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3   Bridging the gap between sociology and communication science

Communication as social action

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This chapter describes and discusses how communication science became a social science by taking over research methods mainly from sociology and by understanding communication no longer as transport of information but as a form of social action. Based hereon, the chapter describes the commonalities and the different perspectives of sociology and communication science on communication and media. In spite of the fact that communication science adopted a lot of sociological theories—for example, from Adorno and Horkheimer or Habermas —both disciplines have different views on communication; sociology as a means to organize society, communication science as a fundamental feature for being human. Thus, both disciplines are different, but can learn a lot from the other.

3.1   Introduction

As is well known, communication science started at the beginning of the 20th century (at least in Germany) at the universities as journalism and newspaper studies. Since then, it has become a discipline in the academic field in its own right. For rather a long time communication science conceptualized communication as the transport of information. This was reflected in the famous sequence of questions Harold Lasswell (1948) used to describe the discipline: Who says what to whom by which channel and with which effect? This transport concept may have been helpful in those days, but is not really adequate to understand the role of communication in the media rich societies of today, as will be seen in this chapter.

It was an important contribution to communication science, when Karsten Renckstorf and others in the 1960s and 1970s created an understanding of media use or mediated communication as social action and started to develop a theory thereon. This view should be understood as a different and independent approach from the former concept of communication as the transport of information, as we will argue below. It creates a different theory. In addition, as social action is a sociological category, this poses at least two new questions: What then is the difference between sociology and communication science? And, what concept of communication as social action does the study of the mediatised societies of today need for analysis to be fruitful?

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To understand these developments and their importance for communication science and to answer these questions, it is necessary to tie up the discussions of the last century without blurring the differences between sociology and communication science. Of course, life is different today: we live in a media rich society, in mediatised and globalised cultures in which identity and everyday life, socialization and social relations cannot be understood without taking the media into account. Thus it is not enough just to look back; instead, based on past discussions, new theoretical and empirical work is necessary. All of this, of course in short form, is the topic of this chapter.

In this chapter we develop these topics in five steps. First, in section 2, we will sketch the development of communication science before the emergence of communication as social action. Then, we will deal with communication after this 'action theoretical turn' (section 3). In the fourth section, we will emphasise sociology's view on communication to make clear that communication science and sociology are related, and at the same time fundamentally different. Section five will discuss communication concepts in the media rich societies of today. The sixth section finally deals with open questions.

3.2   Communication from the perspective of communication science in the first half of last century

Communication science in the first half of the 20th century was never concerned with all existing forms of communication, as it only studied mass communication. Mediated interpersonal communication like using the telephone or writing a letter was never really a communication science topic. The study of face-to-face-communication took place only in the margins of this discipline, as all introductory books show (e.g., Maletzke, 1963; McQuail, 1996; Pürer, 2003). Instead, communication science started with the insight that mass communication was becoming more and more influential for society and politics, for the economy and democracy, for education and also for the relationship between governments and nations. Every media research history tells about the growing importance of newspapers in the second half of the 19th century, which—for example, in Germany—resulted in an emerging 'Zeitungswissenschaft' ('science of newspapers') at the universities in the first decades of the 20th century. In this context, sociologist Max Weber's 1911 demand that there should be a sociology of newspapers and their role in society and his desire for systematic empirical studies must be mentioned (something that was not done at that time) (see for these historical facts Pürer, 2003, p. 35). Another precursor of the emerging discipline in Germany was Wolfgang Riepl, who already in 1913 published a book about the history of communication that had come to a conclusion that even today is not familiar to all communication scholars: the success of new media does not suppress and rule out the old media. In such a process, the old ones will lose some functions and gain others—in the words of today, the development of the media must be described as an ongoing process of differentiation (Riepl, 1972), and not by fixed historical epochs.

Of course, communication science, after starting as a newspaper oriented science, soon became broader, especially because of the emergence of cinema and radio, the latter of which at its beginning was synonymous with 'broadcast'. Especially during the Second World War, the role of propaganda and, more generally, of the different possible media effects became central topics of research, as can be seen for example, in the work

of Paul F. Lazersfeld in the contexts of the 'American Soldier' research project (cf. Stouffer et al., 1966). Thus, in and after the Second World War, a new phase of communication science began, as it became a social science by asking for empirical studies and by using measurement as a methodology. The methodology of communication research at that time was heavily influenced by behaviourism, as were psychology and other social sciences (Pürer, 2003).

