

Bernd Weisbrod. *Die Politik der Öffentlichkeit - Die Öffentlichkeit der Politik: Politische Medialisierung in der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik.* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003. 283 S. EUR 30.00, gebunden, ISBN 978-3-89244-691-0.



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This book contains several articles worth reading for everyone interested in new methods and approaches to media/political history. With respect to its contents and methods, the volume presents the state of the art in contemporary history of the relationship between public sphere and politics. This state of the art can be read in a twofold way: as a compliment and as a statement about its blind spots--but I have to concede: blind spots are hard to locate here.

The volume aims at analyzing the early German Federal Republic. This perspective runs the risk of losing sight of long-term developments. Additionally, the narrowed view of the fifties and sixties implies that changes in the relationship between politics and media are paradigmatic. Nevertheless, restricting the volume to this short period does have the advantage of examining the mechanisms of the interpenetration of politics and mass media at the beginning of the "media democracy" in its details. The editor Bernd Weisbrod aims in his ambitious introduction at writing a new political media history (or vice versa: media history of politics) by overcoming the faults of

the "old" media or communication history and old-fashioned political history." His idea encompasses the multidimensional analysis of the "media ensemble" at a certain time by connecting different angles of development and applying different perspectives. Therefore, he calls for a new concept of the public sphere that focuses on the aspect of its character as a process. The terms *Medialisierung* and *Politisierung* hint at this procedural character. This wide scope on media and politics necessarily lacks the clarity of one definitive concept, but at the same time opens up the field to new approaches.

This theoretical approach has paid off. The articles provide different perspectives, approaches/methods and case studies. About five articles deal with more or less detached overviews by highlighting theoretical aspects. Thomas Mergel presents a discourse-analytical approach on the electoral communication via the aspect of *Sachlichkeit*. He scrutinizes objectivity with respect to different dimensions of semantics as expectations of politics, the operational dimension of politics, and thirdly, objectivity as a rhetorical tool in me-

dia. Using objectivity as a "case," Mergel additionally brings out the differences from American electoral communication. He points out that the use of the objective dimension and its role in politics in Germany means that one cannot speak of an "Americanization" of German political culture, at least until the nineties. The article provides an insight into the analysis of political communication and makes convincing claims for a new perspective about German political culture.

While Mergel pleads for a new political history via the culturally informed historical analysis of politics/parties, media and society, Knut Hickethier completely relies on media analysis. He introduces the concept of the "dispositive" into historical media analysis. In putting forward the conditions of political communication as technically given by the different media, he at first emphasizes the technical conditions of reception before turning to an explanatory concept of the "narration" of media as a complement to the conditions of receptional traces, which are set by the technique. Here, he presents the theory of news value as a kind of content analysis that is a parallel tool to the dispositive. This combination opens up interesting perspectives on political communication and media: the dispositive on the one side and the theory of news value on the other reflect both in their own terms the logics of media. Here, we find a possible answer to the oft-criticized model of the stimulus-response model for parties striving for hegemony. Additionally, the idea of particular logics of media narrations according to specific media avoids the assumption of a teleological development. *Medialisierung* is here implicitly defined as a quite "natural" adaptation process of politics.

This is also an important point in Rainer Gries's effort to identify consumption as an important concept by which the *Medialisierung* of politics should be analyzed. He proposes a model that explicitly looks at the communication of a brand. This idea could actually easily be transferred to party communication, but encapsulates

some traps as well. The idea of political communication of parties being simply the same as advertisement for laundry detergent is an old assault on politics, but the obvious parallels have hardly been discussed with respect to their heuristic meaning yet.

Other articles put forward new concepts and approaches as well, but show their primary merits in opening up new subject matters by presenting cases. Here, only the study by Daniela Münkler drops from the theoretical level, since she offers a description of the parties' strategies to influence the media or respectively, the voters. She demonstrates three changes in the image of Willy Brandt during the elections of 1961 to 1969 in order to influence media presentation which, in the end, turns out to take place the other way round: The media also define the images of parties and persons as much as these parties use the media to define their images. In contrast, Frank Boesch examines the political "scandal" in order to characterize the possibilities and borders of narratives of politics in the media, that is, by media as well as politics. Habbo Knoch widens the scope on media and politics by analyzing the role of the documentary photography in the media as a factor of "politicization." While new magazines fought for market share, photographers also pursued their own agenda by documenting violence in certain ways. By analyzing photographers, political change, and media interests as intertwined, Knoch stresses the methodological approach of discourse analysis in its visual components. In his view, the process of the *Politisierung* of media and *Medialisierung* of politics derived from the different actors' specific constellation and ideological upload, as well as from photography as a visual medium. Paul Betts underscores a longer perspective. By examining the aesthetic continuity of the objects of everyday life from the Weimar Republic to the Cold War, he proves these objects to be "vehicles for national myths, cultural identities

and private life stories"--in sum, to be politically formative.

Quite differently from these approaches, Karl Christian Führer presents an analysis of the relationship between media and politics by looking at the "objects" of communication, the viewers and readers and their observation. The new observatory means of polling and the interconnected idea of public relations changed ideas about viewers, readers, and listeners. Strategies had to be developed to gain their "attention" and win their "trust." The new observation techniques and analyses led to the genesis of new experts in the field of communication and at the same time created rivalry about the interpretational hegemony. Führer shows how this observation influenced political views on communication and its strategies and also ran parallel to the idea of consumption. This article compellingly unlocks the desiderata of an understanding of the role of science and political consultation for illuminating the relationship between politics and media.

In contrast to these approaches, Sybille Buske and Willibald Steinmetz deliver case studies in two policy fields. Buske examines public discourse about single mothers during the sixties and seventies. She shows very convincingly how narratives about these mothers were modified during the years and identifies lobby groups, new magazines, feminism, and a more liberal climate as factors of the transformation or rather the learning process. Steinmetz interrogates the mechanisms of political and media action by examining the course of the Contergan affair from its beginning to the reaction on the political level, which was forced by the media, in detail. One wishes more scholars positioned their studies of political developments like these essays, which take different actors, media, and habits of political culture into account at the same time.

This book is one of the more systematic collections of essays. Nevertheless, the conceptual question of what constitutes *Medialisierung* and

Politisierung is not or only allusively taken up in the articles. Otherwise, different answers are given on the question of what *Politisierung* and *Medialisierung* mean via the (detailed) scrutiny of examples. One prominent outcome of the book is the broad front on which the history of the relationship of media and politics has to be written: relevant terms include consumption, mentality, science/consultation (scientification), media technique, liberalization/democratization, societal change. All these aspects are represented in this book. Still, one can easily find missing aspects, like the matter of East Germany, which is present only in the contributions of Betts and Gries. A case study on television would have been very helpful to cover the change in the leading media. Here, the negative impact of the volume's focus on the fifties and sixties becomes apparent. Additionally, one obvious aspect of the relationship between media and politics, personal networks, are missing. Network analyses, as conducted in political and media studies by Barbara Pfetsch should be integrated into the historical analysis, because they open up a new field or fruitfully complementary studies on consultation and "scientification." Nonetheless, this book gives us a programmatic idea of a certain kind of entangled history and how to "disentangle" the different threads involved.

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