Media Practice and Everyday Agency in Europe

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From a Social Worlds Perspective to the Analysis of Mediatized Worlds

Friedrich Krotz

1. Mediatization: A long term process of change of everyday life, culture and society.

Mediatization is a concept that came up in the last decade of the last century to become a "key" (Lundby, 2009) to describe and to grasp theoretically the changing media landscape and the related change in the daily lives of people, of organizations and institutions, and of culture and society as a whole. The word "mediatization" itself has a surprisingly long history in communication studies, as Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz (2014) has shown. Nevertheless, it is not before the second half of the 1990s that one finds the first attempts to develop the concept systematically as being fundamental for communication studies (Krotz, 1995; 2001). In this sense, "mediatization" was the response of the scientific community and especially of communication and media scholars to the growing importance of digital and computer directed media, which was accompanied by a change of old media. Of course, mediatization research in general is inspired by ideas of the so-called Medium Theory, following Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan, but tries to avoid the one-sided technological orientation and other problems of that approach (Krotz, 2001).

In general, the main question of mediatization research is the following: How are the everyday lives, social relations and people's identity, organizations and institutions, and culture and society as a whole changing in the context of the development of the media system? As a starting point to systematically develop answers to this question by doing empirical research and by developing theoretical insights, today there exist different notions of how to define mediatization (cf. Krotz/Hepp, 2013, Hepp, 2012). Some researchers refer to the media logic concept of Altheide and Snow (1979), others like Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) look for sub-processes in modernity or concentrate only on changing power relations by upcoming institutions in the field of politics (c.f. for all cases: Lundby, 2009). Others again reduce the media development

to the development of the former mass media, try to extend Innis' system of media dominated phases of human development, or reduce mediatization to a development only in the area of digitalization (For an overview: Lundby, 2009, Hepp/Krotz, 2014).

In this paper, mediatization is conceptualized in a broader way following Krotz (2009). It is seen as a so-called meta process, just like globalization, individualization or commercialization, which are studied for example in sociology. From this perspective, "mediatization" should not be used as a synonym for "digitalization", as there were a lot of mediatization processes in history long before digitalization. As media history has shown, media (for example: pictures) have existed since human beings began to communicate and they and their developments have always accompanyied human development (c.f. Hoerisch, 2004). There have been 'human media' telling us about religion. There was the invention of writing in different cultures and societies, and the slow process of whole cultures and societies becoming literate, lasting hundreds or even thousands of years. There was the growing importance of pictures under different cultural or religious conditions, the invention of the printing press and its different forms of use in different cultures, the development of media of interpersonal and institutional communication like the letter and later the telephone and the cell, or computer games as an example for media of interactive communication. Today, mediatization mostly refers to the digitalization of old media and the invention of computer based new ones. A specific topic is the fact that media can also disappear (which may be called "demediatization"), if for example by pressure of the church pictures may disappear from religious buildings, as was the case in the European middle age. And it may be the case that upcoming media are used quite differently in the same society – for example, we as members of society are using the digital infrastructure as a net for communication, for conversation and for mutual understanding, while enterprises and secret services use the same net as a data net in a strategic interest to sell us things and to control us. Of course, this cannot be discussed in more detail here.

If one talks about mediatization, it is important to make clear what precisely is understood to be a medium. We here use a concept of media referring to semiotics (Saussure, 1998) and also to Raymond Williams' understanding of media as technology and cultural form (Williams, 1990). In such a view, a medium is an instrument for communication that at the same time has a structural and a situational existence: As a structure, a medium is a societal institution and a technology. As a situational instrument, it works as a producer and distributor of cultural forms, content and aesthetical forms of representation, and as a space of experience for the users (Krotz, 2011). Compared with face-to-face-communication, today more and more different forms of mediated communication are coming into existence and being used by people. In

a social constructivist perspective, following George Herbert Mead, Alfred Schütz and Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, culture and society are socially constructed by the activities of people, especially by the communicative actions of us all. But under conditions of ongoing media change, and as more and more media are coming up and being used, communication takes place differently, compared with before. More and more communicative activities for more and more intentions and goals are taking place as mediated and media related communication. Thus media become more and more relevant for what happens, which meaning that has, and how society is working.

