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## Book reviews

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David Berry and Caroline Kamau,

*Public Policy and Media Organizations*, Ashgate: Farnham and Burlington, VT, 2013; 208 pp.:  
£55.00

**Reviewed by:** Petros Iosifidis, *City University, London, UK*

This welcome book examines public policy – referred to also as ‘social policy’ – and the influence news media organizations have in the production and implementation of public policy. It is divided into two parts. Part I, written by David Berry and titled ‘Theorizing public policy and news media representations’, starts by analysing the historical philosophical concepts such as the common good, well-being, happiness and the public interest as the driving forces for public policy (Chapter 1). It then assesses the abstract meaning of public policy by combining theory with empirical evidence (Chapter 2), and finally discusses news representations and news discourse on the riots in England 2011 as well as the Conservative Party’s idea of the ‘Big Society’ (Chapter 3). The entire Part I is a combination of sociology and political philosophy which examines both the historical concepts that are core to public policy thinking and the role of news media representations and discourse in relation to public policy matters. The thorough methodology section enables the reader to comprehend language and news discourse as a source of power and persuasion, while references to powerful news media such as News Corporation and the BBC motivate citizens to think of public policy as a ‘game’ played by influential actors, which eventually raises concerns about democracy itself. The author is right to argue that the small number of powerful news media organizations influence public policy, but perhaps a clearer distinction should have been made between, on the one hand, commercial conglomerates such as Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation and their ability to dictate public policy on law and order, and on the other, public service media such as the BBC whose public service remit obliges them to provide impartial and balanced news coverage. In addition, the discussion on the concept of the ‘public interest’ (pp. 23–28) is comprehensive, but not media and communications specific, and eventually does not incorporate issues such as access, universality, quality and so forth.

Part II of the book, written by Caroline Kamau and titled ‘Group processes and the media as a referee in public policy-making’, further explores many of the points raised in Part I albeit from the perspective of psychology. It contends that public policy involves three core entities or groups – the policymakers, media organizations and the public – and argues that media organizations play the role of ‘referee’ between

policymakers and the public because they provide the vehicle through which the public learn about policies. Chapter 4 critically examines the realism of the moral ideal of the 'common good' as the driving force for public policy and concludes that the 'common' represents the exclusive social category with which a given public policymaker identifies in a given policy context, rather than society in general. It therefore departs from the notion of the common good as a philosophical ideal (explored in Chapter 1) and, from the perspective of social psychology, it contends that 'group motives *do* motivate public policy-makers, at least as far as certain public policies are concerned' (p. 123). Group processes then can explain what is to be included (and what is to be excluded) on a given policymaker's agenda as far as particular policy contexts are concerned. Chapter 5 examines the psychological processes through which media organizations and policymakers are connected and argues that media organizations adjudicate psychological decision-making processes among policymakers. By analysing data from the UK parliament and group membership per individual issue, it comes to the conclusion that group membership predicts MPs' policy activities as far as some types of policy issues are concerned, namely women's issues, Scottish issues, health issues and ethnic minority matters. Chapter 6 takes the discussion a step further by analysing the influences of media organizations, through their employees, on public opinion. It argues that media workers facilitate their organizations' values, norms and missions through these decisions, thereby contributing to polarization in public opinion about policy issues. The chapter takes a deep look at some working practices which contribute to faulty decision-making among media staff, such as poor information sampling practices and simplistic representations of out-groups' policy needs. In sum, the author provides a thorough discussion and explanation, first, as to how socio-cognitive group processes play an important role in the policymaking process (Chapter 4), second, how these psychological processes shape policymakers' agendas (Chapter 5), and third, how media organizations and media workers represent and referee public policy.

Perhaps one of the drawbacks of the book is – inevitably, given the location of the authors in British universities – that it is too UK-oriented. The exclusive focus on the UK may not allow the drawing of broad conclusions as to whether these practices can apply to other social democracies. There is no attempt to review the pertinent situation referring to specific communications sectors in other Western European democracies or the US. A second criticism might be the absence of an overall conclusion towards the end of the book, summarizing both the first and the second parts, and making a clearer connection of the diverse theoretical perspectives employed by the two authors. Having said this, the authors provide a good account of public policy and the impact media organizations have on the production and implementation of public policy from the perspectives of such diverse disciplines as sociology, political philosophy and psychology.

This book is highly recommended for those interested in the evolution of public policy, news representations and news discourse in the UK. The reader learns a great deal of how public policy is informed from the triad of media organizations, policymakers and the public. *Public Policy and Media Organizations* is extremely well-written, informative and fulfils its promise. Each section concludes with a

summary (though an overall summary is missing), while the book concludes with a rich bibliography and a comprehensive index.

George N Tzogopoulos, *US Foreign Policy in the European Media: Framing the Rise and Fall of Neoconservatism*, I.B. Tauris: London, 2012; 217 pp.: £56.00

**Reviewed by:** Ekaterina Balabanova, *University of Liverpool, UK*

Referring to the 2012 US presidential campaign, Zbigniew Brzezinski (cited in Abrams, 2013) noted that the ‘Republican would-be candidates are simply regurgitating ideas originally disseminated by the neocons’. This is a view shared by others who even talk about ‘neocon resurgence’ and ‘mounting dominance’ (Heilbrunn, 2013). What this does demonstrate is that the neoconservatives and their ideas are very much present and at the moment arguably influential on foreign policy thinking in the Republican Party. In this regard the concluding remarks of this book could not have been more accurate in predicting a ‘repetition of history’ (p. 159) in the shape of another rise of neoconservatism. It is this history of ongoing rise and fall that makes George Tzogopoulos’s book particularly relevant and thought-provoking today.

