



# The Forgotten Subject

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Subject Constitutions in  
Mediatized Everyday Worlds

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*Edited by*  
Peter Gentzel · Friedrich Krotz  
Jeffrey Wimmer · Rainer Winter

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# Contents

<b>Introduction: The Forgotten Subject in Communication Studies . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
Peter Gentzel, Friedrich Krotz, Jeffrey Wimmer, and Rainer Winter	
<b>Part I Subject Conceptions in Communication Studies Research and in the Light of Current Developments in Social and Cultural Studies</b>	
<b>How Does Communicating Constitute the Human Being? On the Subject Concept of Communication Studies in the Age of Digitally Mediatized Lifestyles . . . . .</b>	<b>17</b>
Friedrich Krotz	
<b>The Subject of Communicative Action, Subjectivity and Subjectification . . . . .</b>	<b>37</b>
Hubert Knoblauch	
<b>From Social Interaction to Digital Networking: Processes of Mediatization and the Transformations of the Self . . . . .</b>	<b>55</b>
Rainer Winter	
<b>Materiality, Technology and the Subject: Elements of Critical Communication and Media Analysis . . . . .</b>	<b>79</b>
Peter Gentzel	
<b>Media Use and Psychoanalysis: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives . . . . .</b>	<b>105</b>
Jacob Johanssen	

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<b>Subjectification in Datafied Societies: Dividualization as a Perspective on Communicative Negotiation Processes in Data-Driven Times . . . . .</b>	<b>123</b>
Jakob Hörtnagl	
<b>Part II Empirical Analyses of the Meaning of Subjectivity and Identity in and for Digital Communication in Mediatized Worlds</b>	
<b>The Narrated Self: Narrative Subject Constructions in the Sign of Medial and Socio-cultural Change . . . . .</b>	<b>145</b>
Christina Schachtner	
<b>From Subject to User: And Back? . . . . .</b>	<b>171</b>
Manfred Faßler	
<b>The History of Media-Based Technologies of the Self from Rousseau to Runtastic . . . . .</b>	<b>191</b>
Gerrit Fröhlich	
<b>Subject Staging and Communication Power Digital . . . . .</b>	<b>209</b>
Holger Herma and Laura Maleyka	
<b>On the Mediality of Pedagogical Relations and the Medial Side of Education . . . . .</b>	<b>233</b>
Kerstin Jergus	
<b>Friendzone Level 5000: Memes as Image-Mediated Practices of Subjectivation . . . . .</b>	<b>253</b>
Sascha Oswald	

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# Introduction: The Forgotten Subject in Communication Studies

Peter Gentzel, Friedrich Krotz, Jeffrey Wimmer,  
and Rainer Winter

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## Abstract

The volume focuses on the question of the transforming relationship between subject, communication and society, in which – according to our thesis – the currently rapid change of media plays a central role. The mediatization approach is recommended as an entry point into this complex question for several reasons, because it represents an analytically consistent perspective that brings together communicative and medial processes of change with social and cultural ones. From this perspective, subjects emerge on the basis of communicative actions, practices and habits and the processing of the experience associated with them, all of which are in turn closely linked to social contexts and processes.

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## 1 Introduction

The focus of this volume is the question of the transforming relationship between subject, communication and society, in which – according to our thesis – the currently rapid change of media plays a central role (cf. in detail Krotz, 2017, p. 31). The mediatization approach is recommended as an entry point into this complex question for several reasons, because it represents an analytically consistent perspective that brings together communicative and medial processes of change with social and cultural ones. From this perspective, subjects emerge on the basis of communicative actions, practices and habits and the processing of the experience associated with them, all of which are in turn closely linked to social contexts and processes. This framework of analysis ties in with the Animal Symbolicum’s conception of man (Cassirer, 2007) and cultural studies, and expands the study of communication processes to include their social as well as cultural dimensions (cf. Krotz’s contribution in detail). Phenomena of action coordination, communalization and socialization are taken into account as well as the symbolic forms of explicit and implicit knowledge. From an empirical point of view, personal and situational conditions of communication are increasingly coming into view. Thus, for an adequate understanding of subject-related processes, both concrete communication frames, roles, motives and contents as well as the interrelated, mutually distinguishable aspects of media as techniques, social institutions, staging apparatuses and the spaces of experience thus socially and technically spanned are analytically significant.

