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Human interaction and communicative figurations.

The transformation of mediatized cultures and societies

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1. Introduction

A main problem of any mediatization research is how to ground it in a practicable empirical approach. When we argue that within an ongoing mediatization process our cultures and societies transform, how can we investigate this in detail? What might be the intermediate concepts by which it becomes possible to research empirically in which way mediatization is related to the change of culture and societies? By posing questions like these, it becomes evident that media as such "do" nothing on their own. They become influential in the way that they "alter" the processes of symbolic interaction or, to be more precise: of communication. We are confronted with complex processes of interweaving in which certain human practices become institutionalized and reified in something that we call "a medium", which – itself continuously changing – "alters" our (communicative) construction of cultures and societies. If we want to analyze the mediatization of cultures and societies in such a way, we need an intermediate concept for a corresponding analysis. This chapter outlines the concept of "communicative figurations" as such an approach: This concept makes it possible to develop a practical, transmedial analysis of the changing communicative construction of mediatized cultures and societies.

To grasp these considerations, we want to argue in three steps. First, we outline a general approach on how to reflect the interrelation between mediatization, interaction and communication. Based on this, we continue by introducing the aforementioned approach on communicative figurations. This is followed by a section which outlines an empirical grounding of communicative figurations. And finally, we conclude with some arguments for a mediatization research that is oriented to questions of interaction and communication.

2. Mediatization, Interaction and Communication

If we consider the present state of mediatization research, we can distinguish two intertwined traditions that we can call "institutional" and "social-constructivist" (cf. Hepp 2014). Both differ in their focus on how to theorize mediatization: While the "institutional tradition" is until recently mainly interested in traditional mass media, whose influence is described mostly as a "media logic", the "social-constructivist tradition" is more interested in everyday communication practices – including their relation to digital media and personal communication – and focuses on the changing communicative construction of culture and society. While these two traditions have certain different foci of research, they have nevertheless come closer together over recent years which makes it possible to formulate a core definition of mediatization across the two. Doing this, we can define *mediatization as a concept to analyze critically the (long-term) interrelation between the change of media and communication, on the one hand, and the change of culture and society on the*

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other (for further aspects of defining mediatization see part one of this volume). In such a general orientation, the term mediatization implies quantitative as well as qualitative aspects. With regard to quantitative aspects, mediatization refers to the increasing temporal, spatial and social spread of media communication. That means that over time we have become more and more used to communicating via media in various contexts. With regard to qualitative aspects, mediatization refers to the role of the specificity of certain media in the process of sociocultural change. This means that it does "matter" which kind of media is used for which kind of communication. The differences between the two traditions is how they define this media specificity – either as an institutionalized "media logic" or more openly as a highly contextual moment of "altering" communication. Another point of dispute is the question of a historical perspective on mediatization, that is if mediatization is rather a short term process since (early) modernity or if it is a process that has to be theorized as a long-term historical process (cf. for these differences again the various chapters in part one).

However, beyond such differences "social interaction" becomes a central concept for both traditions. In his recent volume on the (then) present state of mediatization research, Knut Lundby (2009b: 108) argued that we have to consider "social interaction as the key" to describing processes of mediatization. With reference to the institutionalist tradition of mediatization research, his argument is that "media logic" as a concept refers back to a certain understanding of "forms" or "formats" of social interaction. Originally and with reference to Georg Simmel, David L. Altheide and Robert P. Snow (1979: 15) argued that "media logic constitutes […] a form", that is "a processual framework through which social action occurs". In their later work they preferred the concept of "format" to describe this social form (cf. also Altheide 2013). As Knut Lundby puts it: "Media logic is a codification of how media formats work; of rules, ways, and regulations in 'the underlying interactive order.'" (Lundby 2009b: 108)

If we have more the social constructivist tradition of mediatization research in mind, social interaction is obviously crucial. The reason for this is that any constructivist approach is based on the argument that the social world of human beings is not a given but "constructed" in social interaction. As Hubert Knoblauch puts it: "Social constructivism in this sense assumes that social reality is built on, by and through social actions." (Knoblauch 2013: 6) As part of this tradition, "communicative constructivism" has gained a higher relevance over the last years. Referring back to the original insights of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967) and the later development by Luckmann himself (2006), the idea of "communicative constructivism" is to emphasis the central role of communication for the constitution of cultures and societies. This does not mean that any aspect of "social construction" is communication – but always when questions of meaning are involved does communication play a role. This is the reason why symbolic interaction is in such a perspective the core for understanding the constitution and transformation of cultures and societies.

Such a central positioning of symbolic interaction is not unquestioned in mediatization research. For example, Sig Hjarvard recently reminded us of some problems when overemphasizing "social interaction" in a "one-sided" way as this might "obscure the question of how to grasp the specificities of the media" (Hjarvard 2013: 18). However, this being said, he nevertheless acknowledges that social interaction is fundamental for any understanding of mediatization – we will come to this later.

At this point it becomes important how we define "social interaction". In the most general understanding – and this is also the way Georg Simmel (1972) used the concept, and referring back to him Altheide and Snow (1979) – social interaction is fundamental for social sciences as a whole. It was Max Weber in his "basic sociological terms" who made "social action" – that is, action oriented to other human beings – to the fundamental unit of each analysis (Weber 1978: 4). Understood in this way, any social and cultural analysis deals with the (inter)action of human beings. Mediatization research then becomes preoccupied with how this social interaction changes when technical communication media become part of it.

