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**Book review of *Cultures of Mediatization*
by Andreas Hepp, Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press,
2012, 180 pages**

We live in a media-saturated world, both in terms of quantity – the unprecedented spread and diversity of technical media, and quality – everyday activities and relationships are increasingly re-imagined through media-related practices. In this context, the mediatization paradigm emerges as a conceptual framework and an active site of academic debate prompted by the need to revisit key questions regarding the relationship between media and culture, respectively between changes in media communication and processes of social and cultural transformation. The paradigm challenges the basic assumption upon which media effects theories rely, i.e. media exerts an external, one-sided influence on culture and society, focusing instead on how the centrality of media in contemporary culture is socially constructed, meaning that media are as much a part of social life as social life itself is increasingly permeated by media technologies.

As part of this paradigm shift, Andreas Hepp's book sets out to investigate "the ongoing transition of our culture into a media culture" (Hepp, 2013, p. 1), the concept of "media culture" developing out of a distinctive understanding of mediatization. Media cultures are cultures which have undergone a process of mediatization, where mediatization is regarded as a conceptual construct similar to those of globalization, individualization or commercialization, through which we render meaningful the long-lasting, broad-reaching changes generated by the permeation of media in different socio-cultural fields (politics, education, religion, everyday life etc.) and the complementary development of media configurations specific to each field. This has determined some authors (Hjarvard, 2014) to speak of mediatization as a "middle range theory" which needs to combine macroscopic narratives of change with the concrete forms taken by mediatization in different spheres of society.

A significant contribution stems from the book's equal concern for what media culture is, as well as what it is *not*, the first two chapters positioning Hepp's approach in contrast with established theories of media culture (Frankfurt School's theory of mass culture, medium theory, radical constructivism and digital culture), as well as with current models operating inside the mediatization paradigm (the mediation model of cultural studies and the institutional model of mediatization). This allows Hepp to push beyond what is usually acknowledged as literature review and approach existing theories in terms of their limitations as well as their persistent relevance for today's mediatized world. While Hepp rejects the idea that media

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culture is a mass culture in the sense of a hegemonic culture industry which traps the individual through the serialization of cultural commodities and the standardization of reception, he agrees that any theory of media culture should take into account the ubiquity of media communication without rendering it, however, an integrative or inescapable reality. In a similar manner, while Hepp rejects the view of media culture as a culture characterized by a dominant medium (television culture, Internet culture) or by a historical progression of dominant media (from oral cultures to digital cultures), he argues for a need to acknowledge the power of the medium in shaping interaction and to integrate the potentialities and restrictions of specific media in a transmedial and translocal approach towards communication. Media cultures transcend individual media (even new media, which tend to be regarded as the embodiment of high modernity), being articulated instead through communication networks integrated into larger “communicative figurations”, meaning “patterns of processes of communicative interweaving that exist across various media and have a frame that orients communicative action and therefore the sense-making practices of this figuration” (Hepp, 2014, p. 85).

Hepp also distinguishes his approach from the two main models he identifies as operating inside the mediatization paradigm. The mediation model of communication, originating from a cultural analytic orientation, regards media as embodiments of highly complex communicative relationships which go beyond the linear perspective of production, transmission and reception. Johan Fornäs (2000) refers in this sense to “the centrality of mediation in cultural studies”, where mediation regards simultaneously the tension existing between subjects, texts and contexts, as well as the mediation of meanings and interactions through texts. Hepp considers mediation as a precondition for mediatization, but argues that given its broad spectrum (mediation can be used to describe the general characteristics of any process of media communication) it fails to account for the transformational dimension involved in mediatization.

The second model focuses on media as institutions of mass communication which operate according to a “media logic”, the institutional model regarding mediatization as a process through which: a.) media logic, understood as the technological and symbolic *modus operandi* of the media, begins to exert increasing influence on other social fields, b.) media acquires the status of a social institution in its own right. Hepp considers that treating media as an institutionalized social system with its own logic runs not only the risk of reinforcing mediatization as a monolithic and linear process which disregards actual interaction, but also of rendering invisible the very process through which communicative action becomes institutionalized. According to Hepp, media emerge out of the technological materialization of numerous communicative actions, what appears according to the institutional model as a given, being in fact the product of a process of reification and objectification, through which communicative actions become congealed into institutions and technologies. Knoblauch (2013) refers to this theoretical framework as “communicative constructivism”, building upon Berger and Luckmann social constructivism, arguing that in order to understand how media institutions emerge as a result of the habitualization and routinization of media use, one needs to consider communicative action as the primary unit of analysis. This approach shifts the focus from the specificity of media as a logic to the process of communication itself, asking how technological mediation ultimately moulds human interaction through a patterning of communicative relationships.

Building on the distinctions identified so far, Hepp elaborates in the last three chapters a potential model for the study of mediatization, starting from the concept of “mediatized worlds”, cultures of mediatization being regarded as complexes of mediatized worlds. Me-

diatized worlds are small worlds, not in the sense of a limited domain or a restricted number of members, but in the sense of a hierarchy of relevance principles which restrict their complexity in relation to the broader life-world. The communicative actions of the members, including information access and exchange, are filtered and framed in virtue of the small world's background normative influence. According to Hepp, the study of media cultures should begin with the empirical study of mediatized small worlds (e.g. gaming communities, social movements, religious organizations) and their patterns of media engagement, both on a structural ("communication networks" and "communicative figurations") and personal level ("the subjective horizon of communitization" – in a fundamentally decentred world, the feeling of belonging is no longer restricted to either spatial and temporal proximity or to a single community; we can identify as members of numerous small worlds, both local or translocal, media playing an increasingly significant role in the construction of complex cultural identities).

Although mediatization research is yet to provide a comprehensive methodological framework, "Cultures of mediatization" is, through its concision and clarity, a significant contribution to the field, not only mapping the limitations of existing theories, but also pointing towards further directions of inquiry. In this sense, the book may be of interest to those studying local and translocal communities and the construction of cultural identities through the appropriation of various media or the emergence of digital media in light of processes of remediation and hybridization, but also to those who have a general interest in media communication and social theory. By suggesting a stronger grounding of media studies in social theory, the book contributes to ongoing efforts of finding the proper distance between broader theories of social and cultural transformation and situated instances of communicative action articulated through media technologies.

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