

A photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone up to take a picture of a small, patterned object on a table. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The person's arms and hands are visible, and they are wearing a watch on their left wrist. The background shows a table and some other objects, but they are out of focus.

# Media Practice and Everyday Agency in Europe

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édition lumière

# Table of Contents

## INTRODUCTIONS

*Leif Kramp, Nico Carpentier and Andreas Hepp*  
Introduction: Investigating the Everyday Presence of Media..... 9

*Anne Kaun, Benjamin de Cleen and Christian Schwarzenegger*  
Navigating “Academia Incognita”: The European Media and Communication  
Doctoral Summer School and ECREA’s Young Scholars Network..... 23

## PART 1 RESEARCH

### SECTION 1: DYNAMICS OF MEDIATIZATION

*Nick Couldry*  
Mediatization: What Is It?..... 33

*Knut Lundby*  
Notes on Interaction and Mediatization..... 41

*Sonia Livingstone*  
The Mediatization of Childhood and Education: Reflections on The Class.. 55

*Friedrich Krotz*  
From a Social Worlds Perspective to the Analysis of Mediatized Worlds..... 69

*Andreas Hepp*  
Communicative Figurations: Researching Cultures of Mediatization..... 83

*Risto Kunelius*  
Lessons of the Lament: Footnotes on the Mediatization Discourse ..... 101

*Dorothee Christiane Meier*  
Doctor-Patient Relationship in a Digitalised World..... 115

## SECTION 2: TRANSFORMATIONS

*Minna Saariketo*

Imagining Alternative Agency in Techno-Society : Outlining the Basis of Critical Technology Education..... 129

*Auksė Balčytienė*

The Alchemy of Central and East European Media Transformations: Historical Pathways, Cultures and Consequences ..... 139

*Irena Reifová*

Ontological Security in the Digital Age: The Case of Elderly People Using New Media ..... 153

*Svenja Ottovordemgentschenfelde*

Reconfiguring Practices, Identities and Ideologies: Towards Understanding Professionalism in an Age of Post-Industrial Journalism ..... 163

## SECTION 3: METHODS

*Bertrand Cabedoche*

Advantages and Limitations of a Text Analysis to Reveal the Strategic Action of Social Actors. The Example of Cultural Diversity ..... 177

*Rosa Franquet*

Analysing Media Production: The Benefits and Limits of Using Ethnographic Methodology ..... 195

*Erik Knudsen*

Media Effects as a Two-Sided Field: Comparing Theories and Research of Framing and Agenda Setting..... 207

*Ilija Tomanić Trivundža*

Records of Facts or Records of Mystification? Brief Notes on the “Surplus Value” of the Photographic Image ..... 217

*Leif Kramp*

Media Studies without Memory? Institutional, Economic and Legal Issues of Accessing Television Heritage in the Digital Age ..... 227

*Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Andra Siibak*

Roles of a Researcher: Reflections after Doing a Case-Study with Youth on a Sensitive Topic ..... 249

*François Heinderyckx*

Academic Schizophrenia: Communication Scholars and the Double Bind. 261

## SECTION 4: THE SOCIAL

*Riitta Perälä*

Engaging with Media in a Fragmented Media Environment..... 273

*Hannu Nieminen and Anna-Laura Markkanen*

A Crooked Balance of Interests? Comparing Users' Rights in Printed and Electronic Books ..... 285

*Fausto Colombo*

Too Easy to Say Blog: Paradoxes of Authenticity on the Web ..... 297

*Tobias Olsson*

In a Community, or Becoming a Commodity? Critical Reflections on the “Social” in Social Media..... 309

*Nico Carpentier*

Participation as a Fantasy: A Psychoanalytical Approach to Power-Sharing Fantasies..... 319

*Ane Møller Gabrielsen and Ingvild Kvale Sørenssen*

Reassembling the Social ..... 331

**PART 2****THE EUROPEAN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION DOCTORAL SUMMER SCHOOL 2013 AND ITS PARTICIPANTS**