A more specific understanding of social interaction comes from "symbolic interactionism" as a particular approach within social sciences. Referring back to scholars like George Herbert Mead (1967) and Herbert Blumer (1969), who developed it out of the American philosophical tradition of pragmatism. The fundamental idea of this approach is that "human beings are distinct from other creatures because they have the capacity for language and thus can think, reason, communicate, and coordinate their actions with others" (Sandstrom 2007: 1). One main concept of symbolic interactionism is the idea of "significant symbols". These are all words or gestures that have the same meaning for a certain group of people who share them. If we follow symbolic interactionism, most human interactions are based on these "significant symbols". And we can refer this already back to concepts as they have been adopted in mediatization research. For example, Kent Sandstrom argues that Altheide's and Snow's idea of "media logic" as a "format" is the main way symbolic interactionism found its way into media and communication research (Sandstrom 2007: 5f.).

Reflecting this overall discussion, we can say that *communication is one kind of social interaction*. There are other kinds of social interaction, and communication is interconnected with them. When we build something together (a garden fence for example) we socially interact on this process of building, and we coordinate this by communication. The characteristic of communication as a form of social interaction is its foundation in symbols. In other words, "communication" means any form of symbolic interaction conducted either in a planned and conscious manner or in a highly habituated and socially situated way (Reichertz 2011: 159-160). Communication therefore involves the use of signs that humans learn during their socialization and which, as symbols, are for the most part entirely arbitrary, depending for their meaning upon conventionalized social rules. Communication is fundamental to the social construction of reality: that is, we ourselves "create" our social reality in multiple communicative processes (beside other forms of social interaction). We are born into a world in which communication already exists, we learn what is characteristic of this world (and its culture) through the (communicative) process of learning to speak; and when we proceed to act in this world our action is always related to communicative action. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann formulated this as follows: "The most important vehicle of reality-maintenance is conversation. One may view the individual's everyday life in terms of the working away of a conversational apparatus that ongoingly maintains, modifies and reconstructs his subjective reality" (Berger/Luckmann 1967: 172).

For describing communication as one form of social interaction, different concepts are common in media and communication research. These are "forms", "patterns", "practices" and "types" of communicative action. Basically, all these different concepts refer to the

same fundamental idea. This is an understanding that communication is not solely 'ephemeral' but based on "social rules" which are performed situatively. These rules not only refer to the "use of symbols" but also to "rules of how to use these in action". The difference between the terms above is the level on which they locate and how they contextualize these rules.

In a certain sense we can say that "forms" is the most general word reflecting that different kinds of "content" can be communicated alongside various "forms" of communicative action. These can be very "small" as for example the "replies" and "responses" analyzed by Erving Goffman (1981: 5-77), or the "conversational sequences" investigated by ethnomethodology (Sacks 1995). The term "forms" is, however, – and here especially in media and communication research – additionally used on a more general level to name certain "formats", for example of radio, television or internet-based media. This is also the way Altheide and Snow used the term in the aforementioned way of defining "media logic".

The term "pattern" in this context means very generally that there are certain regularities in communicative interaction. These regularities can be either at the level of single communication actions. Here the term "pattern" is more or less a synonym for the "small" kinds of communicative action discussed above. But also – and at this point the term is an extension – variations of these "small forms" can build more complex patterns. These can be either patterns of how these forms are typically linked (for example questions, response, explanations etc. in a discussion). Or it can also be other kinds of patterns, for example how a certain group of people uses specific forms of communication and thus builds a certain culture.

If we come to the concept of "practice", again different nuances of meaning come into play. First of all, this term refers to a more general "practice approach" on media that moves the human agency / human acting into the foreground of analysis in place of a more detached investigation of "media contents" or "media effects" (Reckwitz 2002; Couldry 2004). Practice, in this case, is understood in an inclusive way, not only practices of media use, but also all other kinds of practices that are related to the media, including practices of media production. Beyond this overall context, the term "practice" mainly refers to how different "forms" altogether build a more complex and socially situated "pattern" of acting with media. Here we can think of the "practice of online dating" which involves different "forms" of personal data representation in online dating platforms, certain "forms" of searching in these platforms, other characteristic "forms" of online chat etc. Therefore, the term "practice" emphasises more the social embedding of a set of communicative forms as well as their relation to human needs (cf. Couldry 2012: 34).

Finally, the possibly most complex concept is the concept of "type". Again it can be understood in a very wide sense, meaning that communication as well as human interaction in general is based on a reciprocal perception of the alter ego referring to "typifications" we learned in the process of socialization (Berger/Luckmann 1967: 28 - 33). Here, we can think about the typification of the other as "representative" of a certain social role ("teacher", "journalist" etc.) or a certain social collective ("British", "French" etc.). But also what has so far been called "form" can be understood as a typification of action, that is typifications of "how to do it right" (in the social sense of the word). The term "type" gains an additional complexity if we relate it to questions of methodology. Then the process of describing "forms", "patterns" and "practices" of communicative action is a way of "typify-

ing" them by analyzing specific occurrences. At this point Max Weber's concept of "ideal types" (Weber 1978: 20f.) is still of relevance. "Ideal types" are forms of typification that are built analytically; that is, beyond the assumption that they would exist in a "pure way". However, these ideal types are helpful when describing different forms of human action as they offer an analytical framework. When media and communication research refers to "basic types" of communication (for example face-to-face communication) as a point of departure for describing more specific "forms", "patterns" or "practices" of communication, a comparable understanding of building up conceptual tools is present.