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## 2 Deficits in Communication Science, the Necessity of a Subject Concept and the Mediatization Approach as a Possible Starting Point

In the pre-digital journalism studies of the twentieth century, individuals were often considered solely as users of media, prototypically in the uses-and-gratifications approach as a bundle of needs, or conversely as objects of media effects (cf. Pürer, 2003). This abbreviation resulted from the media-centeredness of theory and empiricism at that time, which is most clearly expressed in the well-known Lasswell formula. Especially in German-language communication studies, the disciplinary material and formal objects were for a long time very narrowly bound to mass communication or public communication (cf. critically Hepp, 2016). More complex notions of individuality and subjectivity or of socialization and communization

were therefore hardly developed within this discipline, but were primarily derived from concepts of “media use and reception” or “audience”. Similarly, the dictum associated with the development of the uses-and-gratifications approach, “What do people do with the media?” (Rosengren et al., 1985) merely led to the consideration and aggregation of reified motives of single individuals. Accordingly, the “active recipient” in this context is also usually only someone who selects media offerings for reception on the basis of rational and reflected needs (cf. critically Dahlgren, 2013). Activities of understanding and mediating, of appropriation and use of media that go beyond this, in interaction with changing social and cultural framework conditions, have so far been more strongly addressed, above all, only within the framework of cultural studies or in relation to Bourdieu’s habitus approach (cf. the contributions in Hepp et al., 2015).

Accordingly, a broad discussion in communication studies of the differentiated ‘activities’ of the subject in confrontation with, for example, sociological or social-psychological theories has hardly taken place so far. At best, “the subject” has so far been considered in communication studies rather unspecifically and in part not always distinctly in relation to other constructs, such as “actor” and “individual” on the one hand and “identity” and “self-image” on the other. Exemplary, Reichert (2008, p. 47) refers to the rather broad and somewhat fuzzy conceptual field of the study of media-mediated processes of subjectivation:

In the discussion about the significance of self-thematization in blogs, wikis, chats, and forums, a kind of semantic conceptual field has recently emerged that attempts to define the practices of subjectification. This semantic web spans between the terms ‘identity work’, ‘biography work’, ‘self-narration’ and ‘self-management’ and is characterised by an emphatic concept of individuality.

Consequently, it is not surprising that, for example, it has not yet been clarified whether the acting subject is constituted in specific direct interaction or media-mediated communication processes. Or even what role the (media-mediated) reference to a sociocultural knowledge plays, and if so, in what mode this reference takes place. What has not been satisfactorily worked out so far is how the relationship between subject and identity must be conceived under the conditions of a digital media society. In the mediatized forms of contemporary social and cultural life, the previous disciplinary approaches are accordingly no longer sufficient, also because the development of the media is currently raising ever new questions. For in the mediatized worlds of the twenty-first century, the individual constitutes himself as an acting subject, especially in relation to the omnipresent and in many respects dominant digital media: in her/his media-related actions, she/he is actively involved

in the production of social realities, she/he participates in various cultural and social processes, she/he projects himself into the net, she/he continuously develops himself in social relationships through and in relation to it, and at the same time she/he permanently participates in forms of community and socialization in work and leisure. From a critical perspective, however, she/he is also confronted with (media) demands for self-control, self-organisation and/or self-socialisation (cf. e.g. Bröckling, 2007; Thomas, 2007).

In addition, however, the basic conditions of communication also change, which is of central importance because the subject ultimately emerges and develops in communicative practices. Thus, social and cultural structures such as hierarchy and power are inscribed in individuals via communicative processes, in order to be reproduced or changed by them in turn. Therefore, current theoretical debates and empirical studies increasingly focus on questions about the agency of actors in relation to techniques and objects (e.g. Lepa et al., 2014) or about the nature and meaning of individual ideas in light of an omnipresent and profound intertwining of reality with these (e.g. Couldry & Hepp, 2016).