In general then, we can characterize communication science at the beginning of the 1950s by five relevant features:

- their *mass media orientation* (1),
- a *behaviourist* understanding of media use (2),
- a methodological understanding that empirical research consists of *measuring* content, use and effects (3),
- the idea that people using media should be understood as a collective but dispersed audience (4), a view that should be called an *institutional view* of media use and reception, as it refers to the interests of communicators,
- and, a *media centered* approach in the sense that the audience was understood as a target (5) with media effects just happening, as it was ironically expressed in the hypodermic needle model of communication.

A version of communication science from this time can be found in Gerhard Maletzke's famous *Psychology of Mass Communication*, which appeared in 1963 and which had been translated into a dozen other languages by the beginning of the 1980s.

3.3   Communication from the perspective of communication science after the action theoretical turn

The understanding of communication changed slowly in the 1950s and 1960s: Bauer (1960) discovered the obstinate audience; Klapper (1960) criticized media effects research and pointed to its failure. And Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) reanalysed earlier studies and found that mass communication effects must be seen in the context of interpersonal communication as intervening variable; they constructed the opinion leaders. The main theoretical assumption to overcome this crisis within communication science was the assumption that the audience is active, that it acts guided by motives in order to get gratifications by using a specific mass medium with a specific content. Thus, the uses and gratifications approach was born—this was the first action theoretical concept in mainstream communication science. It reduced human 'activity' to a specific measurable behaviour and at the same time reduced creativity to the selection of given TV or radio channels. Nevertheless, this was, compared with the list of typical features above, a new theoretical development to media-centrism (5), as media users were no longer seen only as targets, but as active beings with own motives.

In general, we should understand the uses and gratifications approach as an economically based approach. The *spiritus rector* of communication science of that time was Paul F. Lazarsfeld, who also in other contexts spoke of human action "…whenever we combine into one unit a goal directed series of behaviour that ends in a fairly distinguishable consummatory move" (Lazarsfeld, 1959, p. 2), and he understood "[t]he study of buying as a paradigm for the empirical analysis of action" (Lazarsfeld & Rosenberg, 1955, p. 392) (cf. also Krotz, 1983). Thus, communication as human action here was reduced to selecting specific content for reading, listening or viewing from accessible

channels as it was conceptualized by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974). In Germany, Drabczynski's book (1982) was influential in this direction. Nevertheless, activity as selectivity and action as motivated selection is a frequently used concept even today (cf. for a discussion also Hasebrink & Krotz, 1991).

At this point it is important to remind ourselves that the uses and gratifications approach was not the only action theoretical communication model. It was, however, *the only action theoretical communication model from mainstream communication science that was compatible with the above mentioned features (1), (2), (3) and (4)*: a mass media concept based on behaviourism, a measurable concept, still reproducing a media centered view that understands people as the audience of a medium and not as persons living in their own social environment with their own inner reality. As Alan Rubin explained some decades later (1994), the uses and gratification approach was created to make media effects research better. The uses and gratifications approach thus was not really interested in what people do with the media, it was interested in the role of intervening variables in making effects research better—at least in its basic conception.

Besides this mainstream strain of communication science, another line of thinking about communication has always existed as a sociological theory: symbolic interactionism. George Herbert Mead understood communication as symbolic interaction and thus as a practice by which human beings reproduce themselves in a specific historical and cultural way (Mead, 1969, 1973; Krotz, 2001). James Dewey in 1927 had already written a book (Dewey, 2001) opposing Walter Lippman's proposal to install an elitist democracy in which only experts were allowed to decide on public affairs. Herbert Blumer did empirical research about media on that basis (Blumer 1933). The idea of parasocial interaction and parasocial relations was created by Horton, Wohl and Strauss. These are genuine symbolic interactionist concepts (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Horton & Strauss, 1957). Their approach was, of course, directed at explaining how the emotional engagement of radio users came into existence, but they started at the interaction concept of symbolic interactionism and understood media related communication as a modification of face-to-face-communication. As face-to-face-communication is a form of social interaction, they called media related communication *parasocial interaction* and then studied *parasocial relations*—which depend on parasocial interaction—in the same way as social relations depend on social interaction and face-to-face-communication. (This, of course, especially in the uses and gratifications approach, was frequently misunderstood as these researchers did not make a difference between interaction and relation.)