If we take these fundamental reflections on communication as a form of social interaction as a starting point, the striking question is: How can we relate this to mediatization research? At this point, it is worth recalling John B. Thompson's reflections on the "mediazation of culture". Interestingly, he already argued across the "institutional" and "social constructivist" traditions of mediatization research. For Thompson, mediatization is fundamentally about the transformation of communication as a form of symbolic interaction, a statement which can be proven by his analysis of the emergence of modern society. So he wrote about early modernity: "Patterns of communication and interaction began to change in profound and irreversible ways. These changes, which loosely can be called the 'mediazation of culture', had a clear institutional basis: namely the development of media organizations […]." (Thompson 1995: 46).

Thompson's description of mediatization[2] is closely related to a distinction of three basic types of communicative interaction, that is "face-to-face-interaction" (dialogical interaction as conversation), "mediated interaction" (dialogical communication with media as a mobile phone call) and "mediated quasi-interaction" (monological communication with media as television) (cf. Thompson 1995: 82-87). Mediatization is therefore a process in which new basic types of mediated interaction develop, types that make possible a trans-local communicative action "at a distance": "today it is common for individuals to orient their interactions towards others who do not share the same spatial-temporal locale" (Thompson 1995: 100).

In a comparable orientation, Friedrich Krotz (Krotz 2001: 73-76) also argued that mediatization is not about a direct effect of the media but about how media "change" the various forms of communication. As he wrote, with mediatization "increasingly more and more complex forms of media communication developed, and communication takes place more often, with a longer duration, in more areas of life and in relation to increasingly more topics in relation to the media" (Krotz 2001: 33).[3] However, having the increasing relevance of computerized environments in mind, Krotz distinguishes a fourth basic type of communication, namely the communication in virtual software environments. This comes together with another idea by John B. Thompson, that is the idea of an emerging reflexivity of mediatization: With an increasing "self-referentiality within the media" (Thompson 1995: 110) we are confronted with what he calls "extended mediazation", meaning that "media messages" become "incorporated into new media messages".

If we consider more recent reflections, these early arguments of focusing mediatization research on questions of symbolic interaction and communication are supported by new

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[2] As said, John B. Thompson uses the term "mediazation". However, for consistency we will stay in the following with "mediatization" in the following.
[3] This and all following non-English quotes are translations by the authors.

evidence. For example in his aforementioned chapter "Looking for social interaction", Knut Lundby argued that we have a "need for middle-range explorations" (Lundby 2009b: 113) that move "social interaction" into the focus of analysis if we want to understand what happens with mediatization. As he writes, it is necessary "to specify how various media capabilities are applied in various patterns of social interactions" as "transformations and changes in the mediatization process take place in communication" (Lundby 2009b: 117). This goes hand in hand with Eric Rothenbuhler's thoughts about the theorem of "media logic" that maybe "the logic is not in the medium but in the communication" (Rothenbuhler 2009: 228). The same line of argument can be found in Nick Couldry's book "Media, Society, World", in which he argues for an approach that locates what he calls "mediatization debate" (Couldry 2012: 134) in the frame of field theory (see also Couldry in this volume). For him, this means an investigation of communication practices and their relation to changing media environments that is sensitive for the specific character of different social fields, and not positing a general "logic" of change. And while Stig Hjarvard in his most recent definition of mediatization stays with the concept of "media logic" as a "shorthand for the various institutional, aesthetic, and technological modus operandi of the media" (Hjarvard 2013: 17), he nevertheless emphasises the necessity to reflect social interaction as the "logic of the media influences the social forms of interaction and communication" (Hjarvard 2013: 17). Therefore, irrespective of the preferred detailed concept of mediatization, there is a shared understanding in present mediatization research that any description of mediatization must be based on an analysis of how media change is related to its "influence on communication", that is symbolic interaction.

Table 1: Basic types of communication

	Direct Communication	Reciprocal media communication	Produced media communication	Virtualized media communication
Constitution in time and space	Co-present context; shared system of space and time references	Separation of contexts; extended access to space and time	Separation of contexts; extended access to space and time	Separation of contexts; extended access to space and time
Range of symbolic means	Variety of symbolic means	Limitation of symbolic means	Limitation and standardization of symbolic means	Relative limitation and standardization of symbolic means
Action orientation	Oriented to specific others	Oriented to specific others	Oriented to an indefinite potential number of addressees	Oriented to a potential space of action
Mode of communication	Dialogic	Dialogic	Monologic	Interlogical
Form of connectivity	Local	Translocally addressed	Translocal open	Translocally indefinite

Source: Hepp 2013: 65, based on Thompson 1995: 85 and Krotz 2007: 90-92

If we take this as a common ground it is helpful to refer back to the above mentioned distinction of basic types of communication and systematize them further. It seems to be appropriate to distinguish four basic types of communication (cf. table 1):

- firstly, as *direct communication*, that is, direct conversation with other humans;

- secondly, as *reciprocal media communication*, i.e. technically mediated personal communication with other persons (for instance, through the use of a telephone);

- thirdly, as *produced media communication*, characterizing the sphere of media communication classically identified by the concept of mass communication (newspapers, radio, TV);

- fourthly, *virtualized media communication*, namely communication by means of "interactive systems" created for this purpose; computer games are one example, and another would be robots.