In this respect, the question of the subject aims beyond communication studies to become a powerful heuristic key concept or analytical strategy (Reckwitz, 2008, p. 10 f.) of research in the humanities, social sciences and cultural studies. In this context, it can be observed that the construct subject does not seem to be in very good shape in other disciplines at present. The marginalization of subject concepts in recent social theoretical discourses can be read as an indication of this thesis. For example, in the debates on a *practice turn* or practice theories (PT) (Schatzki, 1996; Schatzki et al., 2001), the – urgently needed – reevaluation of the materiality of sociality and culture seems to be one-sidedly at the expense of the subject (Alkemeyer & Buschmann, 2016). At the very least, the emphasis on the routine, repetitive and habitualized character of practices is followed by a description of the social more in terms of order and stability. It is primarily the practices that contribute to a reproduction of the existing social order that are of interest. The disorganization and instability, the cultural change and the constant transformation of the social, which are more characteristic from the participant's perspective, are, in contrast, mostly relegated to the background. Uprisings and rebellions against the neoliberal order, such as *Occupy Wall Street* or the *Indignados movement* in Spain, are spectacular and extra-ordinary in their linking of street protests with digital forms of resistance, but clearly point to the transformative power of digital practices (cf. Winter, 2010, 2016), which needs to be taken more into account in the analysis. Similarly, the *Material Turn* associated with these discourses (Bennett & Joyce, 2010), as well as the interdisciplinary institutionalizing *Science and Technology Studies* (STS) (Lengersdorf & Wieser, 2014), while making important contributions

to the development of the theoretical and analytical tools of social science research, all too rarely seek to connect with subject theories. Finally, it is *Actor-Network Theory* (ANT) (Latour, 2007) that decidedly assumes the subject as the Archimedean point of previous social theory and then polemically argues against it.

Nevertheless, it makes sense to take up the impulses and contributions of these three research perspectives – PT, ANT and STS. For the technological “texture”, which represents a digital infrastructure for all symbolic operations of the lifeworld and synthesizes the social and cultural in general (Knorr-Cetina et al., 2017), makes more elaborate concepts necessary in order to be able to analyze precisely this. Furthermore, however, these analyses must then be re-integrated into the social and communicative practices of the everyday lifeworld. Only then can meaningful modulations of technology be truly understood, evaluated and criticized in socio-political terms. In this respect, it also helps to consult and further develop the classics of subject and subjectivation analysis.

Starting points for such research questions are provided above all by sociology, which, as is well known, has at its disposal a variety of historically developed and current conceptions of the subject that are located in quite different theoretical traditions: In early Marx’s man bound to the truth of practice and in self-realization in work; in the conception, going back to Mead, that man is constituted as an acting subject in his communicative interactions and relations; in the assumption, as in Goffman, that subject formation is characterized above all by the effort to successfully present one’s self; that, as in Habermas, it is normatively about a subject capable of communication; that practice and habitus are of central importance for the formation of subject structures, as in Bourdieu; that it is the socially formed inner structures of the human being, as in Freud, in which the subject expresses itself and appropriates the world; that, as in Foucault, it formats itself within the social conditions of power or, as in Butler, is only produced by these. In this context, the associated social processes must then also be considered more closely. Here, for example, questions arise as to how helpful concepts such as individualization or identity still are today in order to be able to adequately examine the emergence and consequences of digital action in mediatized worlds. And how do we have to further develop our current theoretical concepts of social worlds, communicative figurations, neo-tribes etc. in order to be able to adequately describe today’s community processes?

However, it is not only the classics of sociological theory formation that form important starting points for an understanding of a communicative subject that needs to be (re)developed. Rather, numerous other conceptual approaches should also be mentioned that have contributed to the further development of communication studies in the past and that can contribute to the development of a processual

concept of the subject. In particular, psychoanalysis, Western Marxism and critical theory should be mentioned here: Psychoanalysis, as is well known, foregrounds the relationship between nature and culture condensed into the human being and his structure of action and experience in society. Western Marxism derives its image of man from the analysis of capital and labour and thus from the perspective of structural power, alienated labour relations and therefore asymmetrically constituted society. Critical theory has always been a relevant basis for media and cultural analysis, at least in Germany, and will continue to be so, especially on the basis of its references to psychoanalysis and Marxism, in the conceptualization of a theory of the subject under radical conditions of media change.

Far from being able to comprehensively answer all the questions grounded in these considerations, the theoretical arguments and empirical analyses briefly sketched here make it necessary to develop subject concepts that expand and overcome the long-dominant media-centered perspective through research in the sense of mediatization research in a broader socially and culturally centered perspective. As is well known, the mediatization approach<sup>1</sup> assumes a fundamental change of everyday life, culture and society in the context of the change of the media. Accordingly, it aims to take a current, historical and critical look at these two transformations – of the media on the one hand, and of human life forms on the other – and their interrelationship, i.e. to examine them empirically and to grasp them theoretically. In this context, mediatization is understood as a so-called meta-process, i.e. as a development that takes place in a culturally and socially dependent manner, but is also of long-term significance for the development of humanity as a whole; furthermore, as a process that has always accompanied human development. Therefore, mediatization must always be examined in the context of other metaproceses such as globalization, individualization, and economization (Krotz, 2001, 2011, 2014).

