

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Communicative Constructivism and Mediatization

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The article (a) proposes communicative constructivism as a theoretical framework for conceptualizing mediatization. Communicative constructivism elaborates social constructivism and links it to Habermas' theory of communicative action. By highlighting the neglected role of objectifications, it allows the recognition of knowledge, body, performance, and objects as part of communicative action. Communicative action results in communicative forms which constitute the institutions of the communicative culture of society. Linking actions and objects, mediatization is (b) part of any communicative action. As communication cultures vary with respect to the forms of communication, contemporary society can be defined by certain features of mediatization. Since these features are to be determined empirically, the article will (c) hint at their consequences for the diagnosis of contemporary society.

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Although the notion of mediatization lacks certainly an exact definition, it seems doubtlessly useful indicating some of the fundamental social transformations that have occurred in our lives in the last decades. Intuitively, the word seems to capture the changes that occur in our perceptions of the world and how we act in it. However, there is quite substantial disagreement as to what the word may mean in theoretical terms and in terms of empirical research. The disagreement is not so much routed in the lack of definition or ambiguity of definition but rather in the lack of a theoretical framework in which the two most divergent aspects of its meaning can be understood. On the one hand, mediatization refers to “a metaprocess of the change of media,” on the other hand, it is a “microprocess affecting human actors and their social relation” (Krotz, 2012, p. 36). The goal of this article is to sketch the outline of such a theoretical framework which covers this broad range of meaning. The theoretical frame not only establishes mediatization within the context of technology and media but also within the larger context of a theory of communication: communicative constructivism. By redefining communicative action as the basic process in the social construction of reality, this approach is built on a convergence of various theoretical strands relevant to the analysis of communication in contemporary society.

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Communicative constructivism is still a developing approach. Although sometimes mistaken for autopoietic systems theory, it, in contrast, builds on Berger and Luckmann's "Social Construction of Reality" (1966). The shift from social constructivism to communicative constructivism is rooted in the massive empirical research triggered by this approach and by a series of theoretical challenges encountered by social constructivism, such as Luhmann's systems theory, Habermas' theory of communicative action, and Actor Network Theory or practice theory. This shift started in the 1990s (Knoblauch, 1995; Bergmann & Luckmann, 1999) and has developed a momentum of its own in the last few years, when studies of "communicative constructions" started to blossom not only in the German speaking area but increasingly also in English (Knoblauch, 2001, 2011, Christmann, in press).

Since the notion of mediatization must be understood in the frame of a more general theory, it is necessary to first sketch the background of the theory of communicative action before outlining its basic premises, particularly in terms of interpretive sociology. Social constructivism, for which interpretive sociology is a starting point, solves some of the problems posed by interpretive sociology, yet suffers from too broad a definition of action and a limited focus on language as the empirical medium of action. Communicative constructivism overcomes these restrictions by recognizing the role of "objectivations" in social action, which allows one to consider body, practice and things. In this manner, I want to show that it also opens up a theoretical perspective on mediatization. Building on the background of a short discussion of the notion of mediation in actors network theory (ANT), communicative action serves as a basis for a concept of mediatization which allows one to conceive of it as a feature of actions and as a metaprocess. By way of conclusion, I want to indicate how this notion may contribute to an analysis of contemporary societal transformation of "communication cultures."

From social action to communicative action

The discussion of "mediatization" in Germany links sociology, media studies and what is becoming a transdisciplinary "communications science." However, in Anglo-Saxon social sciences, sociology seems to have lost its former focus on "communication" and related topics. This is quite surprising since some of the most important American representatives of early sociology, such as Cooley (1909) or Mead (1934), cast communication at the center of this discipline. Although Mead's teaching in particular was well received in the field of "symbolic interactionism," which became one of the core methods of sociology, the crucial role of communication was sacrificed in favor of "interaction." However, one should not forget that Goffman (1953) took communication as a crucial empirical phenomenon and that the role of communication was acknowledged by various empirical approaches, such as the ethnography of communication, conversation analysis and gesture studies.¹ While these methodological approaches have turned into empirical research, German speaking sociology in particular reinvigorated the theoretical preoccupation

with communication in quite a prominent way. While Habermas formulated his theory of communicative action in 1981, Luhmann put communication at the center of his autopoietical systems theory first in 1984, contributing to what one may call a turning point toward a communicative paradigm (Knoblauch, 1995; Luckmann, 1997). This theoretical reorientation of both critical theory and systems theory to communication, which is peculiar for German sociology and well received worldwide, has been complemented by a similar movement within social constructivism. Building on Goffman's work on the ethnography of communication and conversation analysis, new methods for the empirical analysis of communication have been developed, particularly within the frame of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social constructivism. These methods include genre analysis (Luckmann, 1985), video analysis (Knoblauch & Schnettler, 2006), hermeneutics (Soeffner, 1997) and sociological discourse analysis (Keller, 2005).