It positions itself amidst the debates on ‘the alleged impact of neoconservatism on Washington’s military doctrine of pre-emption’ (p. xiv) during the years of George W Bush, and specifically ‘focuses on European interpretations of neoconservatism’ (p. 3). At the centre of the study is the media coverage of US foreign policy in Europe. The book analyses the discourse of the European elite print media in the ‘Big Four’ of the EU – Britain, France, Germany and Italy – to demonstrate how they accepted the impact of neoconservative political ideology on the US approach to world affairs as conventional wisdom. It asks why there was such a focus on neoconservatism over other IR theories, for example realism or nationalism.

The book sets the framework for analysis by linking the international politics world with that of the news media. On one hand, it identifies the political developments that served as the basis for US foreign policy post-9/11 to be referred to as neoconservative (such as the American hegemony in world affairs after the end of the Cold War, the US disdain for multicultural institutions in fighting the war on terror in general and the war against Iraq in particular, and the resultant transatlantic rift). On the other hand, it grounds itself in the notion of constructivism, thus outlining its epistemological and methodological approach to the study of media texts, and justifies its study of media due to its influential role in the perception and understanding of US foreign policy around the world. The choice of eight ‘European opinion-forming and agenda-setting’ (p. 3) newspapers – *The Times* and *The Guardian* (UK), *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* (France), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Suddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany), *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica* (Italy) – allows the author to not only analyse the framing of neocons and neoconservatism, but also to engage with the bigger debate around the creation of a European public sphere (a debate which is returned to in the concluding chapter). Here the book confirms the presence of synchronization and a high degree of similarity in the press coverage as arguably a positive step towards the creation of such a European public sphere (p. 155).

For those unfamiliar with neoconservatism as a political ideology related to both world affairs and domestic policy, Chapters 2 and 3 are particularly valuable. As well as dealing with its core features and principles, they trace the emergence of neoconservatism from the very first use of the word in the 1970s when the liberal consensus in the US started to lose coherence, its development throughout the years being either in or outside government during different presidential administrations. Particular attention is devoted to the debate about the alleged neoconservative influence on the administration of George W Bush. Tzogopoulos considers the role of non-neoconservative politicians, the interplay of realism and nationalism as alternative schools of political thought, potentially exerting an influence alongside the significance of other factors, such as Iraqi oil, to argue that the influence of neoconservatives is overstated and leads to too simplistic a view of US foreign policy. As he confidently points out, '[T]he support of the neoconservatives for the Iraq war does not entail that they were responsible for this military operation, or that they led the Bush administration to it' (p. 42), thus agreeing with the accepted view in the literature of international relations.

The key contribution of the book is its detailed, nuanced and carefully researched analysis of the press coverage of neoconservatism in the selected European press. The study highlights 2003 as the year when all the newspapers started to publish more extensively on neoconservatism and the coverage showed signs of synchronization. The terms 'neocon', 'neocons', 'neokon' and 'neokons' entered the vocabulary of the European elite newspapers. Whether this is a sign of 'particular familiarity with neoconservatism since 2003' as the author asserts (p. 78) or a more simple case of reproducing/using the same language as that used by political figures, the quantitative aspect of the study clearly illustrates the emergence of neoconservatism on the European media agenda. The period of analysis is 1993–2005 and while a rationale for the start date of 1993 is not provided, the end date seems reasonable as it does indeed signify one of the 'falls' of neoconservatism.

The qualitative aspect of the study juxtaposes the 'partial understanding of an abstract phenomenon' (p. 81) by the selected European newspapers prior to 11 September (Chapter 6) with the clear focus on the philosophy of the neoconservative group and its alleged influence in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks (Chapters 7 and 8). The first period is characterized by fragmented coverage and an association of neoconservatism primarily with domestic issues and the arbitrary (although inconsistent among newspapers) attribution of the label 'neoconservative' to various political figures. No wonder Tzogopoulos talks about 'a term with various meanings' (p. 93), since his analysis proves that the European elite newspapers did not agree on a common definition of neoconservatism and did not constitute it as a synonym for US foreign policy prior to 9/11. More importantly, 'there was a lack of specific argument or analytical text to accompany the term' (p. 93) and it remained 'unclear who the neoconservatives were' (p. 94).

The second period – 2003–2005 – sees a complete transformation in the press coverage where neoconservatism becomes widely regarded as the dominant political ideology informing US foreign policy. First, the label 'neoconservative' was attributed to various politicians and intellectuals, the neoconservatives were represented as an entity and various aspects of the group's foreign policy philosophy were analysed. The

latter included the desire to act unilaterally in the international arena, to promote democracy in order to export American values to the rest of the world, if necessary by military means, to support Israel and to dismiss the idea of a strong EU. Second, the European press devoted explicit attention to the supposed influence of the neoconservative group on the US administration as a whole and the then President Bush specifically. Neocons were represented as a ‘powerful group with a catalytic role’ (p. 117). This was done at the expense of other alternative IR theories that offer explanation for the invasion of Iraq, such as realism and nationalism. The philosophy of Leo Strauss was also identified by all newspapers as central to the neoconservative philosophy going as far as identifying him as the group’s ‘guru’. The only newspaper that was found to de-emphasize the presumed impact of neoconservatives was the British *Times*. The paper ‘systematically challenged’ this view and maintained ‘a comparatively balanced approach’ (p. 125).