Thus, the symbolic interactionist understanding of communication (cf. Krotz, 2001) became an interesting model for communication science in the 1950s and 1960s. The reason therefore was that the scientific community of communication researchers experienced the narrowness of their leading paradigms, and thus broadened their theory and research to include the communication concept of symbolic interactionism. When we compare symbolic interactionism as an action theoretical approach of media and communication research with the above listed five characteristic features of communication science and the uses and gratifications approach, the differences to uses and gratifications become evident: symbolic interactionism is the opposite of all five criteria mentioned as it defines communication not only as mass communication, but includes interpersonal and face-to-face-communication and understands mediated communication as a development and modification of face-to-face-communication. In addition, the

symbolic interactionism model is non-behaviourist, as it refers to meaning and sense making processes of the actors. It is not media centered and does not adopt the above mentioned institutional view, seeing communication as rooted in everyday life. In addition, it is common knowledge that research in the tradition of symbolic interactionism cannot operate with measurement concepts (Wilson, 1973; Blumer, 1973; and for communication research Krotz, 2005; Mikos, 2008).

Both action theoretical approaches, the uses and gratifications approach and the symbolic interactionism, became prominent in those years. For example, in Germany, there were two influential articles by Will Teichert (1972; 1973) and some books and articles by Karsten Renckstorf (1973, 1977). They introduced both approaches, that of symbolic interactionism and that of uses and gratifications, which Renckstorf in his early articles called the 'Nutzenansatz' ('uses approach') and which later was considered to be the name of a German version of the uses and gratifications approach.

Today the work of both is still quoted, although a lot of misunderstandings still exist about the common features and about the differences of these approaches. For example, Bentele, Brosius and Jarren in their encyclopedia of communication and media research (2006, p. 200) write that the Nutzenansatz is just the same as the uses and gratifications approach. This also is the position of Pürer (2003). However, Hugger (2008) at first calls the Nutzenansatz the German adaption of the uses and gratifications approach, and then names three specific features of it: its rather hardcore behaviourist roots in the work of Lazarsfeld, the reference to needs as reasons, what people expect of media, and then, astonishingly, says that this approach refers to symbolic interactionism. Also Burkart (1995, p. 211 ff.) in his influential textbook constructs a difference between the Nutzenansatz and uses and gratifications: Firstly, he emphasizes that the Nutzenansatz adopts a perspective on media use that is contrary to every effects measurement; secondly, he says that it adopts the idea from the uses and gratifications approach that people use media in order to obtain gratifications, which means people act on the basis of specific needs. And thirdly, he says that the Nutzenansatz understands media use as a form of social action, which includes the idea that action is the basic object of social research.

Thus, at the beginning Renckstorf's Nutzenansatz contributed to a blurring of the central features of symbolic interactionism on the one hand and to the behaviourist, institutionally oriented and measurement related uses and gratifications approach on the other hand. In his later article of 1989, Renckstorf argues much more clearly and constructs the basics of his media use as social action approach. Here, he mainly refers to symbolic interactionism and demarcates it from the positivistic and behaviourist approaches, but this did not reach the above quoted scholars (Renckstorf, 1989).

In this publication of 1989, Renckstorf thus provided the approach with a clear theoretical background by referring to Max Weber's famous understanding of social action, which he defines as any human behaviour if, and in as far as it is guided by subjectively defined sense (Weber, 1978, p. 9). In consequence, the important contribution of Renckstorf to communication science here is twofold. On the one hand, he defined communication as a form of human action in the sense of Weber and thus opened communication science to a new and fruitful discussion of what communication is, one that can refer to the sociological discussion about different action theoretical approaches. And, on the other hand, this makes clear that the uses and gratifications approach is nothing else then a behaviourist view of action that is independent of whether it is applied to media

or to anything else: activity from this point of view is more or less selection and nothing else is of interest. Thus, the conclusion should be that symbolic interactionism theory can provide communication science with a much broader (and, in my opinion, better) theory, as it does not confine activity to selection; this differentiates it from the uses and gratifications approach.