While Habermas and Luhmann have elaborated on their theoretical programs, which were designed on the basis of critical theory and systems theory, the communicative paradigm derived from social constructivism is not yet well known in Anglo-Saxon circles. Moreover, the serious effects that these empirical findings on communication have on the theory of the social construction of reality need to be reflected theoretically. Given the widespread misunderstanding associated with the notion of social constructivism and its confusion with a Foucauldian "social constructionism" or Luhmannian "radical constructivism" (Hacking, 1999), it may be wise to turn to its original systematic formulation, which was provided by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), for clarity.

Social constructivism in this sense assumes that social reality is built on, by and through social actions. The role of social action, and of action in general, in sociology has been established by Max Weber. In fact, Weber (1978[1921]) succinctly considers sociology as the science of social action. Since action is any meaningful behavior or, as Weber stressed, nonbehavior, social action is any such action oriented toward others. By linking, in this way, meaning to the basic social category, the social world could now be reconstructed as a world that is meaningful to the actors themselves. This move differs from the Durkheimian approach since meaning should not be mistaken for representation (or for signification in terms of structuralism and poststructuralism). While Weber, that is, in his Protestant Ethics, allowed for meaning to be constructed socially, in his concept of action he stressed the importance of its basic subjectivity (and partial "irrationality"). Through this hermeneutic move, Weber saved sociology from a one-sided positivism and provided the basis for an interpretive sociology.

As meaning became the focus of attention, questions arose as to what we may understand by meaning. It was Alfred Schutz (1974[1932]) who contended that Weber had never clarified the notion of meaning, the definiendum of his theory. Schutz suggested drawing on phenomenology, that is, the method of introspectively studying consciousness in order to arrive at meaning. By laying bare the general structures of meaning in a strict methodological way, Schutz believed we could arrive

at the typical forms of subjective meaning of experiences (perceptions, memories, actions, etc.) in the “life world.”

However, since the procedure for systematic introspection was being provided for by phenomenology, Schutz hit the problem faced by all subjectivistic approaches—namely, “given that meaning is subjective, how can it become social?” On the basis of Husserl’s phenomenology, he elaborated on the idea that meaning is an active accomplishment of subjective consciousness (which, one must stress, should not be misunderstood, as often happens in superficial receptions of Schutz, as “cognitivist”). Whereas Husserl had assumed that subjectively constituted meaning becomes social by another subjective act, that is, as “transcendental intersubjectivity” (which reduced the other actor and the social world into something only imagined by the subject), Schutz distances himself from such a “transcendental” solution (Schutz, 1971) and started to accept the pragmatic assumption that the (active) perception of the other as other is an *empirical* phenomenon not accounted for in the pre-existing structure of consciousness. This argument moved the problem from social philosophy to sociology, and it theoretically prepared the ground for the empirical study of social action, interaction or, as we shall call it, communicative action.

The theoretical argument was undertaken by Berger and Luckmann. In linking it to Marx’ materialistic notion of externalization and Durkheim’s positivist idea of society as an “objective” fact, they argued that, not only does the social world result from social action due to the fact that these actions infer meaning from the world while simultaneously affecting the world (in the sense of the theorem by W.I. Thomas that any subjective meaning becomes real by being enacted), but they concluded that reality *in toto* is being constructed socially. As Weber before, Berger and Luckmann assume a typical orientation toward “others” as an essential feature of social action. Since the “other” is not necessarily a human actor but may be determined based on the actor’s knowledge of what to consider as other,² sociality depends on the knowledge adapted by actors of who else may be considered as actors. Thus, while Berger and Luckmann follow Schutz in the argument that action is guided by meaning constituted by consciousness,³ they elaborate his argument that meaning is, empirically, almost exclusively “derived” from society. This socialized form of meaning is what is called knowledge. Knowledge is the social form of meaning, so that the empirical study of meaningful action becomes the task of the “sociology of knowledge” (Knoblauch, 2010).

If one asks how subjective meaning is turned into social knowledge, Berger and Luckmann use the notion of “objectivation.” Since the Hegelian and Marxian connotation of the term objectivation allowed them to consider it as one driving force in the dialectical construction of reality, Berger and Luckmann propose that it also entails a very basic communicative dimension: “a special but crucially important case of objectivation is signification, that is the human production of signs” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 50). Objectivations are obviously designed as an interface between the subjectivity of intentions and actions and the objectivity of social reality. If we ask the question ‘how we can conceive of these objectivations?’ we can see

that Berger and particularly Luckmann restricted their analysis to the same kind of objectivation as Schutz: language. Schutz had already defined language as the “repository of knowledge.” Thus, Luckmann, in later studies, logically directed his focus to language as the major medium of knowledge (Luckmann, 1975, 1984). Focus on language was part of the general “linguistic turn” at the time, which, in a way, was twofold. Firstly, structuralism took it as a basis for the assumption that language forms the pattern according to which culture is generally ordered. Here, language was considered as a system of objectifying meaning. Secondly, there was a pragmatic movement toward language which considered language as the major medium of action, as for example, in speech act theory.

