

Ethik in mediatisierten Welten

Tobias Eberwein · Matthias Karmasin
Friedrich Krotz · Matthias Rath *Eds.*

Responsibility and Resistance

Ethics in Mediatized Worlds



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Responsibility and Resistance: Conceptual Preliminaries

Friedrich Krotz, Matthias Karmasin, Matthias Rath
and Tobias Eberwein

1 Introduction

This volume deals with the normative challenges and the ethical questions imposed by, and through, the developments and changes in everyday life, culture and society in the context of media change. We are thus concerned with the questions of whether and how the central concept of (enlightened) ethics must evolve under these premises—or in other words: what form do ethics take in mediated societies? In order to address this question and to stimulate and initiate a debate, we have focused on two concepts: *responsibility* and *resistance*. The peer-reviewed volume *Responsibility and Resistance: Ethics in Mediatized Worlds* tries to shed light not only on the empirical evidence of change in mediatized

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societies, but also on the normative challenges and ethical possibilities of these developments.

In this introductory chapter, we will start with a short explanation for our referring to the broadly acknowledged concept of mediatization. We understand this to be a concept which may not only serve to grasp the digital changes of today, as a consequence of the advent of the computer as a programmable machine, but which also includes the social, economic, political and other consequences for human life. Next, we will briefly outline and explain the two central concepts of responsibility and resistance. Finally, we will give an overview of the contributions to be read in the following chapters.

2 Key Concepts, Key Questions

Today, we live in the midst of rapid cultural and social change, which is caused by the development of the media as well as by their usage for communication and increasingly for symbolic operations by people, organizations, institutions and companies. Furthermore, the diversity of traditional media is transforming as new ones emerge. Human communication is changing and, as a result, we live in an infrastructure of symbolic operations based on computers and digital networks, which are relevant for leisure time and work, shopping and education, for information and entertainment etc.

In recent years, this change was mostly referred to as *digital change* or *digitization*, and often this label is used with the intention to describe the consequences of this development. Digitization, however, in its original sense, is a purely technical concept and only expresses that the data basis on which media operate has shifted from analogue to digital data. Most people know this aspect of communication. But as long as they find alphabets in their e-books, which they can read, and listen to spoken words (as opposed to encrypted binary codes) on smartphones, and receive messages, music, movies and information in analogue form and can understand them, nobody really cares. Thus, the label 'digital' is not really relevant.

In a technical context, the interesting aspect is why this shift of data became necessary. It followed the advent of the symbolic machine computer, which is the driving force behind all those previously mentioned changes and makes all these new forms of communication and symbolic operations possible. The essence of the driving force and the actual developments could be better labelled as *computerization* instead of digitization, because it is not digital data that changes human communicative practices, but computers as programmable machines. These can

process digital data and—at least today—process nothing else other than digital data. However, despite the term computerization referring to the technical base of the changes, it is also a purely technical concept, which says little about the significant associated changes in everyday life, society and culture. In addition, it would also be a deterministic aberration if we were to regard these social and cultural changes as direct consequences of a technical innovation.

Thus, it makes sense to refer to the theory of *mediatization* that is developing worldwide—and to bring social and cultural changes, which the approach includes, to the fore. Simply by referring to the concept of media, we shift the focus away from the purely technical area. Although media are based on technology, those for communication only become media if they are institutionalized by the use of the people in society and culture. This is achieved by establishing norms, practices, expectations, organizations, companies and other social elements, which accompany the technology and make it a part of society.