Thus, social reality by media development is constructed more and more on the basis of mediated communication and of media related communication. This is what we call the meta process of mediatization, and sub-processes of this overall process may be observed in everyday life, thinking, knowledge, learning, growing up, social relations, political participation, economy, and so on: We then call the results mediatized, when everything depends on media: For example, universities are places of teaching and learning. They started as institutions of handwritten papers and notes and vocal lectures in the 13th century, then became mediatised institutions of printed matter, and today are again mediatized as institutions of handwritten papers, printed matter and electronic media. These repeated sub-processes can be understood to be recursive steps of mediatization.

Today, there is a growing and internationally directed literature, growing empirical work, and a theoretically driven discussion surrounding mediatization (Livingstone, 2008; Krotz, 2011; 2012; 2014; Couldry, 2008; Lundby, 2009; 2014; Hepp, 2011; Hjarvard, 2013; Krotz/Hepp, 2014, and a special issue and the ongoing publication of articles in the European Journal of Communication Research).

Finally in this introductory chapter, let us say what makes the concept of mediatization special and why we recommend its use. It is the aim of communication and media studies to describe communication and media and the cultural and social roles they play for human beings, as well as to analyze the results to gain theoretical concepts which can help to understand and explain what is happening. Now, this has been rather difficult for some decades, and will remain difficult probably for several to come, for we are living in a time of rapid and fundamental development of media and communication, as is well known. In such a situation, the mediatization approach offers four helpful basic ideas.

First of all, mediatization researchers do not start by studying the development of any one single media or specific areas of culture and society: Mediatization research is not media centred. Instead, they start with the communicating individuals and how their communication is changing by using a new medium in a specific area of life. As we said above, changing media

and media systems are changing communication and the social construction of reality as people use them for communication and for orientation in culture and society. Thus, in order to understand changing everyday life, culture, and society in the context of media development, we have to look at what people are doing and how their communicative actions are changing in the case that they use different media in a specific area of life: We do not concentrate on media, but on the social reality. We also know by observation and by prior research that mediatization is not a linear and continually ongoing process, but rather develops intermittently and in different steps in different areas of social life: The mediatization of a houshold is different from the mediatization of a fan group or the school. We thus must study the different areas of social life in different ways – to do so, we introduce in the next part of this text the concept of social and mediatized worlds. If we find out how these developments work in different social worlds, our results can be ordered theoretically. Using concepts like this, we are able to systematically develop an overview of the consequences of media change in culture and society and the surrounding academic research, which today is studied in quite a lot different disciplines and with very different questions and methodologies – this is what communication and media studies can contribute to development today.

Secondly, we thus try to do research with reference to the fact that we need process oriented research and theory if we want to describe these developments and understand them theoretically. It is not really helpful to think of society and culture as stable entities or to say that the media development of today will end in an information, a network or a media society, as nobody today can say what exactly this should be and what are the characteristic features of such a type of society – in addition, it is not clear whether such a society finally would be stable over time. In contrast to this, by using a mediatization approach, one can reconstruct the process of changing media, changing communication, and changing culture and society, and thus follow the historical and present development, but also on the basis of this make plausible suppositions for the future.

Thirdly, we understand the mediatization process as a long-term process in history, as the development of media already took place in the past with the upcoming of written language and books, the printing press, the invention of the camera, the movie, the radio, and so on. Together with all these developments, new institutions and new aesthetics in culture and society, new knowledge and new experiences of the people came into existence, as in relation to these inventions communication and communicatively constructed entities have been changing too. By reconstructing the past, we can try to learn from history in order to better understand present developments, as there may be prior experiences of media developments which can be helpful to avoid mistakes today. For example, 100 years ago the upcoming radio was used to

announce revolutions, and the working class tried to have its own broadcasting facilites. But kings and emperors, governments, bureaucracy and economy have won this fight and installed a government driven or economically driven radio everywhere in the world. Could it be that the same is taking place today with the internet?

