ANDREAS HEPP

CULTURES OF MEDIATIZATION

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Translated by Keith Tribe

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Acknowledgements

Each book has a history – this one is no different. The first ideas for this volume go back to conversations with various colleagues around 2004 and 2005 who expressed the need for a book about present media cultures. The initial outlines were written in various versions; different chapters had been planned as part of this book but were eventually published as articles. The reason for this is that the concept for the text underwent change while it was still being formulated: more and more, it became obvious that the original idea to write an all-embracing monograph on media cultures in their various forms is at present an impossible undertaking. This is because we need far more research to be able to write such a book. Therefore, we need something completely different, i.e. an outline of the concepts and theoretical points of departure requisite for such analyses. The present book on *Cultures of Mediatization* is my attempt to do this.

Cultures of Mediatization is based on very different experiences. First of all, I want to mention the MA programme in Media Culture at the University of Bremen. Its various student projects analyse countless moments of media cultures. In my project-orientated teaching, I became increasingly aware that the most important question revolves around how we can study these moments of media culture in a way that enables the integration of such analyses. Second, I have to make mention of the cooperative and very collegial research at the ZeMKI (Centre in Media, Communication and Information Research) at the University of

Bremen on questions of the mediatization of culture in the context of eventization, migration, mobility and politics. This research demonstrated how far we are from an all-inclusive description of media cultures. At the same time, it indicates how necessary more integrative concepts and theoretizations are. And, third, there is the priority research programme, 'Mediatized Worlds', being developed by Friedrich Krotz, Christiane Funken, Michael Jäckel and myself and funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). This programme offers the space for an empirically based theoretization and conceptualization of mediatization.

This short description of the context in which *Cultures of Mediatization* has been written shows that the book owes a lot to a great number of people. First of all, this includes Friedrich Krotz, with whom I have had the chance to increasingly deepen our collaborative research on mediatization over recent years. Much of this book draws on contributions made by my colleagues at the ZeMKI, who have accompanied me for many years in the course of my empirical research on media culture: Andreas Breiter, who gave me many hints on questions of technology; Marco Höhn, with whom I had the chance to discuss various questions of youth scenes; Veronika Krönert, who together with me researched the mediatization of religion; Cigdem Bozdag and Laura Suna, who were involved with me in a project on the mediatization of diasporas; Michael Brüggemann, Katharina Kleinen-von Königslöw, Swantje Lingenberg, Anke Offerhaus and Johanna Möller, with whom I have analysed political discourse cultures in Europe; Matthias Berg and Cindy Roitsch, with whom I am at present working on the mediatization of communitization. This cooperative research has formed a very important basis for the present book. Last but not least, throughout my time at the University of Bremen my research has been greatly supported by Heide Pawlik.

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1

Introduction

Why should anyone today write a book about media culture? For a book with a title like this one, we should certainly ask this question right away, and this 'why?' has at least two aspects. First of all, it can be asked why one is still preoccupied by the *topic* of media culture. For decades there has been academic discussion of the degree to which our contemporary cultures are to be regarded as media cultures. Moreover, in our newspapers and magazines we also find discussion of tendencies of development, decline and change in our media cultures. Secondly, it can be asked why such discussion should take the *form* of a book. Today's media culture is of course increasingly digitalized, and the Internet is the dominating environment. I would like to respond to both questions at the beginning of this book.

The reason for dealing with the *topic* of media culture lies in the fact that, since the very first writings on modern mass culture and the influence of the media, ever more has been written and published about media culture. However, the analyses that have resulted are, I believe, inadequate for a proper appraisal of the ongoing transition of our culture into a media culture. This is because the significance of this transition is underrated, lacking sufficient understanding of the way in which the media – or, more exactly, communication via media – have increasingly left their mark on our everyday life, our identity and the way in which we live together. *Media* communication appears in such discussion as to some extent merely secondary. By contrast we can read pieces

in which media are talked up into the essence of change and transition – that we are leaving the era of the book or of the television and entering the bright new world of the Internet. A basic argument that will be developed in the course of this book is that both these ways of thinking about media culture are misguided. If we would really like to know how our culture has been and is being transformed into a media culture through the increasing use of media, then we need a much more complex approach than either of these extremes, so that we might avoid simplified argument. Media cultures are cultures of mediatization: that is, cultures that are 'moulded' by the media.