Jan Babnik..... 335

Gábor Bernáth ..... 336

Ilze Berzina ..... 337

Erna Bodström ..... 338

Yiannis Christidis..... 339

Michael Cotter ..... 340

Joanna Doona..... 341

Victoria Estevez ..... 342

Katharina Fritsche..... 343

Roman Hájek ..... 344

Nele Heise..... 345

Lisette Johnston ..... 346

Slavka Karakusheva..... 347

Erik Knudsen ..... 348

Dorothee Christiane Meier..... 349

Cassandre Molinari ..... 350

Anne Mollen .....	351
Tatyana Muzyukina.....	352
Svenja Ottovordemgentschenfelde .....	353
Venetia Papa.....	354
Mari-Liisa Parder .....	355
Riitta Perälä.....	356
Gina Plana .....	357
Sanne Margarethe de Fine Licht Raith .....	358
Miia Rantala.....	359
Cindy Roitsch.....	360
Ulrike Roth.....	361
Nanna Särkkä.....	362
Minna Saariketo .....	363
Dana Schurmans .....	364
Natalie Schwarz .....	365
Irene Serrano Vázquez.....	366
Katarzyna Sobieraj.....	367
Melodine Sommer.....	368
Ingvild Kvale Sørensen.....	369
Neil Stevenson .....	370
Mariola Tarrega.....	371
Khaël Velders .....	372
Zhan Zhang .....	373
Wenyao Zhao .....	374
Elisabetta Zuvorac .....	375

# Notes on Interaction and Mediatization

*Knut Lundby*

I want to approach the broad topic of Interaction and Mediatization via a de-tour through modern painting and early sociology, before I reach recent writings on the matter. I start this essay with a History and a Scream.

## 1. Ambivalence of modernity

The Norwegian painter Edvard Munch (1863–1944) was an early observer of emerging modernity<sup>1</sup> with the ambivalences that the new times carried for people (Berman et al. 2006), sharply depicted in his famous *Scream*.<sup>2</sup> One hundred years ago Munch had to fight to get his ideas accepted for the decoration of the University of Oslo aula. One of the big murals in this festive room is *History*, showing an old man in interaction with a young boy.<sup>3</sup> Munch said it depicts ‘a remote and historically resonant landscape. In it, an old man from the fjords, having struggled for many years, now sits steeped in rich memories, recounting them to a fascinated little boy.’<sup>4</sup> The old man mediates history in storytelling. The boy is a modern, young man who came to experience the media innovations and the following mediatization of the 20th century. Later, the *History* itself became slightly mediatized through re-mediation, even in small instances as powerpoint headings from my university. However, the *Scream* has been much more radically transformed, in posters, advertisements and adaptations – most famously the *Scream* has been echoed and twisted by Andy Warhol.<sup>5</sup>

How does this connect to the topic of ‘Interaction and Mediatization’? As noted, the old man and the young boy interact in the painting, but otherwise belong to centuries apart that are marked by radically different media environments. The old man may even be from a generation interacting and communicating primarily out of a primary orality, while the young man is becoming immersed in a modern society of literacy with its secondary orality in broadcasting, still basically depending on writing and print (Ong 1982). That young man, coming ‘alive’ on the canvas around the outbreak of World War I in 1914, was too early in history to experience the extension of secondary orality later claimed with the digital media (Ess 2010). *History* further reminds us of the changing forms of media in storytelling and how closely knit they are

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Lundby, K. (2014) ‘Notes on Interaction and Mediatization’, pp. 41-53 in L. Kramp/N. Carpenter/A. Hepp/I. Tomanić Trivundža/H. Nieminen/R. Kunelius/T. Olsson/E. Sundin/R. Kilborn (eds.) *Media Practice and Everyday Agency in Europe*. Bremen: edition lumière.



to the forms of interaction. The painting itself becomes a medium between the face-to-face interaction it depicts and the histories of *History* that are shared and amended in communication with technical media, hence open to the transformations inherent in processes of mediatization (Lundby 2009a: 11). This is even more the case with the digital technologies and their capacity for multi-modality, remixing and reshaping. Larry Friedlander (2011) shows this with examples from the old art of portrait painting as a 'prehistory' of Facebook. A portrait is not a 'realistic' depiction of the person. Rather, portraits prefigure strategies employed in self-representation on social networking sites, as he argues.