Fourthly, the mediatization approach includes both historical and current research, in order to construct a theory to understand what is happening in the field of media, cultural and societal change. In addition, this approach may serve as an approach to critical research. Learning from history also means that we can find out what can happen with democracy if media are controlled by government, secret services, or are economically dominated by huge giants like Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon, without the control and influence of civil society. In the perspective of the Frankfurt School, critical research consists of confronting the real developments with the possible ones – and this is what a mediatization approach can help to do by analyzing developments in detail and comparing the results with what could be possible under different conditions. For example, in a mediatization approach we can compare the role of the internet under the conditions of net neutrality with an internet with a lot of privileges for the commercial transport of data – this is not only a question of what works better, but a question of power and hegemony.

2. Taking a social world perspective on media use and media development

The central question related to mediatization is how to study it empirically and to grasp it theoretically. A key element for understanding is to ask how people introduce new media technologies into their everyday lives, how they appropriate these media and integrate them into their lives, and what consequences will arise from that, as they communicate and act differently on the basis of these newly introduced media. Here, the domestication approach developed by Silverstone and Haddon (1996), and similar approaches of technologically oriented research are helpful; but here we have a broader interest as we ask for the media related consequences for culture and society.

As stated above: In so doing, it is important to have in mind that in different areas of everyday life different media and different forms of mediated communication may play a role, and that in each of these areas different rules may apply as to what people do with media and how they use them. For example, there is a lot of information about gardening in the internet; but when you are working in the garden you usually do not have a laptop or a tablet at hand. This may change, if some time in future we have home and gardening robots so that that we no longer do the work but tell them what to do. For the

social world of gardening, therefore, mediated interpersonal communication and mass media and internet related communication are of course relevant, but mostly before and after the work in the garden. Thus, although this social world takes place mediated and media related, it is not completely determined by media relations and influences.

This is different if a person is interested in participating in political work, which today is mainly a communicative activity with the use of a lot of media: reading blogs and newspapers, listening to news, watching TV, discussing with others, face-to-face or via media, and so on: the social world of political communication today is much more shaped by the media then the world of gardening: Moreover, if we look at the political happenings in society as a whole, we can say that political participation and political communication are broadly determined by the role of the media – it is not only a social world of mediated and media related communication, it is a mediatised social world. Although somewhat different, similar differences are the result when we look at media use and the mediatisation process in a family, or if we compare the use and role of media in religious communities with the world of computer games – some include mediated and media related communications, others depend more or less totally on media and thus may be called mediatized. Hence, we can conclude that different areas of everyday life in the perspective of an individual today demand different access to and different experiences with media, as different rules apply and people operate with different expectations – and thus also different forms of media literacy may become relevant. This means that mediatization is a complicated, long-term process that takes place in different areas in different ways. We can thus conclude that we cannot study a long-term meta process in general; instead it makes sense to examine and analyze in detail what happens in the particular individual areas of life.

This is the reason why in the following we refer to the concept of social worlds. The concept stems from symbolic interactionism (George Herbert Mead, 1969; 1973) and was created by Tamotsu Shibutani as early as 1955. Later it was used and developed by Anselm Strauss and his collaborators (e.g. Clarke, 1990; Strübing, 2007). In this view, a "social world" is a "set of common or joint activities or concerns bound together by a network of communication." (Strauss, 1984: 123; cf. also Strauss, 1978). A social world thus describes a specific societal and cultural entity of communication, which we call a "world" because it includes all communicative activities related to the common activities that constitute that world. A social world thus is "not bounded by geography or formal membership, but by the limits of effective communication" (Shibutani, 1955: 566). In this perspective, we do not live in a society as a whole, but in a huge amount of different social worlds, in which we are active and in which we communicate with others. In each such social world, different rules and conditions may hold, especially for communication:

Families and households may be analyzed as social worlds, but also enterprises and departments of a university or fan communities of music styles or sports disciplines. And in such social worlds, the mediatisation of which we can study, analyse and describe, typical developments, typical ways of use and habits may be observed.