And here we can start to see why this should be presented in the form of a book. Some years ago now, in his historical study *In the Vineyard of the Text* (1993), the philosopher and theologian Ivan Illich examined the early development of the modern book, in the course of which he reflected that, as he wrote this book, the form of communication that it represented was threatened with decline. Time has passed since then, and the book as a form of communication is still here. Despite all the dire predictions, even the Internet has changed nothing. In fact, the Internet has become a platform for the purchase of printed books from websites as well as for downloading digital books. The actual non-disappearance of the book as a communicative form indicates that it has properties and possibilities that no Internet encyclopaedia, blog or article in an online academic journal has: the book makes it possible to develop an overarching argument through many pages, an argument that cannot be reduced to a few bullet points. Since an investigation of media culture involves wide-ranging questions affecting everybody, and not only academics interested in communication and the media, answers to these questions cannot be reduced to a few Wikipedia entries, for all one's sympathy with online reference sources. That is why my discussion and argument are presented in the form of a book. My hope in publishing in this form is that the book is interesting and readable, stimulating readers to develop a different way of dealing with media in everyday life.

But before I go any further, it is important to introduce and clarify three basic concepts, so that later misunderstanding

might be avoided: the concepts of communication, medium and culture.

If I refer to *communication*, I mean any form of symbolic interaction conducted either in a planned and conscious manner or in a highly habituated and socially situated way (Reichertz 2009: 94). 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. There is no 'natural reason' for calling a tree 'tree'. Interaction means people's reciprocally related social action. This implies that humans 'do something' in orientation with each other. Communication is fundamental to the human construction of reality: that is, we ourselves 'create' our social reality in multiple communicative processes. 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 also communicative action. Many theorists have discussed these issues (for an overview see Krotz 2008a). Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, whose work *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967) became a sociological classic, 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 and Luckmann 1967: 172). It would be hard to find a more striking and precise way of describing the constitutive force of communication for our human reality as so many of these forms of communication are today mediated by media.

Which brings us to the concept of *medium*. Wherever in the following I refer to a medium, I mean a given technological communication medium. I am not concerned with the general symbolic media discussed in sociological systems theory, such as power, money and love (which, in regard to my later usage, have also been confusingly called 'media of communication', see Luhmann 1997: 316ff.). Nor am I interested in language (or our bodies) as a 'primary medium' (Beth and Pross 1976: 112–19) based upon

the 'biological organization' of humans (Elias 1991: 23). My use of 'media' adheres quite closely to its everyday meaning: the set of institutions and technical apparata that we humans employ to communicate across space and time. Important here is that technical media of *communication* are at issue, those media that the informational theorist and organizational analyst Herbert Kubicek has called 'second-order media' (1997). For Kubicek, 'first-order media' are technological systems with particular functions and potentialities for the dissemination of information in the technical sense of the word: for instance, the Internet as a vehicle for the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) model. 'Second-order media' are in addition socio-cultural institutions of communication. This would be, for example, not the Internet itself but an online newspaper or email. And so when reference is made to 'media' in the following this means 'second-order media' media of this kind. This is a technical means of mediating communication involving (at minimum) a technically based system of signs embedded in a particular social institutional structure, and which as such facilitates communicative action (Beck 2006: 14).