The book leaves the reader with the pressing question of why? Why did the European elite newspapers attribute such a significant role to the political ideology of neoconservatism? ‘Why such a neoconmania?’ (p. 150), in the words of Tzogopoulos himself. And this is where the promise of the chapter titled ‘The neoconmania explained’ appears not to be wholly fulfilled. While some possible answers and explanations are sketched out – scapegoating, oversimplification, conspiracy theory – this is done very much in brief as part of the concluding comments to the whole study. This might, however, be an inevitable result of the design of the study with its empirical focus and does not undermine the overall contribution that this book makes to our understanding of US neoconservatism and its European interpretations.

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Katrin Voltmer,

*The Media in Transitional Democracies*, Polity: Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA, 2013; 275 pp.: £17.99/€21.80

**Reviewed by:** Beata Klimkiewicz, *Jagiellonian University, Poland*

A rise of new forms of communication and new media architecture once again in history reopens the question about the media’s role in changing the political environment. In this sense Katrin Voltmer’s book brings us back to essentials in thinking about the intricate relationship between media and democracy. Her project is highly ambitious in considering the applicability of the western model of democracy and the liberal model of independent media to other parts of the world. The scope of Voltmer’s book is astonishing too – it resembles an ocean where geographic magnitude meets with broad and fundamental themes. Voltmer navigates quite elegantly in this

space posing remarkably clear questions and logical examples. Needless to say, despite a very broad angle of analysis the volume reaches an impressive consistency.

This fascinating journey is essentially conceptual. The point is to make sense and find a systematic approach in understanding the position of communications media in political transitions. As with sailing on the sea, it is important to be prepared for the unexpected while also looking for regularities, repeating patterns that would help to understand circumstances and take sound decisions. Voltmer is right in her choice – too often we deal with particular cases that give us historically precise, but almost sterile accounts of change that are hard to compare with other similar cases and circumstances as ‘everything’ is deeply rooted in a particular historic, cultural, economic context. An attempt to reveal common platforms in this search is guided by two directives: the first is concerned with the role of the media in democratic transitions; the second follows the changes of the media themselves and poses the question as to how successful the projects of revamping media structures and performances have been.

Voltmer’s book is thin in numbers, metrics and comparisons of large sets of quantitative data. Her approach clearly aims at capturing the very sense and nuances of the processes and mechanisms of the media’s involvement in democratic transitions. In other words, she wants to describe how the machine works without the necessity of displaying its various parameters and indicators. She is curious to get to the internal logic of this change, where the media are both the agents as well as the structures, influencing and being influenced by democratization.

While reading the book our appetite grows for becoming immersed more thoroughly in some of the transition cases, to follow the processes in South Africa, Russia, the Philippines or some of the Arab countries in greater depth. But the case studies are composed to support the broader theoretical framework, not to offer complete regional or national explanations. Voltmer makes remarkable use of the secondary data extracting unknown paradoxes that support her arguments and the theoretical structure of the book. Insights into a handful of cases help to make the conceptual choices more convincing. Voltmer is an excellent writer – her sentences are fresh and engaging. Both students and scholars, not to speak of journalists and policymakers, will be absorbed with this substantial diagnosis of media and democratic change.

The book opens with accounts on democracy and democratic media. Voltmer’s conceptual assumptions might sound provocative: qualities of democracy are painted as elastic, seemingly adaptable to very specific historical, cultural and political conditions. Clearly, in her view one size does not fit all. Democracy is understood as a social construct that is used, modified, interpreted in particular cultural environments. This however doesn’t mean that standards do not exist and the empty shell of ‘democracy’ can be filled with any substance provided it is adequately tailored by a ‘democratic’ rhetoric. The basic norms guiding media performance in transitional democracies might seem equally elusive or plastic, especially when the norms are examined against the dynamics of the process of democratization itself. The role of the media in the very initial phase of transition can be characterized by high unpredictability, volatility and uncertain outcomes. It may vary considerably depending on cultural conditions and historical specificities. Sometimes and somewhere, less adversarial and critical media may contribute to consolidation of democracy or more democratic outcomes better than would be the case with watchdog-like and intensively investigative media. Voltmer

challenges the prevailing orthodoxy in viewing the media and journalism as watchdogs, forums and information-providers in a subtle and eloquent way. On the one hand, she asserts that normative values are floating; on the other hand, that they are to be anchored. Inspired by Whitehead's (2002) categorization, she conceives 'the floating' elements of the norms as negotiable and open to adjustment, while 'the anchored' elements are those which are indispensable to preserve the distinct meaning of democracies.

Describing the virtues of democratic media, Voltmer chooses two fundamental categories: independence/freedom and diversity. She elaborates on whether any kind of freedom/independence is equally good for democracy and what kinds of diversity are better or worse for democracy. Distinguishing between internal and external diversity, Voltmer tries to unpack a widely shared view that 'internal' diversity seems to better serve the democratic purpose than 'external' diversity. While the former enables us to present different opinions and views side by side, the latter leads to fragmentation. Yet Voltmer critically admits that with internally pluralistic media it is often impossible to expect a kind of deep diversity that can crystallize through politically or culturally oriented media. Moreover, external pluralism (or parallelism in a broad sense) releases a kind of social energy, along with commitments and engagements that internal pluralism is not able to generate as it always has to be moderated, neutral, mainstream-focused. Thus, both levels of diversity are equally important for democracy – each at a different stage of formulating views and solutions.