In the context of mediatization, we thus understand social worlds as the social entities in which people become acquainted with new media by using them for specific interests and purposes, and study and develop the common rules and conditions which hold in such a social world. For example, if we look at the mobile phone, parents want to control their children or to stay in contact with them, while children want to have their own channel for communication with their friends. Football fans use their mobile phones to organize events, and enterprises use them for internal communication or the acquisition of new customers – all these are indicators for specific mediatization processes. In each such social world the respective relevant mediatisation sub-processes take place by following the specific communicational norms and habits of that social world.

Mediatization thus takes place as a lot of different mediatization sub-processes of different social worlds. Such a social world perspective on people's thematically centred fields of communication is thus not only helpful for an analysis of the everyday lives of people in a mediatised culture and society, which we understand to be constructed socially and by communication of the people. It is also useful if we want to understand the changing forms of cultural and social life by changing forms of media (Krotz, 2014a). In contrast to this, empirical research in the frame of communication studies is often concentrated on single media. As a consequence, communication studies traditionally situate people as part of the audience of solely this particular media. This may result in interesting outcomes, but communication studies would much benefit from a complementary view by starting with the perspective of the individuals in a social and cultural world, as suggested by the concept of "social worlds".[1]

If we assume the perspective of the acting subjects and start research with reference to their social realities, things may look different. This is beacuse the usual knowledge, habits and interests of people become central for the analysis of media, cultural and social change. We also have to take into consideration the reasons why people introduce new media into their everyday lives, how they appropriate media, and with which consequences they use them in the given social world. For example, if a person buys a mobile phone, then this person can be interested in an easier organization of everyday life, to be in more contact with friends, or to get more and current information via the internet. This has been shown for example by studies that have asked people why they do not use certain media and whether or not they plan to do so in the future: therefore, it is the concrete aims and expectations that are relevant,

not the general and abstract interest to use a technical device or any specific technical feature (Gerhards/Mende, 2006). Thus, this paper emphasizes the assumption that people are not generally interested in media. Rather, their interest and their participation is particularly directed into specific areas of life, and these interests motivate them to explore and use new or changing media. This, for example, is also shown by the impressing empirical studies of Maria Bacardjeva (2005), who very carefully accompanied people in their first steps in the internet—and showed that usually people are not interested in the net, but in specific intentions and purposes.

3.   The social worlds of computer games, of football and football fans

In order to illustrate and explain the concept of social worlds and its relations to mediatization research we now give two more detailed examples: The social world of computer gaming and the social worlds of football and football fans.

Becoming a computer gamer does not simply mean that a person happens to play a computer game. Instead, it means that she or he is playing computer games again and again, has a biography as a gamer, has a broader knowledge about computer games than other persons, informs himself/herself about games, their development and the public discourse about them – in other words, that playing computer games is a relevant concern for her or him. Becoming a gamer thus implies that a person must have access, at least from time to time, to the discourse surrounding the computer gaming culture. This necessitates not only that this person owns a computer, but also that they have access to a broad selection of computer generated media like the internet, the mobile phone, the platforms for computer games. And it means that such persons inform themselves about games by reading blogs, journals, websites or other relevant material, and of course is also talking, mailing, chatting with others, or is using further forms of mediated interpersonal communication in respect of gaming, for example being in contact with other gamers within the context of this or that game. To sum up: We expect that such persons in their everyday lives are oriented to living and acting as computer game players – not exclusively and the whole day, but again and again, and that they are committed to doing so. In such a case, we may say that this person is a member of the social world of computer gamers. In addition it is evident that this social world is a mediatized world, as the computer games themselves need digital media, and most activities of the members of this world are communicated by digital media. It is a social world that only exists because of the existence of digital media. Some interesting consequences of participating in this mediatized social world are for example described by Graeme Kirkpatrick (2013).