## 2. Conductors of interaction

The *Scream* – the iconic painting itself became an object in the modern symbolic circulation. As an object it reminds us of the material dimension of all human interaction. This resonates with the theorizing by Pitirim Sorokin, the Russian who became the first professor of sociology at Harvard. He regards 'meaningful human interaction' as 'the generic social phenomenon' (1947: 39) and introduces 'material vehicles' as a 'universal component of sociocultural phenomena' (1947: 51).

In *Society, Culture and Personality: Their Structure and Dynamics* (1947) Sorokin draws up the context and material preconditions for human interaction. Although the book in some respects seems out-dated, because of its pre-Second World War flavour and examples, it nevertheless offers some basic insights for the discussion of interaction and mediatization. Sorokin does not stress the communicative aspect but is aware of communication as the flip-coin of human interaction (1947: 578).

In Sorokin's thinking: 'material vehicles' of all sorts work as 'conductors' in communication and interaction. He explains: 'Since pure meanings, values, and norms are immaterial, spaceless, and timeless, they cannot be transmitted directly from mind to mind' (1947: 51). Meanings, then, have to be externalized, objectified, and socialized through vehicles. Such vehicles could be overt actions, material objects, or natural processes that are used in social interaction (1947: 52).

There is a distinction between physical and symbolic conductors, although they may be connected. Symbolic conductors 'exert an influence not so much through their physical properties as by virtue of the symbolic meaning attached to them' (1947: 53). Physical conductors work in gestures and body movements, in sound waves, light and colour, in thermal and mechanical forms of energy. Sorokin also lists 'electrical and radio conductors' (1947: 52–53) and would obviously have included digital vehicles and conductors if he had lived today. Different vehicles may combine into chains of conductors (1947: 53–57).

Sorokin acknowledges the vehicles as media. He states that interaction across time and space is possible ‘only through the *media* of vehicles as conductors’ of meaningful interaction (1947: 52, my emphasis). This is another terminology for processes of mediation.

While mediation is part of all communication processes (Hepp 2013, Hjarvard 2013), ‘mediatization’ points to transformations of relationships, institutions, social and cultural fields due to the role of the media. Sorokin is concerned with the transformation of cultural phenomena. He formulates ‘The Laws of Transformation’: When the difference between the ‘culture of departure’ and that of ‘infiltration’ remains constant, the extent of the transformation of the migrating phenomenon depends upon its own nature, he argues. The more complex, refined and intricate the phenomenon, and the greater the training required for its use, the more profoundly it changes in the culture of infiltration, Sorokin explains (1947: 573). Modern, technical media are such complex phenomena. Sorokin termed them ‘*a more developed system of communication and interaction*’ as they make interaction possible across physical distance (1947: 578).

Most ‘migrating cultural phenomena undergo a transformation’, he observes.

These transformations depend on the ‘conductors of interaction’ – the media – that are at hand. If they are ‘mechanically standardized, like the printing press, thousands of cultural meanings can be conveyed clearly to all who know and read the language’ (1947: 573). Sorokin concludes that modern, technical media may reach more people and thus accelerate the transformations. We, here, could discern a basic understanding of interaction and mediatization in Sorokin’s writings. (Cf. Lundby 2013: 193-195).

### 3. Symbolic circulation

In *The Media and Modernity* (1995), John B. Thompson carries such an approach to interaction and mediatization<sup>6</sup> further, focusing on symbolic forms and their modes of production and circulation in the interaction and communication. In the contemporary, networked society the formation and circulation of shared ‘social imaginaries’ has taken on new speed and complexity. Valaskivi and Sumiala (2013) define shared social imaginaries as symbolic matrixes within which people imagine their collective social worlds – shaped and transformed in mediatization processes, I will argue.

Although Thompson wrote his book before web facilities stirred up symbolic cascades of presentation and representation on the Internet, he catches the core of mediatization processes: a systematic cultural transformation as part of emerging modernity. The printing press and later electronic media paved the way. With these, then new media, symbolic forms were produced, re-



produced and circulated on a scale that was unprecedented. Hence, patterns of communication and interaction began to change in profound and irreversible ways, Thompson argues.

Human or social interaction is symbolic interaction, in any case with the symbolic capacities of languages. With 'material vehicles' in technical media as 'conductors', to speak with Sorokin, the potential for symbolic circulation across time and space expands. The affordances (Hutchby 2003) of technical media offer additional range for communication and interaction, hence also a larger potential for the transformations inherent in mediatization.