In the second part of the book, Voltmer introduces a set of key concepts that help to clarify how media affect democratic regime change in media-saturated environments. To see the media as both an enabling and constraining force, Voltmer distinguishes between structural and agency-related sources of media influence. The structural dimension is mainly equated with media technologies, the agency-related dimension with journalistic agency. Media structures, however, cannot only be attributed to technology. The structures revolve around various forms and arrangements: ownership, media control, modes of financing, functions the media play in societies and ways in which the media interact with users. The technologies are certainly among the prominent forces in structuring media landscapes, but not the only one. Although Voltmer asserts repeatedly that the reality of communicative abundance and media-saturated environments changes the nature of democratization, the cases used to illustrate this trend are not linked into a more complex picture.

Undoubtedly, the role of time in the process of democratization cannot be omitted. Voltmer's point of departure in this respect is a developmental theory of democratization assuming that the process evolves in steps that logically build on each other. Realities in transitional democracies, however, demonstrate that democratization is not a one-way process. In some countries different stages occur simultaneously, some are very short or absent altogether. Voltmer is well aware that as with human characteristics, so also with transitions: ideal models are very rare. Hence, various paths imply also specific media roles. For example, in the case of top-down liberalization, as well as a bottom-up process, not only do media act differently, in addition different media outlets, forms and services flourish and are differentially involved in the process of change.

The stage of democratic consolidation is interestingly analysed by Voltmer as she distinguishes carefully among symptoms in which the media seem to be particularly important in influencing outcomes decisively. These symptoms accompanying and eventually magnifying the specific nature of transitions include institutional consolidation, delegative democracy and populism, political parties without constituencies, accountability and political culture. All are seen as fragile points that may under certain conditions overshadow or reverse the trend of democratization. Voltmer emphasizes that it is the dynamics of a media-saturated environment which may amplify the weaknesses of a democratic system. Yet it would be noteworthy to remember that media may be seen as fragile too – struggling with regulatory uncertainties, political interferences or the competition of transnational actors.

Although Voltmer observes that in different geopolitical regions in the world particular types of authoritarianism developed, and that there is path-dependency, the 'regional aspect' of democratization as well as the particular characteristics of media systems would perhaps deserve more attention. She distinguishes the four main authoritarian regime types that emerged in Latin America, Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia. The media systems in these regimes differed significantly in their relationship to political power. This then translated into a particular self-perception of journalists in new media environments after the period of democratic change.

Voltmer could certainly have focused on new macro-regional political constellations that certainly influence the course of transition and the media role in the regions mentioned and omitted. In the case of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) for instance, membership in the European Union and Council of Europe, and gradual transposition of accession standards, played a quite important although not final role in democratic transitions and media change. At the same time, a number of relatively recent cases in CEE (the controversial use of libel law by judges in Slovakia, Hungarian media law, lack of independent media regulatory authorities) demonstrate that national responses may corrode transnational attempts when collective purpose becomes weak. Another interesting aspect is the role of cultural proximity and the political use of culture in a search of regional models of media governance. For example, the media-related cooperation of Arab states in the Arab League and political support for transnational media such as MBC and others, builds often on proclaimed historical and cultural commonalities. The 'cultural' and 'heritage' arguments are often used as justification for the particular type of control imposed on the media as was the case with the Arab Satellite Broadcasting Charter introduced in 2008. It goes without saying that transitions are to a great extent cultural phenomena and the answer why in some states we observe recently politically reversed trends might have to do with specific cultural features and values. Indeed, cultural proximity theories can explain why certain regional 'media spaces' share important structural and performance-related characteristics. Macro-regional forces are interesting to explore also in terms of alternative paths of globalization put forward by new emerging powers such as China, India and Brazil. Some of these initiatives (e.g. Chinese media operations in Africa) may promote different normative standards for media structures and journalistic practice.

In the third part of her book, Voltmer explores four key arenas of media transformation – political, economic, social and professional. These are largely derived

from the well-known work of Hallin and Mancini (2004), but Voltmer employs a clearer focus on the specifics of transitional democracies. Analysing the role of the state, Voltmer puts forward a highly relevant diagnosis portraying new multi-party democracies as political jungles where everybody has to survive in relation to long-term actions and their consequences in an always unpredictable future. These conditions are certainly shaped by the growing uncertainty of international and supra-national structures. Quite paradoxically, before being successfully completed democratic transitions may face new types of crisis marked by a lack of economic and financial stabilization and the reshifting of global power.

Voltmer also takes one specific case for a more focused analysis – the transformation of state broadcasting in Eastern Europe. She argues that given the genuine desire of CEE countries to democratize media and politics, public service broadcasting was bound to succeed in the region. However, the outcomes of transformation create a more bitter than satisfactory picture. Voltmer points out that without necessary cultural changes on all sides of the process, the full and fundamental transformation from state broadcasters to public service broadcasting has turned out to be impossible. Important questions can be posed in this respect: to what extent are successful PSB models like the BBC, ARD and NHK applicable to other cultural/political environments? Why has PSB transformation failed also in other European countries – including Spain, Greece and Portugal? Did the fact that some CEE countries followed different models (e.g. Poland the French model, Czech Republic, the German) affect the outcomes of PSB transformation?

With respect to media markets, Voltmer pays attention to the intricate relationship between the state and market, and compares it with a balance between democracy and the market. She argues that although ‘third’ wave democratization always involves market-oriented economic reforms, markets do not necessarily have an intrinsic preference for democracies. What markets need are secure property rights, political stability or predictability, rather than volatile conditions. For a specific focus on this, Voltmer analyses links between the media, money and power. Two instances are studied in this respect – media capture and capture of the state by the media. While the former case denotes a situation when media are politically controlled, the latter manifests the power balance tilting towards organized business groups including the media.