The most complex concept used in this book is certainly that of *culture*, or media culture. Ultimately the entire book deals with the question of what media culture is. Without wishing to anticipate the arguments that I present, it nonetheless seems necessary to make some preliminary remarks about this, so that we do not get sidetracked from the very beginning. First of all, I use the expression 'culture', or 'media culture', in the singular when seeking to establish the term as a concept. Of course, I do not assume that there is only one (media) culture: from the empirical point of view there is only a plurality of cultures. In addition to that it has to be taken into account that cultures are formed at very different levels. A few years ago the German writer Eckhard Henscheid wrote a book with the title *All 756 Cultures: An Assessment* (2001). In what he referred to as a 'Grand Prix for cultures' he demonstrated the presence of 756 different ways of using the expression 'culture' in everyday German language. These run from A (*abendländischer Kultur* – occidental culture) to Z (*Zynismuskultur* – culture of cynicism). The book can be used as proof of the fact that there

is not simply a 'national culture' (which Henscheid refers to as 'German culture'), but multifarious cultures. I would like to take up this idea, although I would also wish to render it more precise than a simple additive approach can. Culture is always to do with the production of everyday meanings. Borrowing from Stuart Hall (1997: 222), we can understand by 'culture' the 'sum of the different classificatory systems and discursive formations' to which our production of everyday meanings relates. Systems of classification are ultimately the pattern of systematic relationships between signs (understanding 'sign' in a very broad sense, and not only as a linguistic sign). Discursive formations are continuing patterned and power-producing constellations of the use of these signs in linguistic and non-linguistic practice. Culture is always a matter of practice, the 'doing' part of the production of meanings. Hence culture is thoroughly contradictory and embedded in a process of social contestation and discussion. Questions of culture are likewise questions of power: whoever is able to define what 'culture' is and is not holds power. German discussion of a 'primary culture' (*Leitkultur*) is a clear example of this. What is important is to keep in mind that we live simultaneously in a number of cultures. These are not simply the given national cultures, but also 'democratic cultures', 'protest cultures', 'musical cultures', to cite some examples from Eckhard Henscheid's collection. We can take their sheer multiplicity as an indication that cultures flow into and over each other; they are not that well defined and are best conceived as 'thickenings'.

These points regarding the concept of culture already suggest how many-layered the phenomenon of media culture as 'cultures of mediatization' is. To deal with this we need to work with all three concepts – communication, medium and culture – and not seek to further differentiate them. Above all we need to see the connections between them. For I would in this book like to show that media cultures are those cultures whose primary resources are mediated by technological means of communication, and in this process are 'moulded' in various ways that must be carefully specified. That is the reason why I call them 'cultures of mediatization'.

The line of argument that I would like to develop in this book

runs as follows. I begin in Chapter 2 with a review of the existing theory and analysis of media culture. I will argue that these approaches do shed light upon important aspects of media culture, but they do not really provide anything in the way of an adequate point of departure for theoretically founded and empirically informed research into media culture. Hence, following such a critique, one must seek to construct a suitable point of departure step by step. This begins with the definition of mediatization as a metaprocess and panorama (Chapter 3), a definition which seeks a line of demarcation with respect to concepts of mediation (*Vermittlung*) and media logic. This conceptual work then allows us to develop in Chapter 4 an understanding of media culture which conceives this as cultures of mediatization. Useful concepts for the description of media cultures will here be found in the ideas of mediatized worlds, communication networks and communicative figuration. Chapter 5 then follows by raising an important aspect of today's media cultures: how we live in different forms of translocal communities. Finally, Chapter 6 deals with the question of what might be an appropriate methodological approach for the empirical study of media cultures. The book is concluded in Chapter 7, where I seek to formulate some thoughts on how, given the account of media cultures and their change which I have developed, further questions and criticism might be integrated.

This outline already makes clear that this book is no final description of what media cultures are today. It is more of a draft, an appeal, a sketch which seeks to grasp what we need to consider if we wish properly to comprehend ongoing cultural change. It is in this sense, then, that this book is intended to prompt further questions and research, rather than premature answers.