If we refer this back to questions of mediatization, we can first of all argue *quantitatively speaking* that the spread of technical communication media is first of all related to the emergence of basic types of communication beyond direct communication: Only with technical media can we think about reciprocal media communication, produced media communication and virtualized media communication. All of these offer the possibility to extend our symbolic communication translocally while at the same time narrowing the range of symbolic means. Additionally, we can say that these different basic forms of media communication became more and more familiar in temporal, social and spatial terms. *Qualitatively speaking*, we can argue that each kind of media – the mobile phone, social web, television etc. – shapes the related basic types of communication in a different way. This is where the various concepts to analyze this media specificity come in: "media logic", "media affordances", "moulding forces of the media" and so on. Irrespective of their detailed theoretical roots, these concepts try to describe how certain media have an "influence" on the way we communicate – whereby this is not understood as a process of direct "effect" but as a process of appropriating these media.[4]

If we locate this in the present discussion about communicative constructivism, we gain a certain understanding of how all this is related to the transformation of cultures and societies. Following the idea of "communicative constructivism" we can argue that "communicative forms are the major 'building blocks' for the construction of reality in that they allow us to coordinate actions and motives." (Knoblauch 2013: 16). In other words, we construct our cultures and societies as meaningful realities by communication, namely forms and practices of communicative action. The main argument at this point is that what we call media are on the one hand "institutionalizations" and "reifications" (or "objectivations") of communicative action: With media we "institutionalize" the forms we communicate and "reify" the possibilities of communication in technologies, infrastructures and interfaces (cf. Hepp 2013: 58-59; Hepp 2014). And as soon as communicative action is "institutionalized" and "reified" by a medium, this in turn has a certain influence on our communication. We are confronted here with an interrelated process of change in

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[4] This is a highly important point, more generally outlined by Hans Matthias Kepplinger (2008) who argued that mediatization research is not a new form of effect research. Stig Hjarvard (Hjarvard 2013: 2-3, 17) for example emphasized the same in relation to his understanding of "media logic". The core idea of "affordances" is about the influence of specific (material) objects in processes of interaction (Gaver 1996). And also the idea of the "moulding forces" of the media is explicitly positioned against the "effect paradigm" (Hepp 2013: 54).

which we cannot define what the driving force of change is. The aforementioned basic types of communication are to be understood as an analytical point of departure for describing the specific forms and practices of communicative action that are involved in this process.

This becomes more complicated when we consider that the communicative construction of culture and society presently does not only rely on one single medium but on a variety of media working together. This is reflected for example in statements such as we would need a new perspective on the present situation of the "media manifold" (Couldry 2012: 16), of "polymedia" (Madianou/Miller 2013: 1) or "transmediality" (Evans 2011: 17) to understand what's going on with media change. While concepts like these differ in their detailed analytical orientation all of them share the same fundamental argument: That is that the present situation of "media-saturation" (Lundby 2009a: 2) and a "mediation of everything" (Livingstone 2009: 1) asks for a media and communication research that does not focus on one single medium but on how different media in their entirety are involved in the changing construction of culture and society. Therefore, it would fall short to discuss the transformation of the communicative construction of mediatized cultures and societies only in the perspective of one medium; rather we need an approach that is able to include a variety of different media in the analysis as far as they are relevant for a certain change.

3.   Communicative figurations as an intermediate concept

While arguments like these are driven theoretically, a more practical question is: How can such a transmedial analysis be undertaken practically? It is obvious that we need an intermediate concept beyond the more general approach of mediatization to analyze the referred to change of symbolic interaction and by that the transformation of the communicative construction of cultures and societies. As we want to argue in the following, such an intermediate might be developed if we focus on "communicative figurations".

What is a communicative figuration? As a first approximation some examples are helpful: Families can be described as a communicative figuration since they are sustained as communitizations through various forms of communication: conversations, communication via (mobile) telephones and the social web, (digital) photo albums, letters and postcards or by watching television together. Also (national or transnational) public spheres can be comprehended as communicative figurations sustained via different kinds of media and confronted with special normative expectations. Among these media are not only traditional media of mass communication but increasingly also so-called new media like Twitter and blogs. We are, however, also dealing with communicative figurations of learning when school teachers, for example, use interactive whiteboards, software applications or intra- and internet portals in order to teach in a "contemporary" manner.

More generally speaking, *communicative figurations are patterns of processes of communicative interweaving that exist across various media and have a thematic framing that orients communicative action*. Such an approach to communicative figurations picks up reflections like those formulated by Norbert Elias, but takes them a step further. For Elias, figuration is "a simple conceptual tool" (Elias 1978: 130) to be used for understanding social-cultural phenomena in terms of "models of processes of interweaving" (Elias 1978: 130). For him, figurations are "networks of individuals" (Elias 1978: 15) which constitute a

larger social entity through reciprocal interaction – for example, by joining in a game, or a dance. This could be the family, a group, the state or society. Due to this kind of scalability, his concept of figuration traverses the often static levels of analysis of micro, meso and macro.

The figuration as developed by Elias is considered to be one of the basic descriptive concepts of the social sciences and cultural studies and was adopted in different ways in theoretical as well as empirical works. The significance of the figuration concept for media and communication research has been more and more emphasized (Ludes 1995; Krotz 2003; Couldry 2010; Willems 2010). The relationship between figuration analysis and current media and communication research can be found in the common interest to describe actors and their interweaving which, according to Georg Simmel (1972), can be conceptualized as a common pattern of interdependency or reciprocation. Unlike the also widely discussed current developments of structural network analysis (see, for example, White 1992), the figuration concept is better at enabling the integration into research of not only the dimension of communicative "meaning", but also of historical transformation. The concept of communicative figuration therefore becomes an ideal starting point for analyzing the transformation of communicative construction processes in relation to mediatization.

