Andreas Hepp, **Cultures of Mediatization**, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012, 180 pp., $22.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by
Jefferson Pooley
Muhlenberg College, USA

When a new concept sweeps through an intellectual field, Susanne Langer once observed, it's easy to dismiss it as fleeting fashion. "Yet it is the most natural and appropriate thing in the world for a new problem or a new terminology," she wrote, "to have a vogue that crowds out everything else for a little while" (1941, p. 23). The rush to adopt a term may reflect the "fact that all sensitive and active minds turn at once to exploiting it" (ibid.). There's often something more than shallow faddism at play.
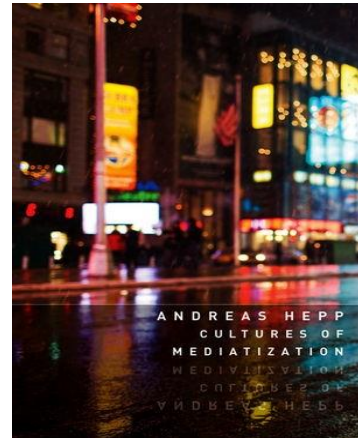
The word mediatization has certainly enjoyed a "sudden vogue" in media studies—and with it, the same reactive temptation to eye-roll and scoff. The term's English-language gawkiness has not helped; mediatization sounds like the latest round of jargon one-upsmanship. Andreas Hepp's **Cultures of Mediatization** is a Langer-confirming rebuke to the skeptics. The 2012 book, translated from the German, makes a persuasive case for mediatization as the field's core concept going forward.

That's a big claim, to be sure, but this is an especially ambitious (if brief) book. Hepp, citing his University of Bremen colleague Friedrich Krotz (2001), positions mediatization as analogous to centuries-long developments such as secularization, commercialization, and individualization. The term describes, in other words, long-term historical change, so that we can talk about—from the 15th century onward, say—"progressive mediatization" (Hepp, 2012, p. 103). Hepp supplies us with a vocabulary to fold media into the broad-sweep stories of social change that sociologists and historians have long told. Those accounts—as taught, for example, in the typical graduate-level sociological theory sequence—neglect the place of media. In the American academy at least, the social theory literature is embarrassingly segregated from the study of media. The great promise of mediatization, as a concept, is to bridge these islands of mutual neglect.

The book devotes a chapter to the already-knotty debate over the definition of mediatization. Hepp, following Krotz, wants *mediatization* to stand as a high-altitude descriptor for the stretched-out and uneven process by which media have interwoven with other social changes. Hepp is especially keen to distinguish his definition from those of others—such as Stig Hjarvard's—that posit a singular, underlying "media logic" (Hjarvard, 2008). Instead, and again with Krotz in mind, Hepp calls mediatization a *metaprocess* (Hepp, 2012, pp. 46–54)—similar to globalization—a limber, panoramic concept that serves as an orienting backdrop to empirical research and more modest, earth-bound theorizing. So while mediatization can refer to the accretive primacy—in both quantitative and qualitative terms—of media

technologies in daily life, there's nothing teleological or unilinear about the face (or, for that matter, the pace) of these changes. Indeed, the story at any given social moment is messy and particular, if only because media-related dynamics are tied up with other social processes.

Another way of saying this is that, for Hepp, it is a mistake to distinguish "the media" from "the social." In line with Norbert Elias (1998) and Anthony Giddens (1984), Hepp treats human action and social structure as mutually constitutive. The hard stuff of structure is nothing more than congealed human action that, in its apparent solidity, constrains and helps shape actors—who, in turn, reproduce and/or modify those self-same structures in the process. It makes little sense, then, to talk about media technologies as such, since they are only realized (and defined) in actual use. For Hepp, "technically mediated communication" can't be grasped outside of everyday appropriation. Television, for example, is a bundle of technical innovations that only became an identifiable medium in its varied but patterned uptake. Although media technologies and institutions originate in and depend on human action, they confront users as structured and thing-like. As adopted in everyday life, then, these media help give particular and evolving shape to social life—in often-unintended ways. Since the language of "effects" implies one-way causality, Hepp prefers the looser claim that media have "moulding forces" (Hepp, 2012, pp. 54–68) realized in everyday practice. Media exert a "pressure" that, however, has no fixed logic but varies with the context of use. The mobile phone, for example, "allows one to remain continuously connected with particular people, even when one is on the move—and the mobile tends to 'pressure' the individual to maintain such connectivity" (ibid., p. 54).

The mobile phone example is indicative of Hepp's focus on contemporary media cultures. The book, though brief, is thick with concepts developed against and used to analyze the highly networked and continent-hopping mediascapes of the 21st century. Though often brilliant and consistently insightful, these analyses neglect the longue-durée historical shifts to which mediatization is supposed to refer. In other words, mediatization as a historical process is largely displaced in the main body of the book by Hepp's treatment of specific, present-day "mediatized worlds". It is as if, at some unspecified but recent moment, much of the world crossed a threshold of media saturation that counts as "mediatized" (see p. 70). To be fair, Hepp has positioned mediatization as a panoramic backdrop which can inform, but not substitute for empirically grounded theory and research. Still, there is no principled reason to restrict our empirical investigations to the present set of media configurations; other concrete moments in time— snapshots in the panorama—surely deserve rigorous research attention as well, especially if we want to understand mediatization as a process and not merely as an achieved (if also complex and various) status.

