consciousness”: Humans have in the process of doing something the knowledge *to act* communicatively appropriately. However, they are not necessarily able to express this practical knowledge of ‘doing communication’ discursively. Again, this is evidence of how far communicative actions are also subjective “interpretation constructs”.

In many cases the goal of communication is not necessarily to stimulate further communication, for example, in the sense of an ‘exchange about certain topics’. Rather, communication is embedded in various further doings or practices: One talks while building this or that etc. The actual communicative action cannot be separated from the further netting of actions, with media or without, with further things or without. In this sense, Jo Reichertz characterizes communication as “human behaviour co-ordination based on symbolic means, which are embedded in social practices” (Reichertz, 2009, p. 98). He argues that communication focusses especially on “communicative power” (Reichertz, 2009, p. 198) in Max Weber’s sense of power (Weber, 1978, p. 53). For the latter, power is the chance within a social relationship to be in the position to carry out one’s own will in spite of resistance and regardless of the bases on which this chance rests. Thinking these arguments further, *communicative power* is the enforcement of such a will via communication. How-

ever, again we cannot misunderstand ‘will’ in the sense of a ‘conscious intention of acting powerful’. Very often the rules and patterns of powerful communicative action are highly internalized and therefore habitualized.

The term ‘communicative power’ does not, unlike the within media and communication research normally used term ‘effect’, imply more or less dimensionable consequences of (media) communication, but it is much more open. Following Weber, power is always *only* the chance but *never* a certainty. But especially the term communicative power refers again to the social dimension of communication, as the (disciplined) social relation of communication has to be understood as the source of communicative power:

“It does exist – the everyday communicative power, which comes without order, without threat and corruption. That is to say, communication works in the everyday life mostly without enforcement (and also without threat and corruption), but never without power. But it is a power which is based on the social relation of the participants with each other and the relevance of the others for the ascertainment of their own identity. This power is based on recognition, that is gratuitousness”.
(Reichertz, 2009, p. 242)

Questions of communicative power are especially relevant for mediated communication, as the reification and institutionalization of certain communicative actions in media make certain forms of communicative power permanent. Classical examples for this are conventional mass media like the radio or television, whose reification and institutionalizations center communication to a certain ‘sender’ and therefore appoint certain forms of communicative power as part of the molding forces of these media. But also within the internet, such forms of ‘permanentization’ of communicative power can be found. An example for this is the data collection of social web suppliers like Facebook. The way information is ‘collected’ and ‘processed’ by the use of certain data-structures through the suppliers secures their communicative power. These contextualized processes of reification of communicative power are important moments of the molding forces of the media, which have to be analyzed in a critical way.

But how do we introduce a certain system into our reflection of media communication and the molding forces of the media as part of it? Since I want to argue accordingly, it is helpful to come back to some of John B. Thompson’s considerations. However, we have to think them through further, based on our reflections so far. In relation to the “mediatization of culture”, John B. Thompson (1995, pp. 82 f.) suggested to distinguish

three fundamental types of communication as interaction – face-to-face interaction, mediated interaction and mediated quasi-interaction. If we have the recent media change in mind, we have to add to this a further type based on the analyses by Friedrich Krotz (2007, pp. 90 f.), that is communication as interaction with 'intelligent' or 'interactive systems'. Merging these typifications in relation to the arguments made up to this point, we can draw the following distinction of basic types of communication:

Table 2: *Basic types of communication.*

	Direct communication	Reciprocal media communication	Produced media communication	Virtualised media communication
Space-time constitution	Context of co-presence; shared spatial-temporal reference systems	Separation of contexts; extended availability in time and space	Separation of contexts; extended availability in time and space	Separation of contexts; extended availability in time and space
Range of symbolic means	Multiplicity of symbolic means	Narrowing of symbolic means	Narrowing and standardization of symbolic means	Relative narrowing and standardization of symbolic means
Action orientation	Oriented towards specific others	Oriented towards specific others	Oriented towards an indefinite range of potentially addressed	Oriented towards a space of potential action
Mode of communication	Dialogical mode of communication	Dialogical mode of communication	Monological mode of communication	Interlogical mode of communication
Form of connectivity	Local connectivity	Translocally addressed connectivity	Translocal open connectivity	Translocal indefinite connectivity

Source: Own systematization, based on Thompson (1995, p. 85) and Krotz (2007, pp. 90 f).