When claiming that transmedia communicative figurations exist, we mean that a communicative figuration is based on different communication media – often, therefore, integrating several of the aforementioned basic types of communication. Which of these kinds of communication and, based upon them, which communication media must be taken into consideration when describing a specific communicative figuration depends on their characteristics: The communicative figuration of a political commission is different from that of a national public sphere. The transformation of *both* communicative figurations is, however, connected and refers back to certain communication media. Consequently, it can be assumed that the communicative figuration of political commissions changes as soon as the direct communication of everyone involved does not only rely on the documents carried along but also on instantly-accessible online information and the possibility to transmit decision-making "live" to the national public via smartphone. Integrating people in the public sphere is, due to the diffusion of digital media, no longer a "two-step flow" (Katz 1957) from manufactured or produced mass communication to direct communication. These days it is much more a case of creating an additional "public connection" (Couldry et al. 2007).

Such statements show quite plainly that the analysis of communicative figurations has to deal with a careful investigation of the role of various media in the communicative forms and practices which are characteristic for each communicative figuration. As argued at the beginning of this chapter, concepts to describe this regularity become relevant when considering that the characterization of a practice-oriented access does not only deal with purely situational actions, but that it moves the regularities and socio-cultural embedding of communicative actions to the fore of the analysis (Couldry 2012: 33-35). For the description of communicative figurations it seems not only possible but necessary to work out the regularities and their transformations. In an analysis of communicative figurations, the terms of "form", (overlapping) "patterns" and "practices" of communicative action are expedient since they detach our view from the individual medium and are applicable to different levels.

Consequently, the guiding idea is the assumption that the characteristic, reciprocal relationships of media-communicative and socio-cultural transformations, described by the term mediatization, are materialized in specific communicative figurations. With the alteration of communicative figurations, processes of communicative constructions of socio-cultural reality are changing. At this level, an analysis of the transformation of cultures and societies becomes accessible as it takes place with mediatization.

4.   Approaching communicative figurations empirically

To sum up the arguments developed so far: As demonstrated, communicative figurations are defined as patterns of processes of communicative interweaving that exist across various media and have a thematic framing that guides communicative action. In and through these communicative figurations, humans construct in symbolic interaction their symbolically meaningful socio-cultural realities. Consequently, communicative figurations do not constitute static phenomena but must rather be observed in their constant state of flux – as a "process": They are realized in communicative practice, thus re-articulated and, hence, they continuously transform to different degrees. In the sense of social constructivism, we can consider communicative figurations as the basis of the communicative construction of socio-cultural reality: The reality of a culture or society is "constructed" in or through the different communicative figurations. Making this more general idea of communicative figurations researchable in an empirical way, we can argue that each communicative figuration is defined in core by four aspects (see figure 1):

- Firstly, we are dealing with *forms of communication*. This concept includes the different convention-based ways of communicative action, which develop into more complex patterns of practice (communicative networking or discourses, for example).

- Secondly, in respect of these forms of communication, a specifically-marked *media ensemble* can be described for each communicative figuration. This refers to the entire media through which or in which a communicative figuration exists.

- Thirdly, a typical *constellation of actors* can be determined for each communicative figuration which constitutes itself through its communicative action.

- Fourthly, every communicative figuration is characterized by a *thematic framing*; thus there is a guiding topic which must be specified.

To explain these four aspects further, it is helpful to link them to our reflection on mediatization and communication. If we take the argument that symbolic interaction is the core anchor to describe mediatization, it becomes obvious how far "communication" builds the first aspect of each communicative figuration. However, if we consider communication as part of figurations, we are less interested in the "individual utterance" but more in the *forms of communication* which are characteristic for a certain communicative figuration. Families as communicative figurations, for example involve other typical forms of communication than political public spheres do. To describe the different communicative forms as they are characteristic for a certain communicative figuration, the distinction of basic types of communication is helpful insofar as it orientates our focus to the fundamental differences between various communicative forms.

In addition, each communicative figuration is located in a certain "media environment" (Morley 2007; Meyrowitz 2009) that can be described in relation to this figuration as its *media ensemble*. At this point it becomes possible to integrate media specificity into the analysis of communicative figurations. As outlined, in present mediatized cultures and societies it is not one single medium that shapes the communicative construction of a certain entity, but rather a group of (different) media in their entirety. This means we are not analyzing one single "media influence", but how the "institutionalizations" and "reifications" of different media altogether "mould" communicative figurations. Focusing media ensembles – which correlate in individual perspective with "media repertoires" (Hasebrink/Popp 2006; Hasebrink/Domeyer 2012) – seems to be the appropriate way to analyze the complexity of present mediatizing processes.

With reference to *constellations of actors*, we have in mind that each communicative figuration is also defined by a certain intertwined group of typical actors. These can be either individual actors (humans) or collective actors (organizations of different complexity). The term "constellation of actors" as we use it is influenced by Uwe Schimank's theory of social action, who in his approach also refers back to Norbert Elias (Schimank 2010: 211-213). In such a view we are confronted with a constellation of actors as soon as we have an interference of at least two actors who themselves recognize this interference as such (Schimank 2010: 202). The argument at this point is that each communicative figuration has one specific constellation of actors who perceive themselves as part of this communicative figuration. There is no need that this constellation is "harmonic" or "friendly", it can also be "conflicting" and "struggling". However, the involved communicative actors are aware of each other as being part of this communicative figuration.