Another obvious example is the social world of football and football fans. The central thematic concern of people engaged in football is the club and the games. Persons, places and institutions that relate to that are the football players, the stadium, the different football leagues, and the other clubs in these leagues, the referees, the staff of the club, and all the organizations that care for football in general. In addition, we have events and activities and whatever belongs to that: football matches, people coming to watch the matches, the technology in the stadium, the screens where goals or other situations are shown or replayed, the police and the video cameras which observe the participants outside and inside the stadium, the people selling beer and sausages or whatever is allowed. Of course, there is also the press and the TV and other media institutions that observe the play and what is happening, and the people sitting at home watching TV and so on. The stadium, the statements, and especially the TV transmissions are in addition full of marketing activities of enterprises. All this all and a lot more – for example a regional meeting of the fans – is the material basis of the social world of football and football fandom. As a whole it consists of all the communicative activities that refer to this area of life, which we can call a social world that already existed before the emergence of digital computer related media. The fans – or the people who call themselves fans – visit their stadium frequently or at least from time to time, some behaving in specific ways and wearing specific clothes, at least on certain occasions, and thus presenting themselves as football fans of a particular club. They usually read special interest journals, specific blogs, from time to time have meetings in specific restaurants or pubs with others who also would call themselves football fans. They usually know a lot about football and have a specific biography or socialization and career with reference to football.

Now let us look at the forms of communication that are taking place in this social world of football and football fans: There has always been highly important face-to-face-communication in the stadium during matches or when football fans meet for a beer or move on to the stadium or go home or to a pubwhen the play is over. There is interactive communication[2], as people acting in this social world use tablets and computers, and fans often play computer games concerned with football. In addition, everybody uses phones or mobile phones and similar devices for mediated interpersonal communication – in Germany, for example, even the referees are connected by walkie-talkies. Today the stadium itself is not only a place for a football match but at the same time a stage for press, radio and TV, who are always present to report about what happens, with the players and the coach as the stars. There are also mass media, for example screens in the arena to inform the spectators and to screen ads, there are further moving animated advertisements, and the club and the players offer information on their websites. Besides all these forms of mediated communication, there is also in a broader sense media related communica-

tion: Most things and facts that people know or experience with reference to their preferred football club and about the whole league, they have experienced through media or at places strongly controlled by media – e.g. the stadium, the club restaurant, or other places where people committed to this football club will meet.

Thus, there is more and more mediated communication and media related communication taking place in this world of football and football fans and it is becoming more and more relevant. As a consequence we would call this social world a mediatized (social) world. We do so because more or less all that happens in this social world is influenced and shaped by the media. Media are crucial for the image and the financial income of the club, they help to control and organize the people in the stadium, and they are responsible for a high degree of name recognition. The media can set the whole club under pressure, and the value of the players and the income of the club depend on the media. For decades, there have also been discussions to change the rules of the game such that it would become of higher interest or offer more excitement – this has happened with a lot of other sport disciplines as well.

4. Mediatization research as the study of the mediatization of social worlds

Social worlds are thus a helpful and logical concept for studying the societal and cultural meaning of media in the everyday lives of people, institutions and organizations, and also the world of economy and politics, socialization, school, religion, and so on. It is an important unit of investigation for what is happening in culture and society in the perspective of the members and participants: As reported above, society and culture can be understood as a (changing and developing) net of social worlds. The concept "social world" is moreover an important instrument for studying the changing roles and meanings of media in the changing world of today in order to learn about the consequences of media change for culture and society and thus about the long-term meta process of mediatization, which describes the relation between media change and societal and cultural change.

In this regard, the overall meta process of mediatization can be described as a process of changing social worlds. As explained above, mediatization comes into existence due to the fact that people communicate and interact by using emerging or changing media. So with reference to mediatisation each social world is developing under its own special conditions and as a result of the changing forms of communication which are relevant for this particular social world: For example, new mediated interpersonal forms of communication may take place or new mass media and other forms of standardized media or inter-

active media may become relevant. This then results in new ways of organizing cooperation and activities in these social worlds and in communication and discourse. Thus, the everyday lives of the people concerned may change, new ways to shape and live social relations, and changing forms of socialization and growing up may emerge, If such developments happen with reference to a lot of social worlds, also the organization and the aims and goals of enterprises, political parties and other institutions may change. Finally, all this will lead to changes in democracy and economy, culture and society. Hence, an understanding of mediatization as the ongoing mediatization of different social worlds in different ways, as shown for the world of football and the new world of computer gaming, may be helpful to describe and to understand mediatization.