Summing up, the uses and gratifications approach as an action theoretical approach in its classical form is a functionalistic approach that does not refer to the basic 'sense' and 'meaning' category of what is fundamental for social action in the sense of Weber. The advantage of such a definition is that it opens the uses and gratifications approach to the measurement methodology of quantitative research, which cannot grasp sense. However, it must be seen that this makes the concept fundamentally different to the interpretative methodology of qualitative research used by Blumer (1973) or Wilson (1973) and all other symbolic interactionists.

Nevertheless this difference was not clear for 1970s' communication science and later, as it was not seen as a separating quality. Unfortunately, this unclear situation brought the discussion in communication science to an end, more or less at the end of the 1980s. The theoretical and empirical potential of the different approaches demanding a clear analysis of the concepts and ideas used thus was not exploited; the difference remained unclear.

In Germany, some years later, Teichert left the field of communication research and turned to journalism. Renckstorf, as far as I see, did not make any attempt to integrate the symbolic interactionist parasocial interaction approach explicitly into his media use as social action approach, in spite of the fact that he referred to symbolic interactionism in a broad way. Some empirical studies by Renckstorf, Westerik, and colleagues referred to the media use as social action approach, but there was no ongoing general debate with theoretical goals. The action theoretical assumptions of the emerging cultural studies approach at that time, as it was still called at the beginning of the nineties (Morley, 1996), would also have had potential to adapt the symbolic interactionist approach to communication science, but this discussion did not really take place. It may be that the end of this discussion was a consequence of the media developments of that time, the large scale growth of commercial TV and, of course, the emergence of the digital media.

Thus, the conceptual and theoretical development of communication as social action did not go on, and even now the question remains open about the difference between sociology and communication science.

3.4   Communication from the perspective of sociology

We start here with the following main thesis: In the 19th century, sociology in general was interested in communication only as a means and not as a topic of its own. The leading questions at that time were concerned with how society is possible and how it functions. The usual answer of that time was that the structure and development of society was given by the economy and its organisation, and communication was seen only as a more or less helpful instrument used by people. In the 20th century the same is still true, but at least some approaches go further: mainly the symbolic interactionism of George Herbert Mead (1969, 1973), the work of Jürgen Habermas (1987) and some research that has its roots in the sociology of knowledge of Karl Mannheim (1980). Of course, we can sketch this only very roughly here.

Sociology started as the science of how society is possible and how it was and should be organised. When we look at the so called classic authors of sociology, for example, when we read Comte, Marx or Durkheim, in general, humans appear to be the only beings that are able to work and to transform nature, and as beings that are dependent of those transformations to reproduce their material life (Kiss, 1973; Aron, 1979; Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). For example, Marx and Engels in the *German Ideology* explain: "Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life" (Marx & Engels, 2008).

As a consequence, in Marxist theory and in most sociological approaches of the 19th century, society is moulded by people's relations to the means of production, and all power appears to be based on that. The Marxist concept for all that is not material, for all that makes sense and that could be understood as meaning, was then ideology. The base – superstructure form which tries to explain human thought and experienced reality as a more or less one-sided mechanical consequence of basic relations and of class position then became relevant for those relations to the means of production. Hence, communication is to be analysed as a means of organising and coordinating the respective forms of work and society, and each empirical analysis then must include the ideological content of thinking and experiencing and is mostly confined to that. Thus, sociology before the 20th century did not really have its own concept of communication and it had no real understanding of its role in society. The main concepts used by sociology to refer to communication have been language and interaction, but communication has not been analysed as a topic of its own.

This changed, at least in specific approaches, in the 20th century. Max Weber, as quoted above, introduced his concept of social action into sociology, and thus opened a new field of sociological studies. But he still was not really concerned with communication in its entirety, as he again understood communication not as the basic activity of human beings (Weber, 1978). Instead, for example, he demanded studies about mass communication and democracy, which typically in the 19th century (and in part still today) understood communication only as a means of transporting concepts, and that were considered to be more important (cf. Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). In the same way, behaviourism and the measurement methodology that emerged in the first half of the 20th century had no real sensibility for the fragile and tentative character of speaking, understanding and answering: When one understands *conversation* between two or more human beings as the basic form of communication, then it is evident that communication is a sequence of acts that depends on cultural, social and situational contexts, on empathy and understanding, on impression and expression, as can be seen for example, in the work of Erving Goffman (1971). The relations between participants and their activities thus are not causal, but interactional; what happens is always fragile and tentative, and each such conversation develops by explaining and understanding things better in an ongoing process. This cannot be theoretically understood or empirically grasped by only searching for causal relations between the different contributions, by only constructing motives that last longer than the situation, or by ignoring the inner reality of the participants.