Figure 1: Heuristics to analyze communicative figurations
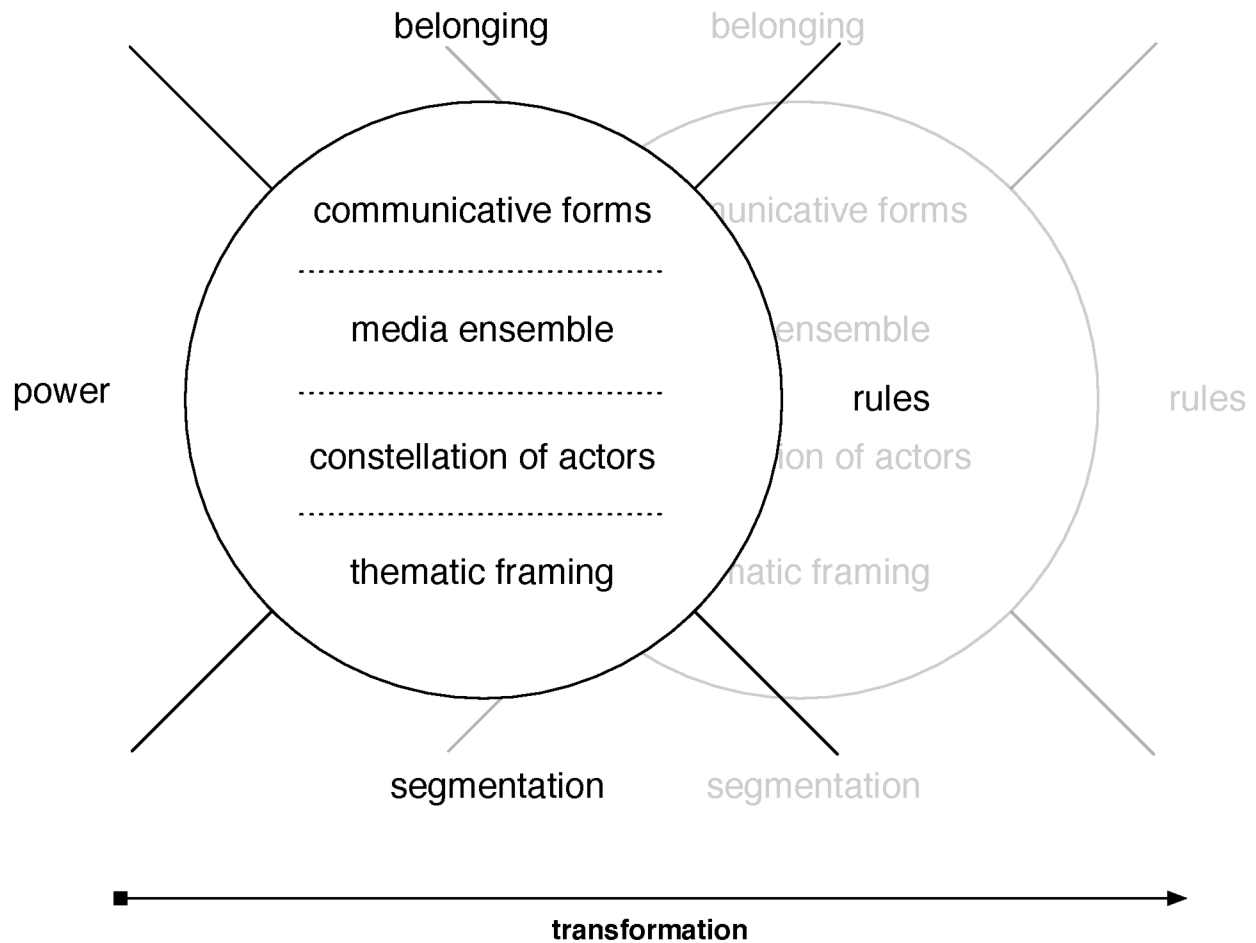
Maybe the most complex point about communicative figurations is their *thematic framing.* Using this term, we refer less to the "framing analysis" as it is well known in media and communication content research. Our terming is much more grounded in fundamental social theory, and here the "frame analysis" as it was outlined by Erving Goffman (1974: 21-40). Frames in his understanding have an interactionist as well as a cognitive moment: On the one hand, frames orientate our interaction as it becomes understandable, for example if we consider a teaching situation in a class-room as a frame: We "produce" this situation by our interaction being oriented to a shared frame of action. On the other hand, recognizing "frames" makes it possible for a person who enters a room to understand "what's going on". In such a more general sense, also communicative figurations have a certain thematic framing: Their communicative forms, media ensemble and constellation of actors build up a "unity of meaning" which orientates the ongoing procedure of "producing" as well as the "perception" of this communicative figuration.

By describing the characteristic forms of communication, media ensemble, constellation of actors and thematic framing, we can describe a communicative figuration on a fundamental level. However, to get a deeper understanding of communicative figurations a further contextualization is necessary. This is the point where the four perspectives of description come in that we have to have in mind when describing communicative figurations. They can be described in a first approach with the help of four questions: How do

communicative figurations construct our different "belongings"? How are certain "rules" created through communicative figurations? How does a communicative figuration produce characteristic "segmentations"? How do communicative figurations create or maintain "power"?