According to this, today's media change, which is often called digitalization in a somewhat undifferentiated and technology-deterministic way, must be traced back in particular to the potentials and uses of computers and the transition of media into hardware-software systems, and thus understood as the emergence of a general, digital, computer-based infrastructure for all symbolic operations of humankind, in which the old media systems are absorbed. On this basis, we call a social or cultural phenomenon, or an area of human action such as one's family, friendships, or work situation, mediatized when the way in which this phenomenon 'works' cannot be understood without taking into account the media and their meaning for it. One area

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<sup>1</sup>For introductory and further literature, see Krotz (2001, 2007) and Krotz et al. (2014, 2017).

of such change that is increasingly being studied in detail is the socialization of future generations. Growing up today, at least in industrial societies, takes place in the context of a constant presence of the Internet, smartphones and the like, and the consequences of these developments are now also widely discussed (cf. the contributions in Hoffmann et al., 2017).<sup>2</sup>

From these considerations, the question is immediately plausible whether the change of everyday life, culture and society in the context of the change of the media is limited to the environment of individuals, or whether the communicative subject also changes under such conditions, or whether it requires new competencies and skills as well as new integration mechanisms of increasingly complex contexts of experience, and what role changing socialization conditions play for this. This alone raises the question formulated at the beginning about the subject and its relationship to communication and society more fundamentally than ever before, since even in digital times the subject wants to be, or as a rule claims to be, the subject of its communication, however, with whom and for whatever reason.<sup>3</sup>

Analytical considerations on this can accordingly be linked to the “natural changeability of man as a social constant” (Elias, 1986, p. 110 ff.), which is inherent in man’s ability to actively and communicatively shape culture and society and in his dependence on it. In this respect, the change in the forms of human coexistence is not based on their biology or on the interplay of stimuli and reactions, but precisely on this social and cultural, especially sense-related variability (Linton, 1974, first 1945). For the change of people and their forms of living together, the respective means of communication are then of course also of particular importance (Elias, 1986, p. 118 ff.), which people acquire in their socialization processes and in their social actions throughout their lives (Hoffmann et al., 2017). In terms of the meaning of media and communication, humans can therefore be described in a very general way as *Animal Symbolicum* (Cassirer, 2007, p. 52). As this expression suggests, both evolutionary emergence and corporeality are significant, as is the unconditional embedding of humans in a symbolic environment. In this respect, communication is a basic human ability and of central importance for socialisation, because it is the basis of social exchange, of learning and of social relationships and individual development, by means of which a person grows into society and

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<sup>2</sup>See also Röser et al. (2017) and Greschke et al. (2017) on the communication structures that develop in connection with media use and along which families are constituted today.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. also the discussion of the concept of subject by Daniel (1981), who relates this concept to integrating identity, reflective and reflected ego, and active self.

acquires competences and characteristics. And on the other hand, today's comprehensive media and communicative pressure on social institutions and processes, and on cultural senses and relevant discourses, causes social subjects to adapt to the resulting conditions and their changes. The social subject is thus a primarily communicatively based subject that changes in mediatization processes (Krotz, 2017). In the process, of course, not only people's modes of expression and representation are transformed, but also their use.

From the perspective of the mediatization approach, what is needed today is a more detailed concept of who actually communicates, i.e. how a communicatively understood subject constitutes itself in its communication with itself and with others and also develops in the context of the change in the media. For it is the resulting social relationships, knowledge and emotional experience, the institutional ties associated with them, the participation in culture and society mediated through them, which on the one hand constitute the human being as a subject in society, but on the other hand also produce the symbolic and conceptual categories in which perception and experience, feeling and thinking take place and which, through them, shape the human being.<sup>4</sup> Insofar as mediatization processes are concerned, this must also be about the mediatized ego, the mediatized self as well as mediatized identity, so to speak (Krotz, 2017). Of course, such a concept is not limited to the perspective of the mediatization approach, even if the analytical need for it has not always been adequately considered in the traditional approaches of communication studies so far – a deficit that the contributions presented in the following would like to counteract.