The transformations are acted in inter-action. As long as the symbolic circulation is part of social interaction, there are actors and agency involved. Hence, social interaction consists of communication and action. I stick to a sociological perspective, not going into details as ethnomethodologists or other micro-processes oriented scholars would do. Still, in this essay I mostly stay with daily interaction in various settings where transforming processes of mediatization may be identified.

#### 4. Critique and counter-critique

I may have been challenged on this topic of 'Interaction and Mediatization' because I wrote a critique of the quick and easy use of 'media logic' as a key in mediatization studies, where the complexity is covered under a general, often linear logic (Lundby 2009b). Instead, I suggested looking for social interaction. I turned to the German sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918). His focus on 'social forms' leads to frames of social interaction by means of which to grasp dynamics of mediatization. Simmel underlines that 'society' is continuously shaped through social interaction. So are mediatization processes. However, those I criticised for a simple, linear use of 'media logic' as an explanation of mediatization, in particular Stig Hjarvard and David L. Altheide & Robert P. Snow, were themselves referring to Simmel. The latter held that 'media logic' is a social form, a form of communication that has a particular logic of its own (Altheide & Snow 1979).

To check out the present status in the discussion I went to check what two recent special journal issues have to say about interaction and mediatization in general and social interaction versus media logic in particular? The two are *Communication Theory* (CT) 23(3) from August 2013 on 'Conceptualizing Mediatization' and the Danish *MedieKultur: Journal of media and communication research* (MK) 29(54) from summer 2013 on 'Mediatization and Cultural Change'. There are seven articles in English in each special issue, including editorials. I tracked all paragraphs with the word 'interaction'.

David Altheide contributes in CT on 'Media Logic, Social Control and Fear.' This article forces me to reconsider my criticism on 'media logic' in Altheide & Snow's classic (1979). Stig Hjarvard also nuances the take on 'media logic' that I criticized.

## 5. Media logic and social interaction

I argued in my 2009-chapter that media logic could not constitute a 'form'. A social form is constituted through continuous patterns of social interaction, while 'logic' refers to the rule of the game. However, in his CT article Altheide anchors 'media logic' with interaction. He offers suggestions for 'continued investigation and mapping of media logic across information technologies in order to clarify the reflexive relationship between communication, social interaction, and institutional orders' (2013: 223). Altheide had turned towards symbolic interactionism with his 1995 book on *An Ecology of Communication: Cultural Formats of Control* – but then with wider 'cultural logics' in plural and focus on processes and practices in relation to formats in journalistic production (Sandstrom 2008). In 2013 he is back to 'media logic' – with social interactionism – to understand mediatization. Networked computer-based digital media had Altheide revising his early ideas of media logic, from a general logic to social interaction within an 'ecology of communication'. His 1995 book on media ecology came right after the launch of the first web-browsers (Lundby 2009b: 114–115).

Stig Hjarvard has made a similar move to defend 'media logic'. In a co-authored editorial in the MK special issue, he holds that the logics (now in plural!) of the media (now specified to the 'mainstream' media) still help explain mediatization (Hjarvard & Petersen 2013: 3). Nearly a decade earlier 'form' was at the fore, when he stated that 'mediatization implies a process through which core elements of a social and cultural activity (like work, leisure, play etc.) assume media form' (Hjarvard 2004: 48). 'Social interaction' became more and more prominent in his reasoning about mediatization in general, and about media logic in particular. He considers media as means of interaction. He holds that mediatization affects society through the many ways that the media intervene in the social interaction between individuals within a given institution, between institutions, and in society at large (Hjarvard 2008: 120).

Still, Hjarvard keeps the concept of 'media logic' and counters the critique, by stating that it

does not suggest that there is a universal, linear, or single rationality behind all the media. It is to be understood as a conceptual shorthand for the various institutional, aesthetic, and technological *modus operandi* of the media, including the ways in which the media distribute material and symbolic resources, and operate with the help of formal and informal rules. (2013: 17)

In conclusion, Hjarvard now connects media logic and social interaction by stating that the 'logic of the media influences the social forms of interaction and communication.' The media logic is the *modus operandi* in these interactions, specified according to the media that are in operation (2013: 17). My suggestion would be to rather start with the concrete interactions, and then see how the media in each case are taken on board as part of the interactions and how this may turn into transforming mediatization. How is this done in the remaining articles in the two special issues?