The *perspective of belonging* picks up the work on inclusion, communitization and socialization through processes of media communication. This includes issues of a mediated construction of national communitization, while the present research presumes that only with continuing mediatization was a comprehensive communicative integration into a nation possible, and an implementation of national culture (cf. Anderson 1983; Schlesinger 1987; Billig 1995; Hjort 2000; Morley 2000). From the viewpoint of political communication research, a debate on mediated relationships is about integrating people into a national and transnational public sphere, which may also happen through conflicts (Dahlgren 1995; Gripsrud 2007; Wessler et al. 2008; Koopmans/Statham 2010). Especially with an increasing mediatization, the possibilities for relationships in and through media communication have increased; complex forms of "citizenship" are emerging which are much more based on popular culture than on political affiliation (García Canclini 2001; Couldry 2006; Dahlgren 2006). Different communitizations and socializations should be mentioned which also contribute to the gains of relevancy of media and communication change. This concerns transnational diasporas (Dayan 1999), popular-cultural communitizations (Jenkins 2006), religious communities (Hoover 2006) or new social movements (Bailey et al. 2008). It also concerns commercialized belongings with companies and associations as to be found in or through PR, or changing links on the level of personal networks and groups (Granovetter 1983; Gauntlett 2011).

The *perspective of rules* does not only concern political and legal regulations of media communication but also social and cultural rules as they are discussed for example in communication and media ethics. Consequently, this question of perspective is about all processes of setting and changing rules, ranging from a "top-down-regulation" and a "co-" and "self-regulation" to "spontaneous negotiation of rules". In today's communicative figurations, processes of rule-making change as the national frame, which for a long time was the primary vanishing point for regulations, is losing this role as consequence of the self-transformation of the state (Chakravartty/Zhao 2008). Besides state regimes, privatized and hence new spheres of influence appear in regulation, for which "ICANN", responsible for the regulation of internet addresses, or the World Summit on the Information Society are mentioned as prime examples (McCurdy 2008). Other problems of rules become tangible due to the public discussion surrounding copyright, security issues and private sphere on the internet. Besides privatized and globalized regimes, supranational regimes gain importance, as exemplarily demonstrated by the guidelines of media politics in Europe (Levy 2007; Kleinsteuber/Nehls 2011). This issue continues to sharpen as with the continuous establishment of digital media, the demarcation between traditional forms of public and personal communication becomes blurred and, consequently, the role of public-service media institutions for civil society must be determined in different ways. On top of this, digital media demonstrate that especially media-ethical and aesthetical rules are reified through "code" – the software-technical or algorithmic architecture of platforms or communication services (Lessig 2006; Zittrain 2008; Pariser 2011). If we investigate communicative figurations, we also have to have this perspective of rules in mind.

The *perspective of segmentation* is more or less related to the tradition of investigating inequalities in media and communication research. One of the questions of research on "knowledge gaps" is about whether the distribution of certain media increases the difference between the "information-rich" and the "information-poor" (Tichenor et al. 1970). Such a discussion was picked up by the so-called digital-divide research (Norris 2001), which investigates to what extent, with the expansion of digital media, socially existing segmentations increase in respect of certain criteria like age, gender, education, etc. Issues about media and inequality, however, reach a lot further. From the point of view of mediatization research such descriptions appear to be problematic, if they exclusively depart from the diffusion of an individual medium. Especially in the case of the "digital divide", a cross-media perspective is just as central as the consideration of direct communication because insufficient "access" and "ways of use" of one medium can generally be balanced with other forms of media – while this is, however, not an automatism (Madianou/Miller 2012). In this sense, the "digital divide […] has to be understood as a dynamic multi-level concept" (Krotz 2007: 287) which takes into account the different "equalities" and "inequalities" in their potentially reciprocal enforcement and their possible compensation. From this point of view, the "digital divide" as well as other segmentations in changing communicative figurations refer to the very basic question of the extent to which, according to Pierre Bourdieu (2010), communicative figurations and their growing mediatization increase "economic", "cultural" and "social capital".

Finally, the *perspective of power* is of high importance also to describe communicative figurations. The change of communicative figurations thus involves a change of the possibilities for "empowerment" and "disempowerment". Manuel Castells discussed this in great detail for the establishment of comprehensively mediatized "network societies" (Castells 1996, 1997), in which social movements are able to unfold a new form of power with the help of their "project identities". Yet he increasingly refers also to opposing moments due to the roles of companies and governments as "switches" between power-networks (Castells 2009). In addition, even communicative figurations related to the audio-visual are about power. Thus, hegemonic concepts of "individualized life styles" in consumer societies are communicated through transmedia productions, such as can be found in nomination shows and make-over formats (Ouellette/Hay 2008; Thomas 2010): The paradigm of "individualized choice" and "selection" is legitimized through the (e.g., internet-based) voting and the representation of an individually-selectable life in such programs.

If we take these four perspectives – belonging, rules, segmentation and power – together it becomes obvious how we have to contextualize our analysis of communicative figurations further: If we understand communicative figurations as the structured ways by which the communicative construction of culture and society takes place, they are also the means by which power, segmentation, rules and belonging are produced. And therefore we have to consider this in our investigation of communicative figurations.