This character of communication did not become a topic of sociology before the work of pragmatic sociologist George Herbert Mead. He understood communication as a form of symbolic interaction (Mead, 1969, 1973). In his theory, what is true for symbolic interaction is also true for communication. In particular, Mead was the first sociologist who studied communication and interaction in two complementary ways: He analysed communication as a form of social action with consequences for the participants, the situation, society and culture. And, he also tried to find out what the conditions and presuppositions for communication are—not only, what people must be able to do, but also, how they must construct themselves in the process of growing up to be able to communicate in a specific human way. By doing so, he showed us that communication is relevant for humans in order to become human and how this happens and that communication creates the human beings as they are: communication as a social practice demands from the participants consciousness of the situation, the other participants and of their own intentions (Krotz, 2007a). Thus, for example, self-consciousness is also a specific communication based human feature—and evidently such self-consciousness is a prerequisite for dealing with symbols and constructing meaning. Thus, to communicate also produces such human features, and this makes human beings human.

It is thus no accident that besides Ferdinand de Saussure (1967), the second great semiotic approach comes from Charles Sanders Peirce (1998), who, like Mead, also belongs to American pragmatism—together they created a new understanding of signs, language and speaking and thus prepared the way for what was later called the symbolic turn in social and human sciences.

A sociological theorist who developed theories rather compatible with those of Mead was Alfred Schütz with his phenomenological sociology (1971) and his followers Berger & Luckmann (1980). Also worth mentioning here are Karl Mannheim (1980) and other sociologists of knowledge; for example, Norbert Elias (1972, 1993, 1994) who referred to Mannheim's ideas. Altogether they have a unique position because they start with the importance of the symbolic and the concept of the meaning of symbols. For example, in his later work Norbert Elias (1989) developed a theory of the symbolic and thus started studies in communication. In his view, human beings live in a *five dimensional reality*—three spatial dimensions, time, and their embedding in the symbolic world, without which they cannot act. Thus, not the material objects are the basis of human action and of what happens,[1] but the shared meaning of symbols that are constructed by human practices, which leads to a much more realistic concept of materialism, as all objects have not only a material realisation, but are also symbols for specific practices—this is the basis of Blumer's definition of symbolic interactionism (cf. Blumer, 1973).

Concerning Marxism, thinkers like Antonio Gramsci (1991) at least searched for new ideas to overcome the strict linear relation and dependence between the material world and a derived ideology (and the symbolic world) and also the assumption that consciousness strictly follows class position. Later also the Frankfurt school, the French structuralists and British cultural studies, especially Stuart Hall argued likewise. In this line, finally Jürgen Habermas (1987, see also his early work of 1990) must be mentioned, who in his theory of communicative action tries to bring Mead and Marx and other theoretical authors together and developed the foundations of a sociology that is based on communicative action.

But it cannot be said that the theories mentioned define the central paradigm in sociology of today (cf. Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). Sociology is still a discipline that operates in a complex multitude of approaches, but it is not centrally based on a sociology of language and communication or on a symbol theory. There is also no real dialectical theory of the relations between thinking, speaking and acting, as would be necessary. The studies and theories mentioned are in part very interesting, but more or less in the margin of sociology today, as can be seen reading an introductory book into sociology (e.g., Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). We thus conclude that the image of the human being in sociology is still that of the being who can work and transforms nature in a collective way because such a transformation is necessary as a basis for living, and this is a rather different view of the human than that of communication science.