While Luckmann turned to the analysis of language in action in an empirical sense, this pragmatic view was predominantly adapted to sociological theory by Habermas. In his “Theory of Communicative Action” (1981), he incorporated the use of language into a generalized and fundamental theory of society. His theory is built on the basic distinction between “instrumental” or “teleological” actions and communicative action.⁴ To Habermas, communicative action possesses three core aspects. First, it is oriented toward others and their understanding. Second, it refers directly to something and, lastly, it is designed to express one’s meaning. If any communicative action is challenged by a person, actors are supposed to orientate toward the kind of claim they made and justify it, unless they are supported by tradition, norm and power. If they justify their action, a “discourse” starts which is guided by the “logic” of language in practice. Speech acts are related to three different kinds of validity (or truth) which make claims based on different aspects of the world. These aspects are the objective, social, and subjective. Since communicative action in its “pure” form accounts for the difference between these claims of validity as implied in utterances, it follows that a certain “communicative rationality” will be present.

The macrosociological relevance of this distinction between two types of action lies in Habermas’ assumption that it leads to an increasing differentiation of two different social spheres or, as critiques say, “realms.” While communicative action yields a sociocultural life world, instrumental actions construct functional “systems.” Mixed “strategic action” links both spheres and may result in the “colonialization” and the functional “mediatization” of the life world.⁵

One has to acknowledge the merits of Habermas in being the first to develop a systematic theory of communicative action. Nevertheless, his concept suffers from various major shortcomings. In focusing on the role of language as the basis of communicative rationality (and, ultimately, utopian justice), he not only underestimated the role of nonlinguistic communication but also neglects the bodily forms of “expressive” communication and visual communication, such as diagrams, charts, or pictures (used even in “rational” scientific and legal discourse). Despite his criticism of what he calls one-sided “culturalism” (which, he argues, reduces action to knowledge and meaning) and of the classical Marxist “production paradigm” (which, in his view, reduces action to the production of objects), there is another more basic problem inherent in his notion of communicative action—namely, the

distinction between instrumental and communicative action that builds an artificial wall between two sides of the same coin. The problem with this distinction becomes particularly pertinent in the harsh duality of his “doctrine of the two realms,” that is, the separation between the “sociocultural life world” (constituted by communicative action and guided by “communicative rationality”), and the “system” (constituted by strategic and teleological action which is guided by instrumental rationality). More important to my argument here, however, is that communicative action cannot “work” if the two types of action are separated. Even if we were to reduce communicative action to language, one cannot ignore the requirement, highlighted by Saussure, for any linguistic meaning (“signifié”) to have a material carrier (“signifiant”). Communicative action needs to produce this material carrier, be it a letter written by hand, spoken word, a technical device, or a visual representation on a computer screen. Since communicative action implies, assumes and depends on the production of this material carrier, the production mechanism must simultaneously be an instrumental action which has “effects” on and in the world. Communicative action is also a socially reciprocal act of meaningful working (including the three aspects mentioned above), “working” referring to that which can be experienced in a common environment (Schutz & Luckmann, 1989).

An outline of the communicative constructivism

For these reasons, the notion of communicative action must be redefined. In order to do so, the concept of objectivation, as coined by Berger and Luckmann (1966), becomes a particularly useful link. Objectivation is the missing analytical link which allows one to turn social into communicative action. Since the notion of objectivation covers a broad range of aspects, elaborated below, it serves as a theoretical bridge from social to communicative constructivism. In the social constructivism of Berger and Luckmann, objectivation designates not only “signs” as part of an institutionalized structure of signs, it also includes any other “meaningful” object of action as well as those fleeting processes which are labeled bodily expression. Its ambiguity is increased since, semantically, “objectivation” designates both a process and an objectivated product (i.e., “material carriers”). To define what is meant by this, consider that objectivation may, firstly, refer to the material carriers of meanings, that is, signs and symbols, which are structured in terms of systems (as, e.g., language). Secondly, although Mead, Schutz or Habermas seem to consider language as the paradigmatic form of communicative objectivation, Baudrillard (1968) and Lury (1996) make it quite clear that “things” are materializations of meaning. Cars, flavors (like wine), or tactile perceptions (as in, e.g., communication with and between the deaf-blind) can be considered as objectifications and can even be conventionalized and coded into sign-systems or related to linguistic systematizations. Objectivations of this kind also include clothes, tattoos and architecture (Barthes, 1967; Lévi-Strauss, 1955; Bourdieu, 1980). Thirdly, while semiotics and structuralism stressed the role of the material character of objectivations as the grounds for their “structure,” pragmatism stressed

the fact that objectivation is embedded in action. This becomes particularly evident in bodily expressions, that is, if objectivations are nothing but temporally fleeting forms of communicative action.