However, it is important to have in mind that our operationalization is not about describing communicative figurations as such. As outlined above, we understand them as an intermediate concept to analyze mediatization practically. They are a helpful tool to focus what "changed" with mediatization. More generally speaking, the concept of communicative figuration offers a way to reflect that media are not the only driving force for change. Therefore, the more prominent question might be to *investigate how mediatized cultures*

and societies transform and which role media have for this transformation process. The concept of communicative figuration gives us the possibility to research this question in a twofold manner, either in a 'diachronous' or in a 'synchronous' way (for a more detailed explanation cf. Hepp 2014).

Clearly diachronous mediatization research entailing a comparison over time is the more obvious way: We investigate the communicative figurations at different points in time and compare the results of this. We can investigate for example the communicative figuration of families of the 1950s, do the same in the 1980s and 2010s, and then compare the results. For sure, the family has changed, and this is interwoven with media communicative change. The same can be said for other communicative figurations like the communicative figurations of public spheres, for example. To give a more detailed answer to how this change takes place in its relation to media communication we must turn to an analysis of the changing communicative figurations over the period of time in question.

But not only for practical reasons – diachronous research of this kind is enormously elaborate and mostly also expensive – is there also the need for synchronous mediatization research. The main reason for this is that the mediatization process is not linear but has certain 'eruptive' moments we might call "mediatization waves". This term indicates that certain media developments might result in a qualitatively different media environment that makes completely new communicative figurations possible. We can understand the recent phenomenon of digitalization as such a "mediatization wave", which is at the same time related to a far-reaching transformation of formerly non-digital media – television becomes internet television, cinema becomes digital cinema and so forth. But also other, nevertheless far-reaching changes in media history can be identified, like for example the emergence of photography and related visual media.

It is especially this kind of synchronous mediatization research that needs further methodological reflection than it has been undertaken up to now. This is a point where Actor Network Theory (ANT) can be a help for mediatization research. Starting with their methodological standpoint to "keep the social flat" (Latour 2007: 159), this approach is interested in how the social is made up by humans and their (inter)action with things. From such a more general, sociological point of view, also the emergence of certain media became an object of investigation, so for example the Kodak camera and the "mass market" of amateur photography. If we follow at this point Reese Jenkins' (1975) historical analysis and Bruno Latour's (1991) interpretation, we can capture a detailed stepby-step process in which the Kodak camera (as a certain media technology) and the "mass market" of amateur photography (with all its related practices) emerged simultaneously. Therefore, it is not the invention of a "new medium" which then was appropriated. In contrast, it is a circular, simultaneous process of "developing" this medium, on the one hand, and its "appropriation" by a wider group of people on the other. Therefore, important for synchronous mediatization research is an investigation of the close interweaving of media development and its appropriation. This is not something that came up lately, as it is often assumed in research on "social media" and the relation of programmers and users there. Rather, this seems to be a general pattern of media emergence.

While we also find concepts of such close interrelations in media and communication studies (cf. for a classical approach Mansell/Silverstone 1998), detailed analysis on these processes are far less common. The typical argument within media and communication re-

search is rather the idea of the "diffusion" of an "innovation" (Rogers 2003); that is, the dissemination of a medium that is thought as something already "complete". In extension to this, synchronous mediatization research might learn from ANT and comparable approaches that media change happens in a much more complex way – namely, in an interweaving of emerging media and the articulation of further media related practices. It becomes necessary to investigate such processes of co-articulation, especially in moments when so-called "new media" come up and turn the media environment upside down, and therefore the communicative figurations we are involved in and by which we communicatively construct our culture and society.

5. Conclusion: The transformation of communicative figurations

This article covered a broad spectrum of arguments: We started with the reflection that mediatization research should be grounded in symbolic interaction, a perspective that moves "communication" into the foreground. Because of that it is necessary to reflect how far the mediatization process is linked to the spread of four basic types of communication – types that still offer us a fundament to analyze specific forms, patterns and practices of communication. However, such an overall approximation falls short of providing an appropriate foundation for a practical investigation of mediatization. For this, we need a middle-range concept to ground the overall general idea of mediatization in symbolic interaction and in so doing make it researchable. We therefore outlined the concept of communicative figurations. The potential of this approach is that we can use it to analyze various phenomena at different levels. As Elias already wrote when he developed the idea of figurations: The potential of this idea is that we can analyze figurations across micro, meso and macro levels. This general statement is also correct for communicative figurations while our idea of communicative figurations is much more concrete: We understand communicative figurations as defined by certain forms of communication, by a typical media ensemble, by a constellation of actors and by a thematic framing. In so doing, communicative figurations are the structured communicative processes by which we construct our changing culture and society, related belongings, power relations, segmentations and rules. In such a view, a practical mediatization research means the analysis of changing communicative figurations (diachronous research) and upcoming new (synchronous research).

The core point for us is that such a move from an overall "meta process" or "panorama" of mediatization to symbolic interaction, and then to communicative figurations, also means a re-orientation of what mediatization research is about: Taking seriously the idea that mediatization research is interested in the *interrelation* between media-communicative and socio-cultural change, we have to develop an analytical narrative that avoids moving the media unquestioned into the centre of our conceptualizing of change. Also other "factors" can be driving forces of change. Again at this point the idea of communicative figurations is most helpful: It offers us a way to analyze the transformation of mediatized cultures and societies by focusing the changing communicative construction process as such. Only from such a conceptual starting point do we have the chance to reflect where the media are highly important for this transformation and where they are less so. In this sense, the outlined approach of communicative figurations is also a plea for a non-media-centric form of mediatization research.

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