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### **3 Theoretical and Empirical Internal and External Perspectives: The Contributions of This Book**

The starting point for the anthology is the conference “Mediatization, Digital Practices and the Subject”, which took place from 25 to 27 November 2015 at the Haus der Wissenschaft in Bremen. It was organized by the DFG Priority Programme 1505 “Mediatized Worlds” in cooperation with the “Sociology of Media Communication” section of the German Association for Communication Studies and the “Sociology of Media and Communication” section of the

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<sup>4</sup>Of course, the term ‘shaping’ requires further differentiation, especially empirical differentiation. In the social sciences, it expresses the fact that one does not really know what exactly is happening, only that something is happening (cf. problematizing Wimmer, 2019).



German Sociological Association. The contributions presented briefly below are the result of a twofold selection process. First, they were specifically selected from the pool of conference papers, which all underwent a review process. Secondly, the form and orientation as well as the aim and added value of the intended publication were discussed in detail after the conference and the contributions were selected again on the basis of this concept. Finally, all authors were notified that their abstracts would be processed against the background of a good one-year distance (and the associated development processes).

On the basis of the foundations and research perspectives outlined in the previous section, the volume aims to discuss conditions of the constitution and construction of subjects with regard to cultural, social and media conditions and their significance for communication processes and communicative action in both theoretical and empirical terms. This distinction between theoretical-conceptual argumentation and empirical investigations, although closely connected in terms of research practice, is also reflected in the structure of the volume.

Thus, in a *first part*, contributions are gathered that primarily present theoretical and conceptual arguments. These contributions concern both the internal and the external dimension of research in communication studies, understood here as an integrative discipline. That is, subject conceptions of communication studies research as a whole are reconstructed, analyzed, criticized, and further perspectives are opened up (internal perspective). In addition, the relationship between subject, communication, society and media change is discussed in the light of the classics of sociological theory formation or current theory developments – e.g. from cultural studies, critical theory, psychoanalysis, communicative constructivism, STS or PT (external perspective).

In his contribution – which introduces the first part of the anthology – *Friedrich Krotz* makes it clear that the currently urgent question of the subject is to be seen above all in the context of digitalization, which permeates all things social. From the point of view of communication studies, this process requires two analytical approaches: not only an appropriate concept of the subject and a related understanding of subjectivation, but also a fundamental concept of communication and a related understanding of media change. *Hubert Knoblauch* reinterprets the concept of subject from the perspective of communicative constructivism. Using the example of showing, he clarifies that the subject is to be understood as an attribute of communicative action that can be empirically modelled with subjects, selves and identities. Building on this, the formation of agents, roles, and collective identities in the context of socialization can be understood as an unfinished process of double subjectification: On the one hand, the subject becomes more public in times of mediatization; on the other hand, there is an increased internalization of action.

*Rainer Winter* takes up the aspect of the mediatization of social networking analytically. From the perspective of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, he reconstructs how the self is formed in social interactions. The process of mediatization produces a digital self that is increasingly exposed to contexts of control and standardization. The article concludes by raising awareness of the need for civil society to be more intensively supported and encouraged to ensure that the digital transformation of the self does not curtail the freedom of the individual. *Peter Gentzel* takes up Winter's critical impetus in terms of content. In his programmatic contribution, he combines aspects of PT, STS and ANT with Martin Heidegger's analysis of technology in order to more appropriately investigate subjectivity and materiality in times of datafication (Couldry & Hepp, 2016). *Jacob Johansson* also integrates approaches from other disciplines to enrich the analytical perspective of communication studies. He presents selected psychoanalytic concepts that help to better understand the complexity of subjectification processes and formulate a more detailed subject theory. At the same time, methodological suggestions are also given. *Jakob Hörtnagel's* contribution rounds off the strongly theoretically-conceptually oriented first part. As in Gentzel's work, the diagnosis of the datafication of the subject is the starting point of his argumentation. However, Hörtnagel focuses on the approaches of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze and the associated concepts of governmentality and modulation. With these, it can be analytically traced how algorithmic processing processes become part of communicative acts and practices of self- and other-direction. He grasps these as processes of divisiveness, which context-sensitive mediatization research should take more into account.

The *second part* of the anthology contains more empirically-analytically oriented contributions that use case studies to describe the significance of subjectivity in and for digital(r) communication in mediatized worlds, such as communicative identity constructions in digital media environments. *Christina Schachtner* interprets from an intersubjective as well as narrative-theoretical perspective the results of an international research project in which several net actors and bloggers were interviewed. She is able to identify six types of narration or narrative practices, which in turn constantly shape the self of the actors in different ways in the various regions of the world. *Manfred Faßler* outlines the empirical topicality of the digital and irrevocable transformation of the (written world) subject into a computer user like a parforceride. This process goes hand in hand with a de-differentiation of social and technological constitution or of subject and user and the emergence of the so-called *prakteur*, who constantly adapts to the unavoidable coupling of networked things and programs as well as their participation requirements as a kind of open subject. Like Hörtnagel, *Gerrit Fröhlich* refers to Foucault's theoretical framework.