With his piece in *Communication Theory* Nino Landerer (2013) aims at 'Rethinking the Logics'. He suggests a new conceptual framework for the mediatization of politics, thus challenging the area of mediatization research where the media logic concept may seem most apt.<sup>7</sup> However, Landerer sticks with the concept of 'logic'. He just wants to substitute the common analytical terms of 'media logic' and 'political logic' with 'normative logics' and 'market logic', as he observes that media companies are mainly driven by an audience-oriented commercial logic and a normatively oriented public logic as two competing logics. Landerer finds these concepts more appropriate for the theoretical understanding and empirical analysis of how mass media and political actors behave.

Could we manage with 'interaction' without any of these 'logics' in mediatization studies? In my 2009-chapter I argue that we could do without the concept of media logic. Various media capabilities are applied in patterns of social interaction. To focus on media logic hides these patterns of interaction, I argue (Lundby 2009: 117). So, what's more in the special issues on interaction and mediatization?

## 6. Culture – society – world

I see three distinct approaches in the material (although this is not exhaustive). The distinctions are partly between levels of analysis, partly between type of agents, and partly on the context. First, there are the articles on mediatization and symbolic interaction, tending towards 'culture' as perspective or setting. Second, there are entries on mediatization and institutional interaction, making

‘society’ the context. Third, articles on mediatization and network interaction have a ‘world’ setting. The three types may overlap, e.g. symbolic communication takes place in networks. Each term characterizes a main form of interaction. ‘Culture’, ‘society’ and ‘world’, on the other side, are rough labels for the aspect of the sociocultural environment in networked, modern settings that the types of interaction point to or correspond most closely to.

This exercise is risky, not just with the said typology, but as well when I connect each of the 14 articles to the one form of interaction where it may contribute the most. Of course, the authors’ works are more nuanced, but let me try. I look at the three forms of interaction, one by one.

## 7. Symbolic interaction

Hubert Knoblauch discusses ‘Communicative Constructivism and Mediatization’, untying the knot I made above between interaction and communication. With ‘symbolic interactionism’ the crucial role of communication was sacrificed in favour of ‘interaction’, Knoblauch holds. He regards the study of mediatization as the study of the changing structure of communicative action, and proposes ‘communicative constructivism’ as a theoretical framework to conceptualize mediatization. Communicative constructivism elaborates social constructivism from Berger & Luckmann onwards, he argues. Thus, he studies social interaction but avoids the stress on the symbolic part of it. Knoblauch rather connects with Habermas’ theory of communicative action, linking actions and objects – or ‘material vehicles’ to use Sorokin’s term again. Mediatization is a general feature of communicative action with media as extensions of action, Knoblauch (2013: 309) concludes.

Although Knoblauch relates in negative to ‘symbolic interaction’ by avoiding that analytical perspective, Couldry & Hepp use the term. However, in their CT editorial they relate communication as symbolic interaction to ‘mediation’, while mediatization, by contrast ‘refers more specifically to the role of particular media in emergent processes of socio cultural change’ (Couldry & Hepp 2013: 197). The two see in mediatization overall consequences of multiple processes of mediation. Through processes of mediation, then, mediatization relate to symbolic interaction.

Other authors also touch upon symbolic interaction in relation to mediatization. David Altheide (2013), as noted above, is among them. However, in the CT article he mostly uses the terms ‘social interaction’ within a larger ‘ecology’.

Elena Block (2013), arguing for ‘A Culturalist Approach to Mediatization of Politics’ in an ‘Age of “Media Hegemony”’, is concerned with hegemonic symbolic interaction. She uses Hugo Chávez’ politically mediatized Venezuela as example. Kameliya Encheva, Olivier Driessens and Hans Verstraeten

(2013) study interaction with the symbolic environment of media in their piece on 'The mediatization of deviant subcultures'. They do 'an analysis of the media-related practices of graffiti writers and skaters'. Kim Sawchuk (2013) has researched a group of activist elders in Canada. He analyses how they use symbols in 'tactical mediatization' with small-scale media in their interaction and activist communication for respect and rights.