In the frame of communication studies, mediatization is one of the most frequently used and discussed concepts. It enables researchers to understand, empirically study and theoretically reconstruct the social and cultural changes of today, in as far as they happen in the context of the developments in media and communication—not a causal relationship, but a related transformation. Terminologically, mediatization describes a process in which

by means of the coming into existence and the establishment of new media used by the people for specific purposes and the simultaneous transformations of the old media and the ways how they became used, human communication and therefore also the communicatively constructed realities, in other words culture and society, identity and everyday life, are changing. (Krotz 2007, p. 43)

However, this process does not simply serve to describe the emergence of a specific historical ‘media society’. Instead, mediatization is constructed as a ‘meta-process’, i.e. a development that is broad in scope, covers a long time span of human development and is relevant in one way or another for most cultures and societies. From this perspective, mediatization serves as an integrating concept like globalization or individualization. Mediatization, as a meta-process, thus allows us to reconstruct the transformation of communication forms and media practices as “longue durée” (Braudel), which comprises

a variety of comprehensive developments, sometimes already lasting for centuries, that commenced even before the invention of writing and that is still not completed yet with the invention of the present-day media. (Krotz 2007, p. 12)

Thus, mediatization research also has an orientation function for empirical research and theory-building. This is the case in this book, since it helps to create relationships between the growing number of empirical studies which analyze the emergence and use of media in concrete social and cultural contexts (“*moyenne durée*”) and to put them in order. A grasp of the theory is beneficial and may motivate further empirical studies. In this way, after its initial systematic description in 2001 followed by various case studies, mediatization theory has become the basic concept of manifold socio-scientific analyses on the micro and meso as well as the macro level. For example, the theory was used by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) Priority Program “Mediatized Worlds” (2011–2016), and can now be considered as empirically helpful and theoretically fruitful.

Besides their descriptive function, “*longue durée*” reconstructions or meta-processes also imply the potential of a normative and value-driven analysis of media change, which is not media-centric, but asks for specific changes in the lives of citizens and their social relations, institutions and organizations, as well as economy, education and other relevant areas of human life—e.g., with respect to democracy, justice and self-realization of the people. Therefore, mediatization is not only a functional social process, but also a concept on a superordinate level which

- describes the appropriation of media by human beings, and at the same time
- understands this process of appropriation as a process of shaping human communication.

Thus, the analysis of mediatization also raises questions of practical orientation for action (micro-social aspect), of institutionally designed options and limitations for action (meso-social aspect) and of social as well as supranational context factors (macro-social aspect) of media and communication practice.

In relation to this point of view, mediatization theory also moves into the focus of a normative approach to media and communication research, which is typical for contemporary media ethics (see Karmasin et al. 2013). Moreover, the consequentialist perspective of media ethics as applied ethics points towards a prospective impact assessment of technical developments in media for the future of communicative action, in particular to develop civil societies.

Among the many normative topics, two aspects seem to be particularly relevant, as many of those developments for the people are initialized within the economic field—and questions emerge as to how the economy operates responsibly and whether people accept or resist developments in appropriating new media in their own way:

1. the term *responsibility*, which is constitutive for modern ethics. It needs to be understood as a normative multi-relational claim to the individual for its actions and the resulting consequences as well as the active assumption of responsibility by the moral subject in the face of a globalized media world, in which supranational bodies and legislators cannot secure this assignment institutionally.
2. the term *resistance*, which is constitutive for modern social philosophy and critical social science. It can be understood as an act of refusal or active opposition towards individual, institutional or structural phenomena of suppression and manipulation. In this sense, resistance is reasoned with reference to an understanding of individual sovereignty.

Both aspects relate to the context of concrete life worlds that are the result—not only today, but generally—of a specific historical mediatization of human communication.

The anthology *Responsibility and Resistance: Ethics in Mediatized Worlds* brings together researchers that systematically illuminate mediatization in the above-mentioned sense from a normative perspective. Therefore, the key questions of this volume are:

- What are the most problematic forms of mediatized communicative actions, communication technologies and communication structures from a moral point of view?
- How can we discuss responsibility for and resistance to these forms of mediatization?
- Which normative principles can be made plausible?

The following chapters will answer these and other closely related questions in the research perspectives of various disciplines and across a broad spectrum of theoretical and empirical approaches.

3 Concept and Structure of the Book

The volume consists of twelve original contributions arranged in two sections: the first intends to describe the theoretical and historical foundations of the book; the second collects various analyses and case studies that approach the aspects of responsibility and resistance from different perspectives.