However, he focuses on the practices and procedures that decisively determine the process of subjectification and that can be subsumed under the concept of technologies of the self. Using two empirical case studies of media-based technologies of the self, diary-keeping in the eighteenth century and digital life management in the contemporary Quantify Yourself movement, he illustrates the potential of interdisciplinary analysis for more detailed insights. In their analysis of the commentary section of *ZEIT Online*, *Holger Herma* and *Laura Maleyka* empirically investigate the communication practices actors use to design themselves as subjects and the extent to which positioning of discussion participants can be interpreted as indications of subjectification processes. With recourse to Jo Reichertz's concept of communication power, they conclude that digital communication does not make subjectivity disappear, but rather functions as a generator of subjectivation. *Kerstin Jergus* illuminates the formation of the subject from the point of view of the mediality of the pedagogical. She is able to show that the media obliviousness of the current discourse on educational policy disregards the constitutive position of the so-called in-between, in which subject and world could enter into a relationship, with problematic consequences. Concluding the second part, *Sascha Oswald* focuses content-analytically on memes as visual practices of subjectivation. Using the case study of the friendzone discourse within the online community *9gag*, he illustrates the extent to which the specific medial properties of this Internet phenomenon as well as its presence in a very specifically structured digital space result in altered perceptual schemata and new techniques of self-thematization.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere thanks to the following people: Cathrin Despotović and Merle-Marie Kruse, who prepared and conducted the 2015 conference together with us, the series editors Maren Hartmann, Andreas Hepp, and Waldemar Vogelgesang, who made this volume possible, Julia Augart for proofreading, and Monika Mülhausen and Barbara Emig-Roller from Springer VS for the professional implementation of the anthology.

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## **Part I**

# **Subject Conceptions in Communication Studies Research and in the Light of Current Developments in Social and Cultural Studies**



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# How Does Communicating Constitute the Human Being? On the Subject Concept of Communication Studies in the Age of Digitally Mediatized Lifestyles

Friedrich Krotz

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## Abstract

The question of the subject of the digitally mediatized society is different today from the question of the subject of earlier societies or forms of coexistence that were not comprehensively constituted via computer networks. In order to answer this question, communication studies need an appropriate concept of the subject and a related understanding of subjectivation, a useful concept of human communication as the basis of subject and subjectivation, and an understanding of its change in the context of the change of the media. Current social conditions can be summarized in such a way that people (have to) increasingly understand their being as a being in transition, that they are increasingly bound to different and differently bequeathed discourses or, conversely, subjectively oriented to them, and that they are and have to be increasingly concerned with asserting a wholeness of the subject or at least a formable context of their person against these segmenting pressures.

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## 1 Introduction: Communicating Subjects in Mediatized Worlds

As already explained in the introduction to this volume, the results of research within the framework of the mediatization approach point to the fact that people are currently changing as subjects of society in the context of media change. For media today no longer serve only to inform, entertain and educate, to address once again their functions named in the pre-digital era. Rather, they are increasingly permeating all areas of human and social life; at the same time, media offerings such as Google, Facebook and others aim to organize the actions of their clients: Facebook, for example, social relations of all kinds, WhatsApp people's everyday communication. And the ever-increasing number of programs present as apps on smartphones increasingly accompany people throughout the day and are responsible for more and more activities, from cooking meals to shopping and driving to streaming services in music. Other devices are being developed that are even closer to the body – *Google Glasses*, medical-related measuring devices or watches with all kinds of additional functions.

In particular, the socialisation conditions of future generations, people's forms of reflection and also the significance of their communicative instruments such as language are changing (Hoffmann et al., 2017; Krotz, 2017b, c). The connection between media change and the change in communicatively based forms of everyday life, culture and society is primarily due to the change in human communication: this is becoming ubiquitous through the increasing connection to technical media, through smartphones, the Internet and apps, and is taking place at all times in more and more possible forms. In particular, actions that used to be carried out face-to-face or instrumentally with instruments and objects created for this purpose, such as waging war, medical operations on the body, or even many work processes, are transformed into activities that are media-mediated or mediatized, i.e. that take place in settings for which media are constitutive. Moreover, people's forms of communicative action are also increasingly structured by gigantic media conglomerates that control the media and their development and use them to monitor, collect data and influence their customers. This process affects many other areas of life: On knowledge, which is increasingly controlled by *Google* and only released in personalized versions; on the emergence of filter bubbles; on sexuality, which in turn seems to be transformed from direct interactions into machine-accompanied or controlled operations; on self-images and self-influence, for example through health apps; on constant comparisons and also increasing evaluations by individuals, but



also by bureaucratic or commercial institutions; all the way to the indices used by the Chinese government to assess the social usefulness of its citizens.