History aside, Hepp's analysis of contemporary "cultures of mediatization" is genuinely impressive. In the especially rich fourth and fifth chapters, he constructs an entire conceptual edifice to make sense of specific (present-day) mediatized worlds, which I can only hint at in this review. By *mediatized world*, Hepp means particular experiential social formations constituted through (a mix of) media forms and uses, such as Apple fandom or a spread-out Rastafarian religious community. (Here and throughout the book, Hepp maintains a sophisticated dialogue with symbolic interactionism and phenomenological sociology; his key concepts are often ingenious, media-relevant adaptations of, for example, Anselm Strauss and Benita Luckmann.) In these two chapters, Hepp marshals an interlocking set of mezzo-level concepts to suggest how researchers might analyze (and compare) specific mediatized

worlds. He frequently refers to diasporic communities and the mediated cultures of international migrants—a topic that he and colleagues (Hepp, Bozdag, & Suna, 2012) have studied in the German context.

Hepp defines a *communication network* (2012, pp. 83–92) as any patterned flow of communication with a more or less stable mix of media forms and practices. Any single person can participate in multiple networks: "A youth with a migrant background can be part of the communication network of a local clique, also part of a deterritorial network of a diaspora, as well as of the centralized communicative network of certain national mass media" (ibid., p. 84). These networks can be compared according to a typology of "basic" media-communication structures (*direct* [face-to-face], *reciprocal* [technically mediated over a distance, with exchange], *produced* [one-to-many], and *virtualized* [interactive systems such as video games]). A number of different but interwoven communication networks may underlie any given mediatized world: A pattern like this he proposes to call, with a nod to Norbert Elias, a "communication figuration" (Hepp, 2012, pp. 92–97). For example, this is Hepp's description of the communication figuration of the migrant communities in Germany that he has studied:

> Here the communication networks of direct communication play a role, since the communicative networking of migrants takes place locally, through family conversations, meetings of clubs and associations and other events. But beyond this there is also reciprocal media communication that does not occur in one local place, but is conducted through (mobile) telephone, letters, email or (video) chatrooms, connecting to relatives in the home country, to other migrants of the same background, to migrants of other backgrounds in Germany and abroad. All of this must also be comprehended in terms of communication networks based upon produced media communication: the connection to the German-language area through TV (to learn the language), or access to the produced contents of the home country through satellite TV, Internet radio or (online) newspapers, through which access to the corresponding communication network in the home country is maintained. Finally, we have found that virtualized media communication in the form of computer games is of importance at least among younger migrants. (pp. 94–95)

Treated as a whole, migrants' communication figuration emphasizes "translocal" immediacy via all four media types, that is, its moulding force. By *translocal*, Hepp refers to detachment from a specific geography. It is a general feature of mediatized cultures that belonging—a felt membership in a community—need not correspond to territory. Hepp wants to remove Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991) from its typical national-geographic applications. *Translocal* signifies the way in which community formation (the book's Germanic term is *communitization*) has been in principle and in practice "deterritorialized." In large part because of mediatization, territory and community have been decoupled. Diasporas, brand "communities," social movements, and religious groups are prototypical examples of "deterritorial translocal communitizations" (Hepp, 2012, p. 111). We often feel a sense of belonging in multiple communities, some local and possibly inherited, others translocal and chosen. Every one of these communities—including the quintessentially "local" relationship of the romantic couple—is shot through with "media-mediated" (it's a great phrase) communication.

There are, of course, many other ways to talk about these developments, and without the heavy jargon. But the great virtue of *Cultures of Mediatization* is that the book proposes an entente cordiale between media scholarship and social theory. The idea of mediatization as a historical process—akin to other large-scale changes that have long preoccupied sociologists—is genuinely exciting. It is, in my view, the beachhead upon which a genuine dialogue could be launched.

References

Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism.* New York, NY: Verso.

Elias, N. (1998). Homo clausus: The thinking statues. In *On civilization, power, and knowledge: Selected writings* (pp. 269–290). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Hepp, A. (2012). *Cultures of mediatization*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Hepp, A., Bozdag, C., & Suna, L. (2012). Mediatized migrants: Media cultures and communicative networking in the diaspora. In L. Fortunati, R. Pertierra, & J. Vincent (Eds.), *Migrations, diaspora, and information technology in global societies* (pp. 172–188). London, UK: Routledge.

Hjarvard, S. (2008). The mediatization of society: A theory of the media as agents of social and cultural change. *Nordicom Review*, *29*(2), 105–134.

Krotz, F. (2001). *Die Mediatisierung kommunikativen Handelns: Der Wandel von Alltag rind sozialen Beziehungen, Kultur und Gesellschaft durch die Medien* [The mediatization of communicative action: The change in everyday and social relations, culture and society through media]. Opladen, Germany: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Langer, S. (1941). *Philosophy in a new key*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.