This systematization differentiates four types of communication; that is, first, communication as direct communication, such as the conversation with other persons; second, communication as reciprocal media communication, i.e. technically mediated personal communication with other persons or groups of persons (for example via the telephone or chat); third, communication as produced media communication, which means the kind of media communication that is normally described by the concept of mass communication, i.e. a “generally addressed, standardized communication” (Krotz, 2007, p. 213), and, finally, the virtua-

lized media communication. This is the communication with ‘intelligent’ or ‘interactive systems’ produced for this purpose, for which interactive computer games or communication robots are examples. Therefore, this term does not refer to the classical online-offline distinction in internet research, but captures a fundamental form of communication in which the ‘communication partner’ is a certain form of ‘technological system’. All these basic types can be understood in the frame of the understanding of communication developed so far.

In all this, systematization demonstrates that for the reciprocal and produced media communication the narrowing of symbolic forms goes hand in hand with the possibility to separate the contexts of interaction and by that take on an increased availability across time and space. In other words: Technical media permit a “disembedding” (Giddens, 1990, p. 21) of communication out of the locality of direct interaction. Communication opens translocal connectivities without physical movement; in an everyday language: ‘connections’ beyond the local. The furthest reaching “disembedding” can be linked with the virtualized media communication, as via this, media technologies are used to create spaces of potential action which can be appropriated in various ways at different localities by a multiplicity of communicative actions.

Various aspects of communication can be made comprehensible based on this systematization. While direct communication takes place in the context of co-presence with a shared reference system in time and space and therefore offers something like a local connectivity, the translocal connectivity of reciprocal media communication differs from this. By the use of technical media the participants act in contexts which vary in space and/or time. They do not share a reference system in the sense of the above. Exemplary for this are talks via the mobile phone, in which a necessity for a ‘doubling of spaces’ exists – that is the articulation of a shared ‘space of talk’, a shared reference system of the interaction partners (Moores, 2008, p. 194). In all, the win of such a translocal communicative connectivity by the mediatization of communication goes hand in hand with the loss of symbolic means by which communication can take place. As the translocal connectivity of reciprocal media communication remains related to defined interaction partners, we can call it a translocally-addressed connectivity.

With relation to produced media communication, another aspect of mediated connectivity can be realized. Again it is first of all translocal, as technical media are used to disembed communication out of its local contexts. However, in contrast to the reciprocal media communication (as well as to direct communication), produced media communication is oriented to an indefinite potential of others. Consequently, the connectivity constituted by this type of communication has to be understood

in a different way, that is, as a communicative netting that due to its indefinite addressing has blurred borders. The win in connectivity – the possibility of a communicative connectivity with a huge amount of not further specified others – is again related to a certain loss; the loss of a dialogical mode of communication in favor of a monological one.

As already mentioned, the state of affairs is more complex with virtualized media communication. In a certain sense the narrowing of symbolic means is only relative since, for example, certain communication robots like the “Aibo” produced by Sony and comparable apparatuses offer (again) wider possibilities of communication like face-to-face gestures. The same can be said for certain computer games like the Nintendo Wii, which via motion sensors can integrate gestural forms of communication into a virtualized space of communication. It is possible to speak here of an ‘interlog’, as a virtual space of action is ‘moved’ in-between the producers of such communication apparatuses and their users, a space in which in the perspective of the users the actual communicative acts take place. Correspondingly indefinite are the connectivities which exist here: While from the perspective of a user a connectivity between user context(s) and virtual space(s) of action exist, from a total perspective, further connectivities are involved, which are articulated by the production and appropriation of this virtual space of action.