The third dimension – political parallelism – is painted by Voltmer in opposition to the concept of internal diversity. She is right to observe that parallelism does not exclude high standards of journalistic reporting, nor does neutrality and detachment guarantee high-quality political coverage. She is attentive also to a destructive force of parallelism, warning against the ‘toxic public sphere’ that jeopardizes social and political integration. The focus section turns to a particular group of transitional democracies – namely those that emerge from violent civil conflicts.

The fourth and final dimension studied by Voltmer is the strongest case in her analysis: she approaches journalism as a social field that adapts to the new environment of transformed politics. Voltmer first discusses the general norms and standards that constitute journalistic professionalism, while at the same time, she admits the presence of multiple models that coexist and compete even within a particular culture or country.

In the focus section, Voltmer addresses a well-known, albeit largely undescribed journalistic practice: the exchange of money for favourable coverage.

In the conclusion, Voltmer is clear that the role models for how to 'do' democracy are no longer exclusively sought in western democracies. At the same time, she bitterly observes that the outcome of transformation of the media in 'third wave' democracies is disappointing. Besides, the very momentum of democratic transformations coincided with a communications revolution that once again in history dramatically changed the way media function in societies and interact with a political process. The third wave of democratization has not only brought a large 'divergence of democracy' but also generated distinctively different media systems and forms of journalism. Certainly, one size doesn't fit all, but we are still able to distinguish between better and worse quality, between the media systems that better respond to the communication needs of a country's citizens and those that do not allow the users' demands and needs to be met. And we can perhaps even assume that, regardless of all the diversity in standards of journalistic performance and professional experience, we may easily say in what countries and media systems it is preferable to work and function as a journalist.

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Lauren Rabinovitz,

*Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity*, Columbia University Press: New York, 2012; 237 pp.: £19.00

**Reviewed by:** Kyle Barrett, *University of the West of Scotland, UK*

The enthusiasm of Rabinovitz alone makes this publication worth reading. Chronicling the rise of amusement parks and cinemas in early twentieth-century America, Rabinovitz explores modernism through these new forms of recreation. Starting from 1893, discussing the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition and its ferris wheel, Rabinovitz discusses the growth of the most famous theme parks in America, from Coney Island to Disneyland, examined in the concluding chapter. Of course there are many interpretations of what 'modernity' is and Rabinovitz is keen to address this issue in the book's earliest pages: 'Modernity itself', she acknowledges, 'has assumed many meanings in many different contexts. While it generally denotes "the modern era," the term can mean a range of historical time frames' (p. 12). The most interesting aspect of the book, particularly for those who are interested in early silent American cinema, is the importance theme parks played in showcasing early films, while later theme parks themselves becoming a setting for many comedies. This may be the leading interest for those coming from film studies, including myself. However, what is fascinating is how Rabinovitz highlights the important factors of these cultural phenomena and their somewhat taken for granted status in the modern age. Both of these escapist forms of

entertainment have become such massive money-making machines that it is only right to see how both depended on one another at their earliest stages.

As more and more theme parks were being built, Rabinovitz highlights the importance of railroads for small towns and cities: 'If a town had a railroad line, the line was likely to terminate at an amusement park' (p. 8). Although amusement parks were obviously a public sphere where many different people of diverse ethnic backgrounds would congregate, Rabinovitz raises the issue of the overt racism and xenophobia of early twentieth-century America as an obstacle to this. It is here that Rabinovitz begins to examine cinema, or rather the nickelodeons that began to surface in theme parks, with the main issue being that cinema was reinforcing the collective experience, a sociological event that overlooked racial lines: 'the reception of movies may only be understood within the context in which movies were once spectacle amongst many, and this contextual condition united citizens across regional, class and racial lines' (p. 19).

Moving forward to Chapter 2, Rabinovitz charts the progress of theme parks as they began to crop up across the US. Here we locate the importance of architecture in their design as a visually seductive platform, sometimes almost surreal in conception: 'Park architecture was extravagant, large-scale, a diverse mix of fantastic, historic, and exotic styles painted in bold colours and dramatically illuminated with incandescent electric lighting' (p. 30). What is examined in detail are the modern designs of the ballrooms, ice rinks, restaurants and beer gardens that could only be found in theme parks. Amongst these new architectural structures were the rides themselves. Rabinovitz returns to the importance of railroads, not just in transportation but in the design of the rides: 'Most rides depended on railway apparatus, a technology that we now take for granted but was not understood in the same way one hundred years ago' (p. 34). Rides, obviously, simulate a sense of danger and Rabinovitz links this with the ambivalence of the public's view on rail transportation, yet they were still eager to experience a rollercoaster using the same technology. In the later portion of this chapter, Rabinovitz examines cinema as another attraction alongside the rides. However, she argues that it was a different kind of experience for the public: 'moviegoing provides a spectatorship of sensory fascination, a *jouissance* instead of an out-of-body sense of panoptic projection into the screen space and mental absorption into an onscreen story' (p. 35). Later, films became more about the human body on screen and Rabinovitz argues that 'the purpose of many performances was to hypostatize the past or the faraway, the gigantic or the miniature, the grotesque or the exquisite' (p. 45), which accounts for many upper-classes snubbing cinema as working-class escapism, too low-brow for those possessed of both economic and cultural capital.

Chapter 3 charts the progress of thrill rides and their fusion with cinema. It is argued that they brought a modern experience through virtual tourism where attitudes towards national identity and technology were optimistic. The main focus is the *Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World* and their impact with cinema: 'If *Hale's Tours* movie installations put a novel "thrill" into motion pictures by making movies a multimedia visceral experience, they in many ways simply extended the work of movies in general' (p. 93). The importance of *Hale's Tours* in bringing modernism to the public becomes Rabinovitz's main argument, for they 'provided sensory verification of the turmoil increasingly associated with modernity, the new century, and urban life' (p. 94).