Symbolic interaction is a key feature of mediated communication. However, this approach to interaction may not be able to grasp the wider implications of social change and transformation in mediatization. It may easily become too micro oriented, concerned with the performed symbols and the meaningful interaction over these symbols. The symbolic approach to interaction relates to 'culture' with its focus on symbols and meanings. The wider social context may fall out of sight. 'There may well be symbolic interaction, but' there may be 'lack of observable [social] reciprocation from others' (Sullivan et al. 1990). There are cultural and symbolic aspects to mediatization, but as long-term processes of change it has to be understood in a wider social context.

## 8. Institutional interaction

Stig Hjarvard is a key theorist on an institutional approach to mediatization. He is focusing on how various institutions in society rely more and more on the media, where the media themselves are gaining a stronger position (e.g. Hjarvard 2008, 2013). As noted above, he observes the variety of interaction processes, in relation to institutions, within institutions and between institutions. In the editorial to the special issue on 'Mediatization and cultural change' Hjarvard and his co-author break the narrow cage of culture that may be read from the above section on symbolic interaction. Hjarvard & Petersen (2013) bring culture into society, so to say, by pointing to the cultural transformations that follow with globalization, commercialization – and mediatization. Institutional interaction and cultural change are brought together. 'Social and material conditions of culture are important as a context for explaining cultural phenomena, yet culture has – also due to the media – experienced integration into new social and material practices as well' (Hjarvard & Petersen (2013: 2). Media institutions have become cultural institutions and the media have affordances for various forms of interaction, they hold.

Klaus Bruhn Jensen (2013) challenges some of the premises his colleague Stig Hjarvard – and others – are operating in mediatization research. Jensen looks to Herbert Blumer's distinction between 'Definitive and Sensitizing Conceptualizations of Mediatization'. While a definitive concept refers to what is common to a class of phenomena, a sensitizing concept gives a more general

sense of reference and guidance on how to understand the empirical phenomena. Hjarvard's explication of mediatization as institutionalization, with certain defined characteristics and the media as an emerging institution, applies a definitive approach, Jensen argues. In contrast, a sensitizing conceptualization could, for example, have played more openly with the role of the media and the consequential mediatization within the 'duality of structure' that seeks to overcome the dichotomy between structure and agency. This would have had consequences for the perception of interaction, Jensen maintains.

Landerer's attempt (2013) to rethink the logics at work in the mediatization of politics also fits in with institutional interaction. The institution of politics and the interactions that are transformed in this institution is the most researched within mediatization studies. However, his proposal to let normative and market logics substitute media logic and political logic as guides to understand political action in mediatized settings would not stand the test by Klaus Bruhn Jensen.

Mikkel Eskjær (2013) goes into the interaction between media and the economic system, and also studies consumption as interaction in a mediatization perspective. He concludes that mediatization represents modernization in a way in which the relationships between consumption, market and politics – i.e. the interactions in and between the institutions in these areas – are reconfigured.

Allison Cavanagh (2013) tries out the usefulness of mediatization theories in historical studies of the media, with the museum institution as example. She observes, through a case study, how mediatization processes change interaction patterns between the institutions of social and cultural power that were involved.

Institutional interaction has 'society' as setting, as modern societies are constructed upon institutions. The institutional perspective on interaction offers a relevant take on mediatization as a process of societal change. However, this aspect of interaction is not sensitive enough – to play with one of Klaus Bruhn Jensen's categories – to capture all forms of emerging mediatization. Jensen indicates (2013) that mediatization research would benefit from greater attention to the ongoing digitalization of the contemporary media environment.

## 9. Networked interaction

A few of the special issue articles inform of emerging practices with digital, networked media. Aske Kammer (2013) analyses the affordances of new websites in journalism and the transformations of the profession that follows. Iben Have & Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen (2013) study the specific affordances of the audiobook, resulting in what they call a 'sonic mediatization' of the book as a medium, changing the act of reading by moving it into arenas and practices where reading did not take place before, like the gym or the bicycle ride.



Both articles describe virtual interaction in digital networks that influence the cultural and social activities at stake. Networked interaction that moves into an established face-to-face arena creates a 'world' of its own: being there and not being there at the same time. The 'Mediatized Worlds' programme in Germany<sup>8</sup> gives flesh to this conceptualization of mediatization.