Part I (*Theoretical and historical foundations*) opens with *Friedrich Krotz*, who describes the mediatization approach in more detail, thus developing the conceptual basis for the whole volume. His contribution outlines some key characteristics of the current processes of media change by reference to both theoretical and empirical studies in the frame of mediatization research. As these processes are relevant for the self-realization of the people as well as for peace and democracy in general, Krotz concludes that now is the time to develop an ethic for the emerging mediatized forms of everyday life, culture and society. In his view, more critical research would not only stimulate a broader public discussion about the ethical dilemmas of mediatized worlds, but could also offer a basis for intervening political decisions.

The chapter by *Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz* and *Erik Koenen* offers a historical perspective on responsibility in mediatized words. The authors refer to the works of Karl Bücher, Erich Everth and Ernest Manheim to explore the development of mediation (*Vermittlung*) as a theoretical concept to understand public communication in the press-dominated—and in this sense: mediatized—society of the early 20th century. As Averbeck-Lietz and Koenen show, all three philosophers explicitly referred to mechanisms of mediation that integrate normative perspectives sustaining public resistance. On the basis of the historical analysis, it also becomes possible to develop a systematical understanding of responsible communication in the present.

Matthias Rath closes the book's first section by introducing an anthropological view on the theory of mediatization. From his philosophical perspective, mediatization is not only a descriptive template for distinct and historically differentiated media transformations, but rather an expression of a growing awareness that imputes a logic of change to observable media and communication practices. Rath uses his approach to mediatization as an awareness concept to discuss its relevance for today's concept of ethics in general. According to his analysis, "present-day normative ethics is the ethics of the mediatized world or it is none at all."

Part II (*Analyses and cases*) begins with a chapter by *Charles M. Ess*, who highlights the tensions between foundational accounts of the human being in positivist social science and the insistence on human freedom, agency and affiliated capacities of responsibility, resistance and disobedience that may be regarded as typical for the mediatization approach. In order to explain these tensions, he draws on Kant's virtue ethics to develop a robust idea of the human subject as ethical agent. He then takes up understandings of complementarity and epistemological pluralism as first developed in Quantum Mechanics and then in the work of Karen Barad and Judith Simon as frameworks that can coherently conjoin contemporary social science with strong accounts of human freedom. Ess concludes

that the resulting coherency—or entanglement—between ethics and science implies new ethical responsibilities for social scientists as ‘virtuous agents’.

By contrast, *Thomas Steinmaurer* and *Helena Atteneder* conceptualize the permanent connectivities of the mediatized present as a new dispositif of communication that is defined by a hitherto unknown status of individual integration into the technological infrastructures of digital networks. Steinmaurer and Atteneder suggest adopting Hall’s model of encoding/decoding of communication within the context of digital network structures, in order to differentiate between various modes of ‘network behavior’. The ensuing analysis demonstrates that the ethical implications of current developments are considerable—and require concepts of digital ethics and resilience to be further developed in digital network environments.

Kathrin Friederike Müller discusses how the integration and use of new (digital) media can be conceptualized as a process of appropriation, which is shaped by accepting or rejecting media and mediatization. It is understood as a user-driven process during which the users of new media decide whether they understand the innovative and novel platforms and if their usage is adequate or not. The chapter aims to contribute theoretically to this topic by defining the users’ role in the mediatization of everyday life more precisely. Müller presents empirical findings that display how users negotiate mediatization and the functions of media in society.

Johanna Sumiala analyzes the phenomenon of digital witnessing on YouTube, by referring to a Finnish case that received broad public attention in 2008. On the grounds of an elaboration of the theoretical work on media witnessing by scholars such as John Durham Peters, John Ellis, Paul Frosh, Amit Pinchevski and Lilie Chouliaraki, Sumiala discusses the ideas of responsibility as agony and the sense of proper distance as necessary conditions for communicative action in ethically challenging situations.