The duality of objectivation, referring both to objects “produced” by actions and to the “production” of objectivations, is neither an accident nor a mystery. While Habermas accounts for the way in which communicative actions “produce” objects in such a way as to allow the process to be reconstructed using instrumental rationality, the role of the *body* in communicative action is largely ignored. However, the body features in all communicative actions. Be it the articulation of a sound, the writing of a letter, the pressing of a button or a glimpse, it is the body which incorporates action and, in a way, accounts for the contradictions in the concept of objectivation. While action is performed, it is simultaneously perceived as being performed, so that conduct is always linked to a sensual meaning (yet, one has to stress, not identical to it). One can infer that it is because of the embodied character of communicative action that instrumentality is always part and parcel of communicative action (be it, e.g., in speaking or in the exchange of e-mails). Insight into the role of objectivations is, therefore, only a route toward recognition of the embodied nature of communicative action. Since this embodied nature, which has been neglected by Berger and Luckmann as well as by Habermas, is most relevant to the notion of mediatization, I should at least hint at some of its most important consequences.

It is because of the body that communicative action is temporal. That is to say, actions cannot be reduced to “choices” or “selections of meaning” as rational theories of action (Coleman, 1990) or systems theory (Luhmann, 1996) assume. Rather, communicative action is action embodied in time in such a way that the body not only “affects” something in its working acts but also allows sensory perception and experience of these very acts of working during their performance.⁶ Following the suggestion of Hymes (1975), which has often been ignored by more recent performance theories, performance is seen here as producing its own order in the temporal course of the enacted bodies or embodied action. It is the temporal course of embodied action, that is, its “sequentiality,” that is, therefore, the basis for social order.

Before we consider the social order that emerges from sequentiality, one should be aware of an important consequence that arises from conceiving of communicative action as embodied action. Since any such interpretation of action is essentially linked to the body, it defies any distinction between behavior as a “meaningless” performance from a biological body and “action” as an “intentional” act of the bodyless mind.⁷ This statement seems daring, yet if we accept that our notion of beauty, gender, or health is socially constructed, the logical consequence is to assume that our body’s performance is meaningful. In this sense one could compare communicative action to what Schatzki (1996) calls “social practices” (including “doings” and “sayings”). However, though practice theory considers these practices as “subconscious,” communicative constructivism considers them as a form of knowledge which has to be acquired by, and depends on, activities of subjective

consciousness. Thus, if we walk or wander, read letters or play soccer, we may consider all these forms of action to have been acquired by processes of consciousness such as sedimentation, routinization, and habitualization. When speaking, pointing or writing on a computer keyboard, we utilize a huge range of such habitualized actions which do not require consideration or reflection. In phenomenological terms one would say that the polythetic action steps, each of which was originally reflexive, are fused into a monothetic understanding so that we are able to execute these actions “automatically.” Since we know that the slightest problem may cast doubt on these habits and cause us to reflect upon and rethink our actions or even reconstruct their (right) course, it seems to me utterly misleading to refer to these habits as “unconscious.” Next to, for example, explicit linguistic elements, they are what Schutz and Luckmann (1984) consider as “knowledge.”

As the role of subjective consciousness is accounted for by the reference to “action,” one should consider that even Schutz assumes that most knowledge is empirically “derived” from a social stock of knowledge via communicative action. Furthermore, according to Schutz, one could even argue that knowledge, simply by virtue of being an activity of consciousness, is thoroughly entrenched in communicative action. This is best illustrated through one of the most basic forms of communicative action, pointing.⁸ In comparing very young human babies with chimpanzees, Tomasello (2008) demonstrates that both lack what he calls “shared intentionality,” that is, “joint attention, joint intention, and communicative intention, we see humans’ cooperative motives for communication turn into mutual assumptions, and even norms of cooperation; and we see humans’ ‘natural’ communicative gestures turn into human communicative conventions” (Tomasello, 2008, p. 335). He regards this “shared intentionality” as the basis for understanding pointing as an action of indication with the finger. That is to say that the act of pointing, its experience, and the perception that someone else is perceiving the action of pointing are so tightly interrelated that we need to presuppose the “other” as part of this communicative action. It is from this basic sociality that we constitute common objects and a common environment.