In this respect, the question of the subject of the digitally mediatized society, in contrast to the subject of earlier societies or forms of coexistence that were not comprehensively constituted via computer networks, is at issue. This is the subject of the present essay, which provides some framework considerations and reports on existing conceptions and studies of the subject. Section 2 will first deal with considerations on the concept of the subject and its relation to human communication, using the mediatization approach as a basis. Section 3 will then present various empirical and theoretical approaches from different sciences that may be relevant for the development of a communicative concept of the subject in today's mediatized worlds, with a particular focus on subject structures. Finally, Sect. 4 will deal with processes of subjectivation that come about situationally, but in which important social conditions are realized.

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## 2 Framework Conditions: Communicating, Mediatization, Subject and Subjectification

Whoever wants to deal with subject and subjectification and their change in the transition to computer-controlled and mediatized forms of human coexistence must deal with the relevant basic concepts. First, this requires an appropriate concept of subject and an understanding of subjectivation related to it; second, a useful concept of human communication as the basis of subject and subjectivation; and third, an understanding of its change in the context of the change of the media. With regard to the change of media and its social and cultural meaning, we refer here to the results of the mediatization approach.<sup>1</sup> Some framing considerations will now be made here on the other two aspects.

The *concept of communication* has undergone an almost inflationary development in recent decades parallel to the current mediatization processes. If one follows the German spelling dictionary *Duden* (1989, p. 367), communication in the eighteenth century still meant “notification, conversation” and was thus essentially tied to human action. Today, however, communication is also used in the context of fax machines, computers and robots, for activities of collective social actors such as broadcasters, for controlling rockets to the place of their explosion, for animals up to

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<sup>1</sup>In brief: Krotz (2017a, b, c), in more detail: Hepp (2012), Hjavard (2013), Krotz (2001, 2007), Krotz and Hepp (2012, 2013), Krotz et al. (2014), Lundby (2009, 2014).

snails and bacteria, even plants and trees are suspected of communication. In an abstract context this undoubtedly makes sense, but at the same time it is also important to focus on differences between the ‘communicating’ of the various possible actors, especially when asking about the transformation of the human subject. Such differences can only be hinted at here with examples: Fax machines ‘communicate’ successfully with each other when both devices involved have exactly the same data after the communication process. In animals, on the other hand, communication means, with few exceptions, stimulus-response mechanisms – communication takes place, for example, when the gazelle runs away in response to a warning call from another animal. And robots cannot understand language, but they can simulate it or respond to it: Human communicating cannot be reduced to any of these models – successful human communicating is not tied to identical bodies of knowledge or immediate responses, nor can it be understood as simulation, but as we know requires processes of understanding and aims at understanding (Habermas, 1987). The development of a communicatively directed concept of the subject, which wants to take a look at the change of the subject in the context of the change of the media, must start with a concept of human communicating that makes sense for this and is not reductionist. Only situational transmission can be observed, but this is preceded by a process of the genesis of a communicate, which arises in the inner reality of a communicator and is bound to the common definition of the situation. Downstream of the transmission, a processing of the transmitted communication and its contexts is required, which takes place within the framework of the inner reality of the others who are involved in the communication situation. Complex processes take place in all participants, which Mead, for example, described in the context of symbolic interactionism as tentative assumption of the role of the other and which are linked to empathy. These basic concepts for symbolically mediated interaction, which are oriented towards situational conversation, can be generalised to media-mediated forms of communication (cf. also Krotz, 2001, 2007 and, of course, fundamentally the works of Mead, 1969, 1973; Helle, 2001 and others).

Moreover, one needs a *concept of the subject*. This, too, is a contested area, as already alluded to in the introduction to the present volume. First of all, it must be taken into account that there are various concepts of the subject in the social sciences, which as a rule start from an empirically useful concept of an individual who is essentially also shaped by his communication through active and lifelong socialization. In its cultural and social dependence, this naturally differs from the absolutely set and autonomously conceived subject of “I think, therefore I am” (Descartes, 1986).

