The Mediated Construction of Reality

Andreas Hepp
‘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 1966: 172)
‘Suppose the social to be mediated – what? […] So, how do we rethink the character of the social world (including ‘sociality’, ‘socialization’, ‘social order’, ‘society’), starting out from the principle that the social is constructed from, and through, technologically mediated processes and infrastructures of communication, that is, through what we have come to call ‘media’? ’
Outline

1. Deep mediatization
2. A figurational approach
3. Materialist phenomenology
Deep mediatization
i) What means ‘mediatization’?

Mediatization as a concept to analyse in a critical manner the (longterm) interrelation between the change of media and communications on the one hand and culture and society of the other hand.

- **Quantitative aspects**: social, spacious and temporal spreading of technologically based media of communication
- **Qualitative aspects**: ‘moulding’ of the media (institutionalisation and materialisation)
ii) What means ‘deep mediatization’?

**Deep mediatization** is an advanced stage of mediatization in which the fundaments of our social world are deeply related to media and their infrastructures.

- Differentiation
- Connectivity
- Omnipresence
- Pace of innovation
- Datafication
iii) How does deep mediatization relate to social construction?

**Primacy of direct communication:**

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**The difference of the ‘media manifold’:**

- Media as resources for direct communication
- Multiplicity of mediated communication
- Mediated parallel communication
- Datafied constructions of the social
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A figurational approach
The challenge of bridging concepts

**Macro:**
Society as a mediatized construction

**Micro:**
(Communicative) action as social practice

- Differenzierung
- Konnektivität
- Omnipräsenz
- Innovationsdichte
- Datafizierung
The challenge of bridging concepts

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Network
Assemblage
Figuration as a bridging concept

Point of reference:

Core idea:
- Figuration as structured ‘interdependences’ between humans with a shared orientation in action

Understanding of society:
- Society as a texture of various interrelated ‘figurations’ and ‘figurations of figurations’, bound with linking discourses (instead of ‘symbolic universes’)

Figuration as a bridging concept

*Trends of deep mediatization*

- Differentiation
- Connectivity
- Omnipresence
- Pace of innovation
- Datafication

*Society: media environment*

*Social domains: media ensemble*

*Individuals: media repertoire*

'Social domains as communicative figurations:

- Actor Constellation
- Frames of Relevance
- Communicative Practices

'Network'

'Assemblage'
3

Materialist phenomenology
A materialist phenomenology to understand the *mediated* construction of reality

**Materialist:**
We need a *materialist* phenomenology of the social world, because we need to consider media both as technologies including infrastructures and as processes of sense-making, if we want to understand how today’s social world comes into being.

**Phenomenology:**
We need a materialist *phenomenology* of the social world, because we believe that, whatever its appearance of complexity, even of opacity, the social world remains something accessible to interpretation and understanding by human actors, indeed a structure built up, in part, through those interpretations and understandings.
http://communicative-figurations.org