As insightful as this example may be, one needs to assert that the notion of “shared intentionality” Tomasello takes from Searle (1995) is vastly oversimplified since what is assumed to be “shared” results from a number of activities of consciousness implied in communicative action. These activities, which allow for “intersubjectivity,” have been analyzed by Mead (1934), for example, as “taking the role of the other,” Cooley (1909) as the “looking glass effect,” and by Schutz (1964) as the “reciprocity of perspectives” including the “reciprocity of motives.” It is by virtue of these activities that we can compensate for the differences in perception associated with our different locations. Thus, when perceiving the action of finger pointing, we are able to infer the person who performs the action and, from the action, the object of their indication and, simultaneously, the self-perception of this action. It is by virtue of these activities that meaning or intentionality can be shared, intersubjective activities which presuppose subjective consciousness.

As the intersubjective activities mentioned, which are implied in communicative action, are accounted for by the notion of “action,” the communicative aspect is due to the objectivations. Due to the intersubjective activities, these objectivations form part of a “common environment” (Schutz) or “social situation” (Goffman). Now, objectivation is something that is perceivable and perceived to be perceived, and perceived to be perceived as being related to an actor. This holds for the pointing of a finger in the face of another person, but it also holds for a branch broken at a tree as a “sign” for someone who arrives in the same place later, and it even holds for oneself (as a “self”)—if one wants, for example, to remind oneself of one’s way back or where to go. The range of experiences that are part of a common environment are as widely varied as their meanings, so that it may include only “positive facts” or even spirits and “higher powers.” In order for the environment to be stabilized it must, therefore, be objectivated in such a way as to be relevant for subsequent actions and thus elicits a sequence of actions. Material objectivations which carry the marks of actors, that is, “cultural products,” objects, and technologies, are one way to stabilize objectivations, and, consequently, also communicative actions. For this reason they are also reference points in the discussion of mediatization to which I shall refer later. Before this, I should at least hint at the most important presupposition in the stabilization of communicative action into communicative forms which construct the social order.

The clearest example of the construction of such an order through simple *sequences of actions* has been formulated by Schutz (1964, p. 14) with respect to questions and answers: “I ask you a question. The in-order-to motive of my act is only the expectation that you will understand my question, but also to get your answer; or more precisely, I reckon *that* you will answer, leaving undecided what the content of your answer may be. (. . .) The question, so we can say, is the because-motive of the answer, as the answer is the in-order-to motive of the question. (. . .) I myself had felt on innumerable occasions induced to react to another’s act, which I had interpreted as a question addressed to me, with a kind of behavior of which the in-order-to motive was my expectation that the other, the questioner, might interpret my behavior as an answer.” As Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1978) also argue, the sequential structure of questions and answers allows for the coordination of the oral actions of two actors in time, simultaneously providing them with a structure of motives which overarches each individual action—on the basis of intersubjectivity. Questions and answers are, thus, a rigorous example of the emergence of social structures from communicative actions which could be considered a form of “replies and responses” not necessarily presupposing language (Goffman, 1981). This sequential and simultaneous concatenation of actions is the basis for the construction of “structures,” as Giddens (1984) calls it, or “institutions,” as Berger and Luckmann put it (1966), or communicative forms, as I shall call them in order to account for their communicative character.

The notion of institution or of communicative form relates both to social action and the actors’ knowledge. On the basis of the processes of typification, sedimentation,

and habitualization, even intricate sequences of social actions can be routinized in such a way that they can be considered as form. As soon as this form is established between at least two actors, and appears relevant to other actors, this knowledge can be transmitted, either explicitly, by including legitimations, or implicitly as a “tradition.” Institutions are those sequences of actions which are taken over by third parties.

If it is accepted that the transmission of any knowledge demands its communication, we must also assume that institutions are communicative in nature. Analogous to social actions, one can say that meaningful communicative actions can be sedimented, routinized, and institutionalized into a communicative form. The communicative form may be apparent in the way that people greet each other, how hunters coordinate their actions or how one points to something (by breaking a branch or pointing with a stick). Communicative forms are the major ‘building blocks’ for the construction of reality in that they allow us to coordinate actions and motives. Communicative forms are not only produced by communicative actions. Due to their objectivated character, they also serve as a means to produce order and to orientate action on different scales toward varied goals. Communicative forms range from single sequences (such as answers and questions) to interactive episodes, that is, medical consultation, to the cooperative regulation of technical systems, as, for example, the coordination of activities in underground railways, airports, and other forms of social organizations (Heath, Knoblauch, & Luff, 2000).

As soon as actions are coordinated by an institution, their form not only provides an “order,” which emerges from the very actions that constitute them, but they also arouse expectations about the courses actions will take and thus invoke “knowledge” of these forms, expectations of their performance and, consequently, “sanctions and norms.” In this way, communicative forms are linked to power. Depending on the degree of power, they may also vary with respect to their formality. Some forms may be structured in a very rigid and formal way; some may be weakly structured and informal.