3.5   The humans living in media rich societies as seen by communication science

Of course we must say that sociology developed a lot of theories and ideas helpful for communication science. Communication science should in general be seen as a cross-sectional discipline sharing a lot of theories and approaches with psychology, political science, media studies, and other disciplines. A lot of fundamental theories are derived from sociology: symbolic interactionism, the work of Habermas (1987), Luhmann's system theory (Luhmann, 2006), the cultural industry theory of Horkheimer and Adorno (1971), Goffman's (1971) interaction studies, for example. Also, research methodology and most research methods of communication science as a social science stem from sociology (cf. Krotz, 2005). Thus, there is an important connection between sociology and communication science, although they are very different from one another, as we can see when comparing their basic views of human beings. We described the image of humans in sociology above as the natural being producing the material basis of its life by transforming nature. In communication science, the starting point instead is the human being as the only being that has a complex language and uses a complex system of symbols, and the only being that needs such a complex symbol system and depends on its use. It is the use of symbols and the production of meaning that makes humans a species of its own, and thus symbol production and use is basic for any theory of communication—the human being is the one and only being that is a symbolic being. At the same time, this means that logically semiotics are basic for any communication science that wants to understand human existence in a broader way than just media use.

In addition, when we look carefully at the history of sociology and communication science, we can see that communication in the frames of each of these two disciplines is very differently understood. Sociology must learn that an understanding of communication just as a means is not enough to reconstruct society theoretically and to understand the forms of human living together—instead, communication as a basic activity of humans that are understood as symbolic beings must be seen as an independent area of human activity. Communication science must learn that communication is not just a measurable happening between people, a transportation of information or more or less automatic behaviour, but a fundamental human practice that creates the human beings as human beings. As we live in a web of meaning, as Clifford Geertz put it (1991), the 'symbolic' needs more attention in communication science, as this symbolic refers to sense and meaning as it was understood by Max Weber and George Herbert Mead, as

quoted above. Consequently, communication and media use must be seen as a form of social action in the sense of symbolic interactionism as this defines a core reference system of communication science. At the same time it defines the main difference between sociology and communication science, as communication science is concerned with the production, the use and the necessity of the symbolic by and for human beings, which is not the main topic of sociology. Nevertheless, both disciplines are complementary and interwoven.

When we refer to such a conversational based understanding of communication—which means that human face-to-face-communication as conversation is the basic form of communication—and when we refer to communication and media use as social action and to the symbolic interactionist concept of communication as sketched above, we have a broad basis for developing a theory of communication and media today in media rich societies. This is because on this basis we can argue that all other forms of communication should be understood as modified forms of face-to-face-communication, an idea that was started by the concept of parasocial interaction by Horton and Wohl (1956) and Horton and Strauss (1957). When one reads their articles carefully, it becomes evident that they understand media related communication as a modification of interpersonal face-to-face-communication—mass communication, and more general media related communication is for them communication 'as if', which means it is similar to face-to-face-communication, but also different. Using the assumption of modification we can transform our knowledge from face-to-face-communication to media related communication and also from the analysis of mediated communication into knowledge about face-to-face-communication, of course, while retaining the fundamental differences. Horton and Strauss and Horton and Wohl thus provided us with a concept for understanding media development as a long term evolution, which consists in a differentiation process of communication.

Even in the media rich societies of today, each individual experiences and learns communication as an individual action. It takes place in a specific face-to-face-situation, there are spoken or otherwise symbolised messages, and every message is intentionally produced by one of the participant actors or at least it is assumed that this is the case, when a person tries to understand what he or she thinks to be an intentionally produced symbol. In general, all participating actors try to understand the produced message and the intentions behind it in order to produce an answer or to react in another way thereto.

Today, besides the elementary form of face-to-face-communication, there exist three different types of media related communication, when one differentiates according to whom a person communicates, and each type consists of a lot of different forms of communication:

· Communication may take place one-sidedly, with reference to an object and with no one expecting an answer—this is the case when one writes or reads a book, produces and reads radio or television or in general in the case of mass communication. Here we speak of human communication with a standardised message that is addressed to an unspecified audience. The communicator then produces the message, and the audience activity is usually called media reception.

· Communication may take place when the message is produced by a machine like a robot or a software program in a computer, as is, for example, the case when a person plays a computer game. The difference with mass communication is that it may be individually addressed and gives a specific answer to a preceding message. In this

case we speak of interactive communication with an 'intelligent machine' that always gives more or less individual answers.

· Communication may take place between two or more human beings who address each other personally, but the message is transported over time and space by media, as is the case by telephone or letter.