Chapter 4's main interest is how movies represented theme parks in their use of displaying the enjoyment and promotion of theme parks. More specifically, Rabinovitz puts forward the notion of movies and picture postcards as different approaches of promotion: 'From their outsets both postcards (the miniature) and movies (the gigantic) took on the amusement park – as subject matter and as a location for their dissemination' (p. 97). Throughout this chapter, Rabinovitz compares both movies and the picture postcard which offered little to the imagination because of their size: 'The picture postcard, a static photograph small in size and scale, renders its subject matter diminutive in relationship to the spectator' (p. 98). What follows is the development of these forms as the parks grew across America.

The penultimate chapter focuses on slapstick comedies set in amusement parks, more specifically the comedies from Coney Island. Many silent comedies from 1909 until 1918 used theme parks as a site for gags with their machinery and architecture as a perfect backdrop for physical comedy. Rabinovitz takes examples such as *Jack Fat and Slim at Coney Island* (1910), exploring the nature of what was inherently comedic about these backdrops: 'The visceral engagement and fascination in physical spectacle for which amusement parks offered a privileged subject served a historically specific purpose of an earlier era when a conjoined celebration of speed, industrial power, and bodily kinetics meant kindling a national participation in technological modernity' (p. 161). This chapter is the highlight for the examination of cinema and is the best example of the marriage of amusement parks and film. The book concludes by discussing the opening of Disneyland in 1955 where this became a cultural event in itself, being promoted with a special two-hour live broadcast entitled *Dateline Disneyland*, which was viewed by 90 million people. This further highlights the theme of modernity not only in how audiences consume culture but also in the impact television had in 1950s America. Rabinovitz goes into considerable detail about the dependence of promotion through television which Disney required: 'As is well known, Disneyland depended on broadcast television not only for promotion but also for financing its construction' (p. 165). This was a major development in modern advertising, and Rabinovitz suggests that it redefined the relationships between amusement parks and movies. What follows is an interesting if brief discussion on the role of adults and their experiences at Disneyland and how Disney himself was more interested in children as consumers. Finally, this book offers great insight into what has become a major recreational activity and, though Rabinovitz is slightly more focused on the development of amusement parks, there is a significant argument made for the impact both parks and movies had on American modernity.

Brian D Loader and Dan Mercea (eds),

*Social Media and Democracy: Innovations in Participatory Politics*, Routledge: London and New York, 2012; 288 pp.: £90.00

**Reviewed by:** Natalie Pennington, *University of Kansas, USA*

Loader and Mercea's edited book on the effect of social media on democracy provides a realistic and at times optimistic lens with which to view research that has emerged regarding the participatory potential of new media technologies. Each chapter in the

book for the most part provides insight into a specific subset of digital media ranging from Twitter to websites to traditional news media sources as comparison, giving the reader a chance to consider the various ways in which the political landscape is changing online. The focus on different countries (Finland, Australia and Canada, just to name a few) also helps to create a more comprehensive understanding of the make-up of political engagement in an online world.

In the introduction to the book the editors rightfully point to the complex tapestry woven between politics and social media. While many are optimistic about the potential of Twitter revolutions and communication through Facebook, blogs and more – Loader and Mercea ask: can we engage in personalized politics through social media? The central claim laid out in the introduction to the book is that with more widespread use of social media and Internet technologies into everyday life (i.e. domestication) their potential to shape social situations increases greatly (p. 2). This certainly fits well with the existing literature base on the potential of new media technologies. Drawing on the ever-popular Henry Jenkins, the book posits that we are no longer passive consumers, but creators and participators in the process through social media. The following chapters lay out specific studies in participatory politics online, raising questions concerning ‘user-generated’ democracy that are divided into three parts: social movements, participation dynamics comparing traditional and new media technologies, and finally, digital political participation as a question of stasis or flux.

Part 1 consists of just two chapters (compared to four chapters in Part 2, and six chapters in Part 3). At the end of the section as a reader, I had hoped for more information building on what is often considered an important area and opportunity for the intersection of politics and digital technology. Chapter 2 provides great evidence in terms of the effects of new media use (and more specifically, personalization of collective action) on a given social movement (protests to the G20 Summit in London), while Chapter 3 sets up a more general discussion on the debate about mass media and social movements, while also discussing research that has been done on communicative strategies of social movements as it pertains to democracy. This chapter is well summarized (p. 52).

In Part 2 of the book, titled ‘Participation dynamics: Intersections between social and traditional media’, the chapters range in their focus greatly, covering a variety of topics and countries. Chapter 4 appears to be the set-up for bridging the gap between traditional and social with a content analysis of online and offline articles about poverty in the UK and Canada. The discussion about the Internet and ‘social media’ (in this case, online news articles) is minimally developed however. The subsequent chapter from Christian Vaccari does much more to address the social media aspect of the Internet when it comes to political participation by looking at different outlets for online participation in Italy including a primary focus on e-petitions but also a brief discussion of both YouTube and Facebook (pp. 84–85). Chapter 6 continues to develop this argument by looking at social media use through the general election in the United Kingdom in 2010. The authors of this particular chapter, through their study, do well to highlight what appears to be the goal of the book: that using the Internet as a means of increasing political participation is a supplement, not replacement, for traditional news media (p. 92). Finally, this section concludes with an excellent chapter focusing on one of the more popular sources of social media to date, Twitter. Chapter 7, entitled ‘What

the hashtag? Canadian politics on Twitter' by Tamara A Small asks: Who uses political hashtags? What is the nature of tagged tweets? To what extent does Twitter allow for political conversation and participation? Through a content analysis of a large sample of tweets (1617), Small found that, perhaps not surprisingly, it is primarily individuals using political hashtags, and that they do so as a way of informing and/or sharing what news they read elsewhere. The ability to '@' reply and re-tweet suggests that Twitter is a unique site for conversation (pp. 123–124). This final chapter does well to set up the third and final section of the book.