Communicative forms are the institutions of communication culture, that is, society as seen from within the actions by which it is constructed. Therefore, the structures of society are constructed by, and differ with respect to, communicative forms—be it the specific linguistic code, the materiality of the action or the technicality of its implementation. If we Skype, talk on the phone or write letters, it is the form of communicative action that “makes a difference.” However, this difference is not only a selection of codes but is a way for embodied actions to be performed in time and related to things. On the basis of these differences in performance, it is logical to assume that any societal difference depends on different enactments of communicative forms. Thus certain “styles of communication” (codes, formats) define the way in which “science” differs from, for example, religion (i.e., the “sermon” vs. the lecture).

However, different codes, styles, and forms of communication do not only contribute to what Luhmann (1996) calls “functional differentiation” of subsystems, such as science or art, but also serve as methods of social distinction. Social classes

and milieus are differentiated by the preference for, and consequently the enactment of, particular forms and styles of music, art or food (Bourdieu, 1980). As differences in forms of communication produce differentiation, similarities of communicative forms also produce integration. As an example, the dissemination of powerpoint presentation as a performative genre contributed to the extension of the knowledge class. It also provided a communicative form that bridges the most diverse functional sphere, from business and science to church services, the globalizing “knowledge society” (Knoblauch, 2012).

Finally, communicative forms, as any institution, are linked to legitimations. In addition to the knowledge sedimented in institutions, legitimations provide an explicit formulation, account, and discourse that makes sense of an institution’s function. Because of their specialized character, legitimations tend to become part of the “special knowledge” of experts and professionals so as to support differentiation. Simultaneously, legitimations integrate specialized institutions into larger contexts. This process ultimately results in the “symbolic” integration of society and the power that constitutes the performance of communicative action. Of course, the differentiation of and competition between styles and codes can also result in conflict or disintegration. The prevalence of one of these tendencies over another and the way in which this is achieved cannot be determined solely on a theoretical basis. The communicative actions performed and the order constructed and institutionalized by them must be examined empirically.

Mediation, mediatization and medialization

This introduction to the concept of communicative constructivism provides a background for the question of how we can conceive of mediatization. As already mentioned, mediatization is a concept that has already been discussed extensively in a range of texts. The notion is initiated, discussed and clarified by Blumler and Kavanagh (1999), Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999), Krotz (2001), Schulz (2004), Couldry (2008a), Lundby (2009), Livingstone (2009), Hartmann and Hepp (2010) and Krotz and Hepp (2012), among others. The notion is conceived of in quite diverse ways, as is the distinction between it and neighboring categories, such as mediation, medicalization, and domestication. Instead of discussing these differences, I want to approach mediatization on the basis of the notion communicative action, as outlined above, and determine it with particular respect to the notion of mediation and medialization. In doing so, I essentially agree with Krotz (2001, p. 23) that the “starting point [of the analysis of mediatization] must be communication or communicative action.”

If mediatization is framed in terms of action theory, it must necessarily be related to the notion of mediation. As Hepp (2012a, 2012b) stresses, mediatization and mediation must not be considered in opposition. Rather, as I want to suggest, they can be considered as complementary features of communicative action. The notion of mediation has already been conceived of as a basic dimension of action

by Schutz and Luckmann (1989). On the basis of Schutz' earlier writings, they draw a distinction between "immediate" forms of social action and "mediated" forms as basic dimensions of social action (cf. Gebhardt, 2008). The two forms of action are related to two zones of "working acts," the "primary zone" and the "secondary zone," which are mediated to the former by technical means. As a consequence of this distinction, it appeared as if the social world was separated into two orbits, one being linked to the presence or the "primacy" of the face-to-face interaction as the paradigmatic form of social interaction. This idea of the primacy of face-to-face interaction was also shared by Berger and Luckmann (1966), and Goffman (1981) built on it through notion of the interaction order.

A series of authors, particularly involved in the study of communication media, have stressed that technologies of mediation allow us to cross the "orbits" and enter into the face-to-face situation. Thus Thompson (1994), Höfllich (2005) and Krotz (2001) suggest a mixed form of interpersonal mediated interaction which accounts for the massive "penetration" of communication technologies into face-to-face interaction and their "domestication" (Lundby, 2009). Within the sociology of technology, this intersection of social action with technology has been said to cause a differentiation of actions and the creation of a form of social action through technologies called "interactivity" (Rammert, 2012). Probably the most radical reaction to the mediating role of technologies has been formulated by Latour as part of the "Actor Network Theory." His radicalism is not only due to the fact that he accepts technologies as "actors" in the same ("symmetrical") sense as human actors. He also allows us to address the question of the role of "objectivations," which lies at the core of the theory proposed here.⁹