The chapter by *Nina Köberer* turns the spotlight onto participatory forms of communication in the online world, where everyone can share media contents and, as the author states, “show solidarity ‘with just one click’ as an act of resistance”. The analysis demonstrates that there is an urgent need to reflect on these practices from a normative point of view and to accentuate which ethical challenges arise with new forms of participation. Köberer uses the mediatization approach as a heuristic to identify and classify emergent forms of social interaction and participation.

Michael Litschka focuses on the field of institutional ethics and discusses the relevance of corporate responsibility in a mediatized world. His contribution questions the relevance of the concept of ‘consumer sovereignty’ on the

theoretical basis of Amartya Sen's capability approach. According to this view, the ability to choose and make use of media offerings is dependent on the encompassing concept of 'media capabilities', and not on any rational choice actions by individuals. Following these arguments, the author shows that responsibility in a world of mediatised institutions must also be borne by institutions like media companies—and this example is examined in detail.

The case of journalism in change is also taken on by *Anke Trommershausen*, but her chapter employs a contrasting analytical approach. The author introduces the theoretical concepts of postmodern business ethics and the ethics as practice approach, in order to guide her study. As Trommershausen demonstrates, these two theoretical grounds give insight in how organizations and their ethics management can appreciate the new arising ethical practices of journalists in mediatised working environments. The contribution closes with an outlook of a possible empirical research agenda.

The chapter by *Gudrun Marci-Boehncke* deals with the challenges of mediatisation in the university training of future teachers. As the author indicates, there is an increasing need for an extensive change of the mindset of trainee teachers to cope with the demands of modern media education in a creative way. Against this background, she established a teaching and research project that concentrates on the question of how far mediatisation is a topic in current, award-winning literature for children and adolescents. In this context, Marci-Boehncke discusses the aspects of responsibility and resistance, in order to help teachers reflect on mediatisation and thus to develop their own attitude towards it.

The book concludes with a chapter by *Nicole Duller* and *Joan Ramon Rodriguez-Amat*, who consider sexual interactions with technological devices as mediatised sexualities. The authors combine the mediatisation approach with the perspective of Actor-Network Theory to enable a cross-disciplinary discussion about such "sex machines". The article presents a typology of sex machines that builds on the criteria of similarity, extension, substitution, sublimation, sensuality and creativity to provide a discussion on ethical issues. These include, among other things, the role of robots, surveillance, psychological, sociological and body-related concerns, which are also relevant for media and communication studies.

In summary, the texts gathered here are from various disciplines, which are based on a range of theoretical references and empirical approaches. They create a broad picture of what could be called the ethics of mediatised societies, but not by any means a conclusive one because we discuss emerging changes, and the transformations and developments are still ongoing. Further research and further discussions, especially involving a broad public, are necessary—and we will try

to be part of it, not only by publishing a series of books, but also by organizing conferences with a focus on the issues at stake.

The idea for this volume originated at an international conference that took place in December 2015 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. It was organized by Matthias Karmasin (Austrian Academy of Sciences/University of Klagenfurt), Friedrich Krotz (DFG Priority Program “Mediatized Worlds”/University of Bremen), Matthias Rath (Research Group Media Ethics/University of Education Ludwigsburg) and Tobias Eberwein (Austrian Academy of Sciences/University of Klagenfurt). In the context of this conference, the Interdisciplinary Media Ethics Center (IMEC) was created—a network of researchers that are dedicated to ethical debates in the frame of a critical understanding of human enlightenment. Within this framework, the discussion begun here is to be continued. We invite our readers to join us.