Indeed, it is Part 3 where the book appears to offer new and interesting insight into the participatory potential of social media in regard to politics, shifting the focus away from traditional sources almost entirely and going back to the key focus set up by the editors in Chapter 1 of the book. Chapter 8, entitled 'The political competence of Internet participants: Evidence from Finland' by Christensen and Bengtsson, addresses a long-argued debate about politics and the Internet: does it actually increase participation and knowledge, or is it those who are already engaged in politics who find it useful (p. 132)? The results of their large-scale study showed that while indeed those who were actively engaged offline utilized the Internet as a source of political engagement, 16% of their sample indicated that they were able to become involved because of using the Internet. Additionally, the researchers found that those who engaged strictly through the Internet were competent participants (pp. 140–141). These findings are among the strongest in the book to support the claim that there is a benefit to engaging through social media online.

In Chapter 9, Ward does a great job at the start of the chapter addressing online presence across the Internet – rather than focusing on just one particular location, Ward recognizes that a youth organization can and should create a presence in multiple places, and as a result analyses not just websites but Facebook and Twitter accounts as well (p. 150). This particular chapter/study analysed seven organizations, asking each for Skype interviews, with the research question: How do youth organizations view young people as citizens, and how is this view communicated via their websites and on their Facebook and Twitter profiles (p. 156)? Unfortunately the results of the chapter are hard to follow, with examples given that are unclear, particularly when it comes to what Ward's argument is about Facebook and Twitter versus websites.

The following two chapters are heavily focused on engaging youth: Chapter 10 is a great chapter on what motivates people to engage with websites, particularly the importance of visual stimuli and why it is important to have a simple interface (pp. 187–188). Conversely, Chapter 11, from Ariadne Vromen, points to how youth-based civic websites tend to have a top-down approach in Australia, and that realizing the potential of Facebook and YouTube in addition to websites to engage youth would be helpful (p. 206).

Had the book ended with these two chapters, I would have felt the editors had successfully addressed their claims about political participation and new media. It is with the last two chapters of the book however that more questions are raised. Chapter 12 from Mascheroni, for example clearly states that offline divides in participation are reproduced and reinforced in online environments (p. 222). This stands in contrast to the results suggested in the chapters previously discussed. With no concluding chapter or thoughts from the editors on how to view these conflicting viewpoints, the reader is

left uncertain. Finally, while Chapter 13 from Cohen and Raymond proved an interesting read about pregnancy forum sites and how they offered support and empowerment, the chapter felt out of place with the rest of the textbook, offering little context for its placement at the end or how it fit with the larger scale questions being asked – it would seem much better suited for a book on social support online.

Each piece of this book offers interesting insight into many topics and countries tied both tightly and loosely to political communication. Loader and Mercea offer up many questions to consider when it comes to social media and democracy, and do well in answering most of them through the studies offered. This book is ultimately a good launching point for considering the bridge from traditional to new media, inspiring the reader to consider all the ways in which one might be able to participate both online and offline.

Anne Kaun,

*Being a Young Citizen in Estonia: An Exploration of Young People's Civic and Media Experiences*, University of Tartu Press: Tartu, 2013; 133 pp.; €10.00

**Reviewed by:** Veronika Kalmus, *University of Tartu, Estonia*

This book originates from the author's doctoral dissertation, defended at the Universities of Örebro and Södertörn, Sweden, in 2012. The book is the first volume in a new peer-reviewed series Politics and Society in the Baltic Sea Region, published by the University of Tartu Press and devoted to exploring contemporary social and political issues in the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea.

While being firmly located in the field of media studies, the book draws on insights from philosophy, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, critical theories and discourse theory – to name the most prominent disciplines and threads of theoretical inspiration for the author. This is done in order to abandon the media-centred approach to media studies in favour of 'a decentred perspective on the media as sites of discursive struggle' (p. 25). In following a simultaneously old and new suggestion that media studies should move from researching media as its object to studying the media in society, Anne Kaun focuses on the question of how young adults' experiences as citizens intersect with their media experiences. The media, according to her viewpoint, are seen as 'a space of possibilities for civic experiences with the potential to both enable and constrain civic engagement' (p. 7). Furthermore, the author adopts an alternative way of analysing the processes of mediation and mediatization, namely through focusing on 'the media perceptions of media users themselves' (p. 8). Thus, the core question of her study lies on whether and how young people understand and reflect upon a growing importance of the media in all spheres of life (mediatization) as well as media's representational role (mediation).

The central pillar of the theoretical framework of the book is the concept of *experiences*. Following the conceptualizations by Edmund Husserl and Wilhelm Dilthey, and drawing upon contributions from within anthropology (Victor Turner), cultural studies (Raymond Williams) and critical theory (Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge), Anne Kaun distinguishes between experiences as individual, specific, meaningful episodes, in other words *lived experience* (*Erlebnisse* for both Husserl and

Dilthey), and experiences as a general stream of encounters, a structure of feelings or culture, or a social character of a specific historical period (*Erfahrung*). The focus of her study, however, strongly lies on individual *Erlebnisse*, while *Erfahrung* is of interest only to the degree that specific civic experiences of young people are linked to the general civic culture prevalent in contemporary Estonia.