Latour emphasizes the idea that society is not only built on human actors but on the relations between varied kinds of actors, including technologies and objects. Actors are linked by networks which can be condensed into black boxes so as to incorporate these actors in a way which he calls "powerful." Networks of actors seem quite a useful concept since they allow Latour to account for the relevance of things to actions. By relating to networks of actors, Latour also intends to overcome the primacy of the "local" face-to-face interaction. It is at this precise moment that Latour (2005) introduced "mediation" or, to be more exact, "mediators." Mediators belong to the category of actors who link the 'local' and 'translocal' or the 'situational' and the 'extrasituational.' Latour argues that the 'local' has no primacy over the 'translocal' nor is the face-to-face situation more "real" than situations of mediated interaction. Rather, it is the association of certain objects which allows the production of a certain locality. Thus, mediators are objects which relate specific situations to the global context (such as centers of calculations, stock markets or panoramas). They are the "means of transportation" by which different contexts are brought together.

By highlighting the role of mediators, Latour undeniably contributes to the understanding of an important aspect of mediatization, mediation. However, the notion of mediation simultaneously exhibits a certain deficiency which sheds light

on the complementary notion of mediatization. Let me illustrate this deficiency with respect to an empirical example. Latour refers directly to the “panorama” (Latour, 2005, p. 300ff). The panorama is a way in which society is produced as something that appears to supersede the situation. Latour rightly observes that panoramas serve to “frame” and “contextualize” what actors do. This view is in common with the empirical research performed on a notable example of a panorama which Suchman (1993) calls a center of coordination. Such centers of coordination have been empirically studied in some detail by the Workplace Studies (Heath, Knoblauch, & Luff, 2000). As opposed to Latour’s view that networks of things and humans do the work in these centers (Latour & Hermant, 1998), this research shows that framing and contextualization is achieved not just by the actors but through the temporal coordination of actions, both human and technological, and their performance. Hence, Latour does not only neglect this kind of performative aspect of action, he also seems to miss the observation emphasized by the workplace studies that the sequence of actions (or the association of actors) is dependent on the knowledge of the actors and their interpretation.

My argument is that, while rightly highlighting the role of objectivations in actions, ANT is systematically blind to the meaningful aspects of objects and technologies that are embedded in the performance of communicative action. ANT has, as Couldry (2008b, p. 166) stresses, “little or nothing to say about how actors interpret or think about the persistence of such associations and the institutions which result or how actors impact on their mutual relationships with each other and the wider space or networks.” There is, however, evidence in ANT of the additional aspects required for mediatization. In his theoretical media extension of ANT, van Loon (2008, p. 117) distinguishes between two kinds of media “representations.” The first kind of representation is the process by which one particular modality, that of discourse, replaces what it stands in for so that the mediating technology seems to vanish. In the other kind of re-presentation, the practice of mediating becomes the message. While the latter corresponds to mediation, the former may be considered a succinct definition of “medialization,” that is, the representation of the world in the codes of media. Like mediation, medialization must not be misinterpreted as being separated from mediatization but rather as complementary to it. Mediatization combines both, mediation and medialization. In this way, mediatization includes the interpretation of mediators as meanings and messages. From the point of view of communicative action, technologies, be they designed for communication or not, are not just “instruments” interposed into communicative action. Neither can they be accounted for simply by the notion of practice. Instead they require, as we have seen, interpretations, which Pinch (2008) rightly stresses, interpretations which, one has to add, are themselves part of communicative actions.

In summary, mediatization is a general feature of communicative action. It involves meaningful bodies and objects in action. The body figures as the crucial reference point for mediatization, with respect to both experience and active conduct. Mediatization thus refers to the fact that media are not just “extensions of our

sensory apparatus” (Meyrowitz, 1994, p. 58) but also extensions of actions. While mediatization is a general feature of communicative action, it is the forms of communication or, as Thompson (1994) prefers, the patterns of communication and interaction which are subject to change. The study of mediatization is, therefore, the study of the changing structure of communicative action.

Postsociality, mediatized modernity, and the communication society

Although this outline of communicative constructivism and of mediatization may still require further elaboration, it should have become clear that it allows to conceptualize mediatization in an encompassing theoretical framework. The concepts of this theory are abstract enough to fit into general theories of society, yet they have proven to serve also as sensitizing categories for empirical research. Moreover, they allow to reconcile the two diverging dimensions of mediatization mentioned in the introduction. On the one hand, they locate mediatization as a fundamental feature of social life, that is, communicative action. In this respect, they closely relate the analysis of media and technology to human actors and their perspective. On the other hand, they delineate mediatization as an encompassing “meta process” constructed by communicative actions. In disregarding the distinction between micro and macrolevel or situation and structures as an ontological fact, mediatization becomes a crucial aspect of analysis, particularly in contemporary society.