All these types are modifications of face-to-face-communication, and they should be conceptualized according to Renckstorf (1989) as social action: Communication understood as social action is central for any understanding of what communication is and may be, and for any empirical research and any theory of communication. This enables us to devise a complex understanding of communication that fits to symbolic interactionism, to the semiotic and cultural studies and is adequate for the mediated societies and cultures of today.

To sum up: Communication science has its own image of human beings; the human being here appears as the only being that uses and needs complex symbol systems for communication, thinking, producing and living in general. This makes communication science a sibling of sociology (and, of course, also a sibling of other disciplines). Because of this basic view of the human being, communication is fundamental for any social theory, and media must be understood as instruments that modify communication—they transform communication into media production or media reception, mediated interpersonal communication or into interactive communication. This understanding gives us the basic concept for a broad theory of communication and media use, especially in mediatised societies in which all human areas of life and experience are intertwined with media (Krotz, 2001 2007a; Lundby, 2009). Nevertheless, what we know about communication as social action today is by far not enough, and thus the discussion on these questions must go on, as we will sketch finally in the last section.

3.6   Some open questions about communication in mediatised societies

In this final section of this chapter we want to name some problems that make it evident that communication science must revitalise the problems of what communication is as social action. These problems are connected to the perspectives we have developed in the text above and thus show a direction in which research can and should go on.

A first problem about communication in mediatised societies stems from the actual and rapid change of communication, for example, by the Internet, by mobile phones and all other media: What happens to socialisation and children's growing up, how do we live together, what happens with culture, society, the economy, democracy and civil society, with everyday life and social relations? This is relevant for communication science, as this is a discipline with also practical goals. For example, we do not know enough about interactive communication. In addition, most of the empirical studies of communication science are still one-medium studies. As said above, an approach to communication and media use as social action supplies us with a broad approach to study these developments (Lundby, 2009; Krotz, 2007b, 2009).

Cultural studies are the source of a second problem. We argued above that communication as found in traditional communication science is regarded as reproducing an institutional and media centered view. Cultural studies reacted by creating its own view—that social and cultural reality is the relevant starting point of theory and empirical re-

search, and not the media. This can be seen in the work of Ien Ang, David Morley or that of Stuart Hall and all others who did not follow this institutional perspective of people as audience or target (for an overview, see Hepp, Krotz & Thomas, 2009). Here, a broad social action approach may be a good basis for further theoretical development.

A third problem lies in the methodology. As Renckstorf already noted in 1989, communication research still has a behaviourist bias. As we said above, an action theoretical approach should refer to symbolic interactionism and semiotics, and this means that we must use qualitative research methods. The central category of research is not the mean value or the deviance of quantitative data, but a sequence of case studies taking into account the sense and meaning of whatever happens, from the perspective of the single analysed person, following an intelligent theoretical sampling based on grounded theory (Krotz, 2005). Of course, there are research questions that should be answered by using quantitative methodology, for example, percentages of how much people view a programme and things like that. But most theoretically interesting research will refer to another type of data and starts with understanding what people do and why.

Fourthly, there is a problem coming from the history of communication, which should not be confused with and reduced to the history of the media system or the history of language. We still do not have any understanding of the historical dependence of communication today, as was mentioned above when we discussed the relationship between sociology and communications. Saying 'I' today is different from saying 'I' in the Middle Ages, in a society with slavery or in a highly religious culture. The nature of a joke and how we laugh about it today is different to jokes in other times and cultures. Saying a sentence today is not the same as saying the same sentence a century or a millennium ago or will be in the future: We do not have a socio-historical theory of communication. We even do not have a history of media with reference to their role and meaning to society, as can be seen when one refers to medium theory (Meyrowitz, 1990, 1995, 1997; McLuhan, 1967; Innis, 1950, 1951; and others). But we need a broad historical understanding of media and communication development when we want to understand in which direction media, communication and thus our culture and society are developing (and not only a media history).

In sum, the direct route from action theoretical questions to theoretical and empirical answers to these questions is to go on with such a discussion and to learn from symbolic interactionism. This does not mean that the paradigm of communication science is symbolic interactionism. But it means that communication science can learn from the symbolic interactionist approach to communication and that it should do so. The first step was the action theoretical turn in the last century, now we must go further.

Notes

1   I want to emphasise that this does not mean that a materialistic perspective on the social is wrong. But it remains mechanical if it does not take into account that the human being lives in a symbolically given world.

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