Such an approach is in addition helpful for understanding the special features and qualities of mediatizaion. As in the case of globalization, modernization and other long-term meta processes, (which are meta processes as they cannot be described merely by different states at different points of time), mediatization in such a view is evidently taking place in a nonlinear way, not simultaneously in different social worlds, and in each phase it includes a complex and cultural diversity of developments. There are always different sub-developments, and they all depend on social, cultural, and historical conditions. Even inside a given culture and society, there are different developments in the different fields and segments, how upcoming media are used and what for, which rules and norms will be accepted, and this at least today takes place in the midst of an ongoing media change – we have given examples for this above. We can also analyse which social worlds are impacted by new media and via which paths a new media develops in a given society – which may be different in different cultures or social groups. We may also find out what it means when some media are used at first in economy and school, and others in the private sphere; and also whether the use of media is related to power or to interest on the part of the social subjects.

As a consequence, mediatization research has three different branches:

- There is current research trying to reconstruct empirically and grasp theoretically the developments of today and, for example, to bring the different, mostly single-media studies together,
- There is historical research trying to understand the developments of the past and learning from them, also to be able to understand the current developments,
- There is critical research, as the development today is driven by technological, economic and bureaucratic developments and institutions like Facebook, Google or Amazon and by governments and their bureaucracy, as this can be reconstructed by using for example the concept of so-

cial worlds. Such research becomes critical if one, in the tradition of the Frankfurt school, contrasts the reality with what is possible under the given conditions.

Especially the latter type of research has to be promoted, as mediatization research is showing how fundamental the changes of media are and how relevant they are for the development of culture and society. Today, the whole media development is driven by enterprises and industry, and more and more parts and forms of use of the digital media are controlled by great enterprises and losing their aspects as spaces of freedom and democratic participation. In addition, and as is well known, nearly all important industries, all economic branches, and all enterprises collect and analyze all the data on people they can get, and the above mentioned internet giants together with the secret services try to control whatever happens in the whole net. As all this leads to more control and power and makes the net more and more to an instrument of ongoing hegemony, this must be countermanded: Fundamental areas of life must be under democratic control. We thus need more critical research to look for other developments controlled by civil society and not by industry and government, and helpful concluding proposals as to what has to be done to get the net back for civil society and the individuals.

Notes

1   Such a social world perspective is adopted and developed by some projects of the German priority program "Mediatized Worlds", cf. www.mediatizedworlds.net

2   interactive communication should not be confused with interaction – while interaction in sociology stands for social actions between persons, interactive communication designates a human-computer activity, where the hardware/software system gives the user seemingly individual answers.

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Biography

Since October 2010, Professor of Communications and Media Studies with a focus on social communication and mediatization research. Friedrich Krotz has a Diplom in Mathematics (University of Karlsruhe) and in Sociology (University of Hamburg), he holds a doctorate in sociology and qualified as a professor in Communication and Journalism. He worked at the University of the Saarland as a mathematician, at the University of Hamburg as a sociologist, and at the University of Berlin in the field of policy research. He taught and researched computer science and sociology at the College of Public Administration in Hamburg. From 1989 until 2001 he was a research fellow at the Hans Bredow Institute for Media Research at the University of Hamburg. He has represented professorships at the Universities of Jena, Potsdam and Zurich and he held a professorship in Media Sociology and Psychology at the University of Muenster before he followed Peter Glotz as professor of Communication Studies and Social Communication in 2003 at the University of Erfurt. There in 2004 he founded the Research Centre COMDIGMED and was also its speaker until 2010. Since 1st October 2010 Friedrich Krotz teaches and researches at the University of Bremen.

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