If one asks why mediatization became so important in “mediatized modernity” (Lash in Lundby, 2009), one cannot escape the role of interactivity. Interactivity is most often identified as the exchange of behavioral sequences between human actors and technologies. As clearly as the observation of these sequences focuses on the body, it typically neglects the very forms of communicative action which are performed in these sequences. I would argue that the increasing role of interactivity would be better understood if we focused on communicative forms and genres which are realized by actors and technologies. As the electronic mass media seem to make social spheres “more permeable” (Meyrowitz, 1994, p. 67), the increasingly multimodal interactivity fostered by digital technology is one of the most salient features of mediatization in contemporary society. It results in the transgression of what used to be the “primacy of the face-to-face situation.” This includes several aspects: transgression between the local and the global, transgression of social structure and interaction order and, closer to the discussion of mediatization, the transgression (or dissolution of the distinction between) of immediate and mediated social situations which turn into “scopic” situations.¹⁰ Mediatization, however, does not only mean that the structure of coordinating communicative actions is changing, as the notion of interactivity suggests. The transgression also results in the transformation and creation of communicative forms, patterns and genres, such as computer games, messages on answering machines and powerpoint presentations, to name but a few. In this way, it contributes to the transformation of the communicative cultures of contemporary society.

The transgression of the face-to-face situation is not a totally new phenomenon. However, the fact that communicative action can increasingly be performed in a translocal common environment inherently decreases the relevance of localized social relations and affects what is called community, the public and public communication and even presence that turns or “liveness” (Auslander, 1999; Couldry, 2008b). Some authors argue that mediatization results in the increased importance of objects and, therefore, postsociality. According to Knorr Cetina (2001), for example, postsociality is due to the insertion of objects into the ‘social.’ Also Latour (2005) assumes that sociality must be extended to “interobjectivity” in order to incorporate “objects” as actors in their own right. As opposed to these views, communicative constructivism considers objects and technologies as an integral part of communicative action which are intrinsically and meaningfully linked to the human actors via the pivotal role of the body. Seen from this perspective, the proliferation of objects and technologies does not reduce sociality. Rather sociality can be seen to be enforced or enlarged by mediatization in all its aspects, so as to increase the importance of communicative action. The inclusion of new technologies into communicative action does not only allow for new medialized forms of communicative action, including a massive expansion of visualization and the secondary sensualization of the life world (Krotz, 2001). The current form of mediatization, based on digital technologies of communication, legitimated since the 1960s by a huge range of privately and state financed programs to create the information society, dissolves knowledge (“stored” in subjective consciousness) into communicative action and increases the frequency, performance and speed of communicative action to such an extent that one may dare to diagnose a profound transformation into “a culture of communication for the sake of communication” (Castells, 2009, p. 38) in which more and more knowledge is transformed into communicative forms.

Notes

- 1 As a kind of founding document cf. Gumperz and Hymes (1972) to which Goffman (1964) contributed “the neglected situation.” The relation of Goffman to Conversation Analysis has been quite confrontational (Goffman, 1981) whereas gesture studies of Kendon (2004) quite plainly build on his approach.
- 2 Although Latour (1993) claims that the “others” in sociology have always been restricted to humans, Schutz and Luckmann (1984; 1989) quite explicitly argued that almost anything can be considered as the other—depending on the actors’ world view.
- 3 The structure of meaning of action has been analysed by Schutz and Luckmann (1984; 1989) in some detail in terms of the time structure of action, typifications, relevance, etc.
- 4 There is a third type of action: if actors use language but pursue instrumental goals. Habermas calls it “strategic action.” When acting strategically, we communicate without trying to arrive at a common understanding but only to pursue our egoistic goal.
- 5 By “mediatization” Habermas refers not to the role of technical communication media; rather, he exclusively restricts this term to the intrusion of symbolically generalized media (in Parsons’ sense) into the sociocultural life-world, resulting in “distorted” communication. Cf. Habermas, 1981, Vol. 2, pp. 267.

- 6 This notion of the body builds on the analysis of its “excentric positionality” of “being a body” and “having a body” so forcefully analysed by Plessner (1970) which is seen rather as a result of communicative action than as its prerequisite.
- 7 This is the difference to Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967) who take “communication” to be a form of behavior. The observation that we cannot not communicate is due to the fact that we cannot not be part of society which provides us with the meaning for our own conduct, for the things we relate to and for as well as of others.
- 8 The argument that the liberation of the hand by the upright position led to new ways of its use and, thence, of communication, has been put forward forcefully by Leroi-Gourhan (1964–1965).
- 9 I am referring here to Latour (1993, 2005) and a range of articles collected in Belliger and Krieger (2006).
- 10 Cf. Knorr Cetina (2012) who assumes that “scopic” media allow diverse and disparate localities to link—in sports, financing or the military.

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