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Part I

Theoretical and Historical Foundations



Ethics of Mediatized Worlds: A Framing Introduction

Friedrich Krotz

Abstract

In recent decades, the system of mostly mass media has radically changed. Today, we live under conditions of a computer-controlled digital infrastructure, which is relevant for all symbolic actions and interactions—and this has fundamental consequences for all areas of human life. This is what mediatization research tries to grasp empirically and theoretically. As a consequence, we must develop an ethic for the emerging mediatized forms of everyday life, culture and society. This must also include an ethic for the ongoing development of media. In the second decade of the 21st century, media development is controlled by huge enterprises and the ideas of engineers. However, these developments are relevant for freedom and self-realization of the people and for peace and democracy. We thus need a broad ethical discussion about what is going on and where we want to go. This chapter describes the mediatization approach and discusses some questions of ethical relevance from empirical and theoretical work in the frame of mediatization research.

Keywords

Mediatization · Media change · Change of communication · Transformation of culture · Media ethics · Symbolic animal

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1 Introduction

Since some decades, we are living in a rapidly changing world of media, communication and, more precisely, of symbolic operations. These changes are of high importance for more or less all areas of people's social life and thus for the human being, understood to be a "symbolic animal" living in a symbolic world (Cassirer 2007; Krotz 2017a, b).

A serious academic approach must describe these developments as an *inter-related pair of transformations*:

On the one hand, there is a *technical and organizational transformation*—the growing importance of the nets of computers and digital devices, the rapid development of both hardware and software, and of specifically organized forms for their use by the people. Today, this transformation takes place under the influence of huge global enterprises, which, in a monopolistic way, try to manage human activity throughout the world. They, for example, intend to manage all of the social relations of all people like Facebook, they try to become universal warehouses like Amazon, they want to control all human knowledge like Google, and they are even interested to build an index of usefulness for all inhabitants of China like the Chinese government, just to mention some examples. Doing so, they use software, which collects all user-related data, which can be found in the nets, and even try to provoke the production of such data, in order to make money with that. In a similar way, all other human operations, in as far as they refer to symbols, are becoming organized with reference to computer nets and the related organizations, and thus all human communication becomes dependent of technical media and the organizing enterprises.

This technical and organizational transformation is usually called digitization, but must be understood as a transformation of the formerly existing media systems and the media-related human communication into a digital infrastructure for symbolic operations, controlled by computers, with specific organizing forms, in order to use them. More or less, this growing infrastructure includes, or is at least relevant for, *all of the symbolic operations of humankind*. It is driven by technological inventions, today mostly under control of the developing organizational interests of enterprises and bureaucratic institutions.

On the other hand, there is a related second *social and cultural transformation*, as the first technical and organizational transformation is becoming increasingly relevant for all areas of human life and communication and for all that is related to that: family life, friendship and education, work, knowledge, consumer activities and so on. This second transformation takes place at all levels of culture

and society—at the micro level of the single persons and their activities, at the mezzo level of enterprises, organizations, institutions and political parties, and at the macro level, as the transformations are also relevant for economy and democracy, cultural capital and health, all forms of mobility and so on. We already live quite different than we did in relatively recent times.

Obviously, both transformations follow their own rules, as both are highly complex. In addition, each one depends on the other, but also on many other conditions—all types of cultural, economic and social conditions, people's habits and education etc. Thus, both transformations cannot be understood as one being an intervening variable for the other or that there are only, or even mainly, causal relationships between them. However, they are nevertheless closely interrelated: both transformations exist in and on the basis of a dialectical relationship, and each one is a context of the other one.

One of the problems with that is *that the long-term consequences of these two transformations are totally unclear and open*. Nevertheless, we know that relevant human needs and interests are influenced by these transformations and that they have far-reaching consequences for the human forms of life like democracy and human self-realization. However, there is no broad public discourse about what is taking place and there are no framing political decisions, which give development a direction and a sense. Instead, there are a lot of technical and practical constraints, powerful enterprises and bureaucratic institutions, which follow their profit and other interests, and by that decide what happens today and in the future—without really taking responsibility for what they are doing.

In addition, there are threatening signs that the developments go in a dangerous direction. For example, since the courageous activities of Edward Snowden, we know that the governments and the bureaucracy of most nations use this infrastructure to observe and control other nations and their citizens, and similar activities are undertaken by huge global enterprises. At the same time, public discourse, the development of political frames, critical (not dystopian) research and a broad ethical discussion are not taking place. Thus, it seems that we all accept without question the interests of the governments, bureaucracy and global enterprises.