André Jansson (2013), inspired by theoretical works on social space, contributes a more theoretical article on networked interaction and mediatization. He actually reconstructs mediatization as a sociospatial concept, focusing on how networked media, or 'transmedia' with the 'increasingly interconnected and open-ended circulation of media content between various platforms' (2013: 287), change social environments and social practices by providing new spaces on the Internet and at the border of the online/offline realm. Hubert Knoblauch (2013) adds to this perspective by suggesting Actor-Network-Theory as a 'radical reaction to the mediating role of technologies' (2013: 308), where technologies are accepted as 'actors' in the interaction alongside humans.

With the expanding digital networks, an approach to mediatization through networked interaction seems more and more relevant. However, the easy circulation, remix and reformulation in digital networks makes it necessary to keep an open eye on the symbolic interaction involved in the networking. We also need to keep an institutional perspective, as power in society to a great extent is exerted by them, and hence in institutional interaction.

## 10. Conclusion

A full-fledged analysis of interaction and mediatization, then, needs all three aspects of interaction discussed briefly here. The combined social-constructivist and institutional approach to mediatization that Couldry & Hepp (2013: 196) argue, meet in a focus on social interaction. I recognize mediatization when various media impact people's life horizons and form a basis for a significant part of the social interaction within a certain domain, thus becoming a 'mediatized world'.

We need to understand mediatization and interaction in the span between agency and structure, between acts and the format or setting they relate to. This is easy to say, but difficult to carry out in empirical studies. Pitirim Sorokin and John B. Thompson paved some of the way, pointing to the material vehicles as conductors of meaningful interaction. But we have to proceed. We have to go into details, to study specific interactions, in different settings, by specific agents/actors and media. We have to learn how the transformations actually take place. And we need a historical perspective in theory and on the material we study to grasp the before and the after in mediatization.

Edvard Munch created paintings that have been shared so widely that they have become ‘social imaginaries’ (Valaskivi & Sumiala 2013) to many people trying to handle life in contemporary society. What Munch pointed to – or painted – was actually the ambivalent interactions in a mediatized, modern world.

## Notes

- 1 [www.hf.uio.no/ifikk/english/research/projects/munch/](http://www.hf.uio.no/ifikk/english/research/projects/munch/)
- 2 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Scream.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Scream.jpg)
- 3 <https://www.google.com/search?q=Munch+History>
- 4 [www.uio.no/om/kultur/kunst/kunstsamlingen/utsmynkninger/Munchbrosjyre-aulamaleriene.pdf](http://www.uio.no/om/kultur/kunst/kunstsamlingen/utsmynkninger/Munchbrosjyre-aulamaleriene.pdf)
- 5 <https://www.google.com/search?q=Warhol+Scream> and [www.amscan.org/pdf/SR\\_Spring13\\_MunchWarhol.pdf](http://www.amscan.org/pdf/SR_Spring13_MunchWarhol.pdf)
- 6 Although Thompson applies the term ‘mediatization’.
- 7 Landerer (2013) thus challenges the defence for ‘media logic’ given by Frank Esser (2013). Esser considers a specific logic of appropriateness within the institutional media sphere, that is media logic, which should be understood as shaped by the combined forces of three dimensions: professionalism, commercialism, and media technology. Esser is not concerned with the concept of ‘interaction’, neither are Jesper Strömback in their joint writings on media logic versus political logic (eg. forthcoming 2015).
- 8 [www.mediatizedworlds.net](http://www.mediatizedworlds.net)

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## Biography

Knut Lundby, Dr. philos, is Professor at the Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo, Norway. He has background in sociology and wrote his doctoral dissertation in sociology of religion. Lundby was founding director of the research centre InterMedia, University of Oslo, working on communication, learning, and design in digital environments. He directed the international research project “Mediatized Stories. Mediation perspectives on digital storytelling among youth” (2006-11). He is currently managing the Scandinavian research project “Engaging with Conflicts in Mediatized Religious Environments” (2014-2017). Lundby is editing the handbook on Mediatization of Communication for the series of Handbooks on Communication Science, published by De Gruyter Mouton in Berlin. Lundby has edited *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories. Self-Representations in New Media* (2008) and *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences* (2009), and *Religion Across Media. From Early Antiquity to Late Modernity* (2013), all with Peter Lang in New York.

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