Systematizations like these are at least partly contested within mediatization research. For example, Stig Hjarvard (2008, p. 122) criticizes the original, here extended reflections by John B. Thompson, because they would rely too much on an outdated differentiation between personal communication and mass communication. Hjarvard suggests to differentiate only between direct and mediated communication – and then to make more concrete distinctions like, for example, one-way/two-way, interpersonal/mass, text/audio/visual, and so forth. For sure, he is correct in that we need further distinctions and categories for concrete analyses. However, the potential of such a systematization is to offer a frame of orientation which in times of mediatization brings to mind fundamental characteristics of communication. This is especially important as these different types rely on different forms of institutionalizing communicative power: Monological, for instance, describes a centering of communicative power on a rather small group of people; interlogical goes hand in hand with other forms of communicative power which lie in the ability to create such virtual spaces of interaction.

In particular, this systematization has allowed to make the meta process and panorama of mediatization more concrete over the past decades: While for a long time mediatization meant especially the establishment of further forms of reciprocal and produced media communication and related molding forces, we can say that the establishment of virtual me-

dia communication means a further move of mediatization, the molding forces of which we can hardly assess at present.

As a consequence, mediatization describes the process of establishing these different types of communication across various context fields as well as a saturation of these. How certain molding forces develop, which changes of communication and therefore of the construction of reality exist, this has to be researched for these fields in a contextual way. When one attaches the associations of change which are described by the term mediatization to 'the media', we have to have in mind that this is an abridgement of a highly complex *dialectical* relation that one is observing. At the core, the question is how different forms of communication are interrelated with socio-cultural change. Media are no more and no less reifications and institutionalizations of certain communicative actions which are part of change. And when we speak about the molding forces of the media, this is a metaphor to grasp this complex dialectic.

Conclusion – or: from the panorama to the field

The aim of this article was to clarify how we can understand mediatization in a way that makes a kind of empirical communication research possible that also reflects the specificity of certain media. To do this, I started with a reconsideration of the concept of 'media logic' that had been central for mediatization research since its beginning. Discussing the various understandings of 'media logic', the core argument was that the interrelation between media-communicative and socio-cultural change is too complex to be reduced to the supposition of a 'logic' of (institutionalized) media. This resulted in the discussion of a further conceptualization of mediatization, understanding the latter as a more general approach to reflect the interrelation between media-communicative and socio-cultural change in a long-term way. Here, reflections of mediatization as a meta process and panorama are important. However, such a way of thinking does not answer the question of how to consider the specificity of the media in the process of mediatization – a question, which was in a certain sense the starting point for any discussion of 'media logics'. Here the concept of the 'molding force' of the media comes in, which reflects that media are at the same time an institutionalization as well as a reification of communication. By both, media 'open' fundamental forms of communication and therefore have an influence on socio-cultural processes of change. Such an understanding is in so far a progress of critical research as not only the level of institutionalization of communication is considered as a location of power, as it is done within critical discourse analyses, focusing on various forms of institu-

tionalized 'discursive formations'. Also the reification of communication is a location of power as power-relations become materialized.

But we cannot see any institutionalization and reification beyond its context: It depends on the researched field and the human practices within, how the 'molding force' of certain media come into life and is interrelated with further processes of change. There is no general logic of the television, the radio, the newspaper or the internet. We have to focus very context-sensitively on the question of how the spreading of these different media is related to further processes of change in various fields.

This said we can understand the present status of mediatization research as follows: A more open understanding of mediatization as a meta process and panorama opened a number of research questions that operate on a level of higher complexity than the suggestion of one media logic does. From this starting point we are now in the process of doing empirical research on the mediatization of various fields like, for example, religion, politics, etc. Such research makes it possible to develop grounded theories, reflecting the mediatization of these concrete fields. In the perspective of the arguments being developed in this article it seems to be more likely that we come to a "formal" (Glaser, 2007) – that is: more general – theory of mediatization through this kind of research instead of presupposing a general media logic. My aim was to encourage this kind of research in a way that it does not forget the specificity of media – their 'molding force'.

Bionote

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