Habermas (1990) considers that democracy came into existence in Europe as a result of the cooperation of the economy and civil society against the feudalistic government and bureaucracy. In contrast to that, today, the economy, bureaucracy and government cooperate against the civil society, which they want to control and to manage. In this sense, it is a good first step that ethical and political discussions about the consequences of the two transformations are beginning and becoming more visible. This chapter will contribute to that aim.

What then is meant by ethics, here? Simply, we understand *ethics as the reflection in order to evaluate conditions, activities and developments with reference to their depending moral value*—this also includes bearing in mind in which contexts something is taking place. In the understanding of this article, ethics is and must be based on the values of enlightenment¹: human rights, democracy, justice, equal life chances, the rights and obligations of civil society, and self-realization of the people. From such a perspective, ethics as a part of philosophy, is an academic sub-discipline with a practical goal and thus must be a theoretically founded and empirically supported result of societal and individual reflections and discourses, justified not by exegetic interpretations, but by rigorous arguments (Rath 2014; Karmasin 2016).

Of course, such ethical discussions and their applications as political frames and rules must include all citizens and all people—we need *publicly discussed and democratically based ethics in this sense*. This then obviously demands a common basis and framework to describe the current developments, so that ethical discussions can start from common ground about how to analyze and evaluate concrete technological, organizational as well as social and cultural developments. It should then be possible to develop a comprehensive set of norms, values and principles to decide open questions and to pilot and control further developments, on the basis of democratic structures and public discourses. Clearly, such a common ground must take four aspects into consideration:

- We are living in an open process and do not know where the journey will take us—thus we must learn to *think in processes and not in given stable states*, for example, in order to influence future activities.
- The current developments must be understood to be *part of an historical long-term development*, as emerging media and ethical discussions on that accompany human development.
- We should not start to analyze mainly technology or organizational forms. Instead, we must *take a social perspective*—we must start with the perspective of how people experience new media and the changing conditions of life and whether the developments are helpful for democracy, human rights and self-realization.

¹... and not on a specific religion. Religious ethics seem to me to be mainly exegetical, but we need a democratically based ethics of our world.

- We must take into consideration that media development and the emergence of a computer-controlled infrastructure for human life and society are only one long-term development, as there are also others *like globalization, economization and individualization*.

These four points are exactly the basic points of the so-called mediatization approach, which tries to reconstruct the developments by describing and analyzing empirically and grasping theoretically the two transformations introduced above, which constitute mediatization as a long-term process. On the basis of this, one can draw practical and political conclusions. Thus, in the following section of this chapter, we give a very short introduction into the mediatization approach. In Section 3, we draw some conclusions, and in Section 4 discuss some more complex consequences from empirical research and theoretical work in the framework of the mediatization approach, which may be helpful for the necessary ethical discussions of today.

2 A Short Introduction to the Mediatization Approach²

‘Mediatization’ is a descriptive term with a long tradition in communication and media studies (Averbeck-Lietz 2014), but it has never been systematically developed. The approach is inspired by ideas of the so-called medium theory following Harold Innis (1951, 2007) and Marshall McLuhan (1964), but it tries to avoid the one-sided technological orientation and other problems of the medium theory (Krotz 2001, 2007; Krotz and Hepp 2011). However, the main reason why mediatization is an adequate concept to develop a theory of media change (Krotz 2014c, 2015) is because people experience the current changes in the old media and the emergence of the new media by speaking about the mediatization of their social relations, of work and leisure, of politics and economy, which is why it makes sense to adopt this name.

²This short introduction includes some common wording with a similar introduction, which is part of an article about the so-called ‘media logic’ approach (Krotz 2018), but also includes additional ideas. Broader explanations of and introductions into mediatization research can be found in Krotz (2017a, b, c).