Another crucial distinction applied in the book is between civic experiences that involve some kind of *action* (civic participation or direct political action) and civic experiences that are mainly based on an *orientation* or involvement (public connection). The author admits and demonstrates in spots in the analysis that the boundary between these two forms of civic experience is not clear-cut: action-based experiences and non-action-based experiences often intersect and overlap or trigger each other. While the book 'seeks to make a conceptual contribution by proposing an analytical approach to civic experiences that includes both action- and non-action-based understandings' (p. 10), the study clearly focuses on civic experiences as orientation (public connection) – partly because this aspect 'has largely been overlooked in previous research' (p. 32), and partly due to the chosen methodological approach and empirical material.

The analytical goal of the book does not entail providing representative generalizations about Estonian youth; rather, the author aims to elaborate the discourse on media and civic experiences using young people's stories and 'to develop existing theoretical accounts through those stories' (p. 38). Young adults, all of them 'students with all kinds of interests and positions regarding publics and politics' (p. 50), shared their experiences in online, though not publicly accessible, diaries and in-depth interviews conducted by the author who seems to have done her best to achieve a relative sample balance in terms of gender, place of residence and ethnicity (Estonian and Russian-speaking youth). The book devotes a considerable amount of space to give a thorough and rigorous description of the methodological details and considerations as well as the sociopolitical and economic context of the study. While the author discusses possible ambiguities and contradictions in the empirical material, she, for some reason, neither mentions the language in which the data were collected (was it self-evidently English?) nor considers the mediating function of language or the way language structures and language proficiency potentially mould the construction of stories.

By and large, Anne Kaun's analytical pathway follows Paul Ricoeur's 'hermeneutic arc', moving between the empirical material, theoretical categories and insights from previous research. She has selectively and elegantly combined methodological tools and categories provided by narrative analysis and discourse theory, presenting the results of her analysis in a well-readable story unfolding through three empirical chapters of the book.

These three empirically based chapters revolve, respectively, around three core categories that emerged in the analysis of young people's stories: *media criticism*, *play* and *history*. While the first two categories appeared as dominant themes in the diaries, the third one, focusing on the historical tensions between ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russians, was mainly represented in the interviews, being thus less participant-driven.

In the chapter focusing on media criticism, Anne Kaun introduces a crucial distinction between two types of young people – *critical media connectors* and *critical media disconnectors*. The latter are characterized by withdrawal from mainstream news

consumption, the conscious strategy of *exit* (to use Albert Hirschman's term), based on media criticism and discontent. Anne Kaun's analysis, however, demonstrates that critical media disconnectors also remain connected to discursive publics through relying on information from their primary groups and networks. Even more interestingly, her analysis reveals several problems in evaluating the role of critical media connectors in relation to democracy and civic culture. For instance, young adults tend to perform their critical communicative actions mainly in corporate spaces (commentaries on mainstream news, blogs and Facebook), leading to privatization and segmentation of public opinion. Thus, while young people's media criticism can be seen as a sign of the vitality of democracy, it also bears the potential to depoliticize the same agents.

The chapter dedicated to playful public connection demonstrates most vividly dynamic relationships between action and orientation by analysing how young adults' joyful, voluntary practices of engaging with politics trigger or are triggered by (mediated) public connection, and how practices and orientation may collapse into each other. The chapter ends by critically discussing the transformative potential of playful civic engagement that, in many real-life instances, may still remain inconsequential for the hegemonic discourse.

The last empirical chapter relates the lived experience of young people to dominant historical narratives. This chapter offers some good illustrations of the paradox of a shared history of ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russians that is at the same time not shared, and explores which nodal points of the dominant discourse are meaningful for the young people's experiences of history. The chapter concludes that the young adults consider a common and shared historical narrative as essential for reconciliation of the society, thus reproducing the dominant narrative of Estonian integration policy.

The concluding chapter presents a summary of the main findings as well as the author's self-evaluation of her contribution to the field of civic culture research and media studies. Anne Kaun concludes that the mainstream and new media play an important, though not the *most* important, role for young adults' civic experience. Furthermore, she emphasizes that the notion of the informed citizen, often considered as disappearing by critical authors, is still relevant to young people who, while deeming news media as crucial for democracy, relate critically to them. Thus, we can speak of 'the emergence of a more reflexive and demanding informed citizen' (p. 117) as well as 'multiple forms of citizenship that are context-dependent and under constant negotiation' (p. 117).

In sum, this book lays out an empirically well-illustrated and theoretically cemented mosaic of specific civic experiences of contemporary young people, presented in the form of an engaging story. The author's decision to focus on individual *Erlebnisse*, rather than on *Erfahrung* as the general civic culture, is simultaneously a strength and weakness of the study. While this strategy of analysis and presentation keeps the story well focused, it also limits the author's possibilities for wider and deeper interpretations of the phenomena. This limitation becomes particularly apparent in the chapter devoted to the historical tensions between ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russians. As the author's theoretical ambition involves the scrutiny of public connection as conflict orientation, the analysis would have benefited from a more sensitive consideration of the dynamics of power relations between the ethnic groups, mentioned merely in

passing in the book. Moreover, Anne Kaun seems to have made a deliberate choice in relying mostly on analytical views from outside the Estonian academic community in contextualizing the reference points of young people's experiences of history (*language, places and discursive spaces*), possibly to avoid any ethno-centrist bias. Nevertheless, a more extensive dialogue with Estonian scholars would imaginably have led to a still richer analysis of the historical context and political implications of inter-ethnic power relations and discursive conflicts.