In the following, we use the term ‘subject’ in accordance with the definition in the *Lexikon zur Soziologie* in a sociological sense for “the experiencing and acting

individual with his needs and aspirations, who confronts, acts upon and is himself shaped by the material, social and cultural objects that make up his environment” (Klima, 1978, p. 664). Compatible with this, Schulze (1990, p. 747) understands ‘subject’ on an empirical basis as the indissoluble coupling of body and consciousness, which is, however, always also situationally bound. Similar concepts are also found in psychoanalysis and psychology. It is significant that such a definition of the term is based on people’s understanding of themselves: thus, more or less every person, at least in Western industrial societies, sees himself or herself as an active subject independent of others, and he or she also assumes that his or her environment is populated by other subjects. Subjectivity thus does not merge into identity and also not into the mechanisms of society, but contains a remainder relevant to action theory, insofar as every individual in principle remains creative and capable of action beyond given norms and in particular also reflects on his or her own actions and experiences (Daniel, 1981).

In this context, ‘subject’ and ‘subjectivity’ are not understood, as in philosophy, as absolute concepts that can be analysed overarchingly for themselves, but as historically and culturally dependent: The subject of the Middle Ages differs from that of a slaveholding society and just as arguably from the subject of German industrial society or that of indigenous peoples in, say, Latin America.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, such a conception of the subject aims at a cross-situational, culturally mediated subject structure. It conceives of the human being as an ‘animal symbolicum’ in Cassirer’s (2007) sense, locating the ‘subject’ between materiality and nature on the one hand and the symbolic world in which it lives on the other, but fundamentally incorporating both. Such subject structures are also often referred to as (communicative) social character or (communicative) habitus, as will be elaborated below. It is obvious that such a social character can describe the structures of action and experience of individuals in a real-typical perspective and thereby also take into account differences between social groupings, without, however, being able to describe all individuals in an equally differentiated manner or even to causally derive actions from them.

Even from such a comparatively simple and general concept of subject, some assumptions can be worked out that make clear the importance of communicating for the genesis and nature of social and historical subject structures: As an acting

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. also the conception of man of symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 1973; Helle, 2001; Mead, 1969, 1973) and the thesis of Shibutani: “The socialized person is a society in miniature” (Shibutani, 1955, p. 564), which at the same time express this dependence on culture and society and the possible creativity and freedom of communicating.

agent, the subject must, on the one hand, be able to distinguish between itself as an acting person and its environment, consequently between internal and external processes. Accordingly, the subject must have the ability to perceive, i.e. to see and hear, as well as the ability to understand, interpret and process what it sees and hears in some sense and to relate to it in a meaningful way in its actions. These modes of perception, abilities and competences are linked to biological potentials, but in the concrete case they are related to the respective cultural environment in which the person grows up (and acts throughout his or her life) and are thus fundamentally learned. As abilities acquired during socialisation, they are thus dependent on communicating with other people. For the human being comes into the world with a variety of potentials, which then develop into accustomed forms of perception and feeling, of speaking and moving (Linton, 1974). This includes, in particular, the human potential to be able to operate with symbols, by means of which the individual relates to the world, to others, and thus also to himself. By means of this, the individual inserts himself into the culture and society that has always been given to him, thereby reproducing and maintaining it, and thereby developing it further by taking it into account both as a context and as an object of his action. This happens at all possible levels of human action, and always in connection with language and the communicative circumstances into which individuals are born. For only through this can experience be conceptualized and processed. In comparison with animals, this can also be expressed in such a way that the human subject substitutes the lack of genetically determined stimulus-response patterns by, on the one hand, culturally and time-specific habits, and, on the other hand, by corresponding practices or ways of acting and thinking, which are adopted on the one hand, but are also always further developed.<sup>3</sup>

Social or communicative subjects are thus in principle oriented towards being viable in the respective culture and society. They must therefore possess common historically or culturally dependent competencies and structures, which can be described with *the concept of social character or habitus*. In this context, social character and habitus develop within the framework of, for example, predetermined structures of speaking, moving, thinking and acting, and thus within the framework of socially and culturally predetermined conditions. Of course, these always refer to power, which must be understood as a universal of human reality, even if the forms of power are culturally and historically changeable. In any case, it should be noted

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<sup>3</sup>Just as with animals, one can of course find fundamental differences with so-called artificial intelligences.