

Alexander Gallus, Sebastian Liebold, Frank Schale (Hg.), Vermessungen einer Intellectual History der frühen Bundesrepublik, Göttingen (Wallstein) 2020, 392 S., ISBN 978-3-8353-3472-4, EUR 32,00; Axel Schildt, Medien-Intellektuelle in der Bundesrepublik. Herausgegeben und mit einem Nachwort versehen von Gabriele Kandzora und Detlef Siegfried, Göttingen (Wallstein) 2020, 896 S., ISBN 978-3-8353-3774-9, EUR 46,00.

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For quite some time now, there has been a sustained interest in the intellectual history of the Federal Republic of Germany. Contrary to an earlier focus on foreign policy, economic reconstruction, or the development of democracy, this more recent concern with ideas and intellectuals centers on the self-reflection and, ultimately, the self-recognition of the Federal Republic. Founded with significant Allied and especially American support yet also building on long-standing German traditions, the Federal Republic lacked a foundational consensus or formative moment, such as the American and French revolutions in the 18th century. As a result, postwar German intellectuals engaged in sustained and bitter debates about how to define the nature of the new republic, often in explicit contrast to previous periods in German history and fueled by hopes (and fears) of an uncertain future.

Both volumes significantly contribute to this new intellectual history of the Federal Republic. Yet the use of the English term »Intellectual History« in the title of the edited volume by Alexander Gallus, Sebastian Liebold and Frank Schale suggests that this field is not very well grounded in German-language historiography. The dominance of a social-scientific approach to historical writing has tended to relegate »ideas« and »intellectuals« to an area of lesser concern, which allegedly contributed relatively little to explaining the course of German history after 1945. Both publications seek to correct this long-standing marginalization of intellectual history in the German historical discipline. They not only highlight the drama and vibrancy of intellectual debates in postwar Germany but underline their significance for the broader history of the Federal Republic.

Both volumes share some important similarities in how they approach the intellectual history of the Federal Republic. In his methodological introduction, Alexander Gallus cites a biographical approach, the history of knowledge and of specific disciplines, media, and the East/West dimension as guiding methodological perspectives to the edited volume, and several of these perspectives also clearly inform Axel Schildt's monograph.



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The latter also participated in the conference on which the volume is based and contributed an essay as well. Both books also reflect some of the longstanding German skepticism toward a more old-fashioned history of ideas. They focus less on individual great thinkers and their significant works, but rather seek to analyze the role of intellectuals within broader public discourses. »Medialization« is the central concept in both publications, that is the extent to which intellectuals participated in public debates and how various media – newspapers and magazines, radio, TV – shaped these activities. Both publications thus eschew a close analysis of the most important works or intellectual debates at the time. Instead, they analyze in great depth the public engagement of intellectuals as it manifested itself in smaller contributions: newspaper articles, essays or, especially, radio broadcasts. What emerges from this analysis is a picture of a vibrant public intellectual sphere that formed an essential element of the culture of postwar West Germany. Rather than reviewing both publications separately, this review essay will seek to show how both books complement each other and often address similar themes and problems.

Axel Schildt's magisterial tome on West German media intellectuals will easily become the new benchmark publication for West German intellectual history. Never has the intellectual field during this period been analyzed so thoroughly and in such great detail as in this monograph. The book has a very tragic gestation period. Its author wrested it from a deadly disease, and he was ultimately not able to complete the manuscript as planned. The analysis stops rather abruptly in the chapter on »1968 as intellectual history«, a planned fourth part of the book on the 1970s and 1980s is missing. The manuscript was edited posthumously by the late Axel Schildt's wife, Gabriele Kandzora, and his close colleague and former collaborator, Detlef Siegfried. One can only express deep respect for the author's heroic efforts to get the manuscript to this point; he reportedly worked on it until a few days before his untimely death.

Schildt also spent more than a decade on the research for this book, which is therefore deeply grounded in extensive archival research. In particular, Schildt's analysis draws heavily on the private papers and private correspondence of some of his main protagonists. What emerges is therefore not a picture of towering intellectuals producing great ideas, but a more mundane story centering on intellectuals' day-to-day struggle for public attention and a never-ending quest for prestige, either through recognition by colleagues or through frequent media appearances. The author thus highlights the performative dimension of intellectual history, with intellectuals acting as if on stage and in the context of an »economy of attention«. The »winners« were not the individuals with the best ideas and arguments but the intellectuals who managed to be at »the center of public attention« (Schildt, p. 20). This analysis also highlights the shifting contours of the West German intellectual public sphere: it elucidates the rules of what



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could (and what could not) be said in public and how these rules changed over time.

One result of Schildt's particular approach is that it offers as much a history of media as of intellectuals. The book includes detailed and fascinating histories of various publication venues, beginning with the post-1945 founding of newspapers and magazines as central platforms of intellectual debates. The histories of key publications such as »Frankfurter Hefte«, »Merkur« or also the weekly newspaper »Die Zeit« appears as essential to the history of an evolving West German public sphere. Schildt also highlights the significance of regional radio stations and of (re)emerging publishing houses such as Rowohlt near Hamburg or Kiepenheuer & Witsch in Cologne. These developments led to a temporary decline of the former capital Berlin as intellectual center, to be reversed again only in the 1960s.

This focus on publication venues is also part of the edited volume. Gabriel Rolfes analyzes the history of the »Frankfurter Hefte« and their editors, Walter Dirks and Eugen Kogon. Dirks also assumes a prominent role in Axel Schildt's work, both publications largely correct the desiderata that Rolfes identifies, namely that »both founding figures have been widely neglected by historical research« (Gallus et al., p. 334). Peter Hoeres' contribution challenges the notion of the »Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung« as the »Prawda« of the Bourgeoisie« by pointing to an »internal pluralism of the paper« (ibid., p. 368) as its distinctive feature, which owed a great deal to the more left-leaning »Feuilleton«. Stefan Gerber's essay points to several publishing projects within the Catholic milieu, such as »Hochland« or »Herder Korrespondenz«, which also receive significant attention in Schildt's book. The extent and vibrancy of a Catholic public sphere in the early Federal Republic is an important finding in both publications.

In spite of such newly emerging publication venues, both works leave no doubt that, as in other parts of West German life, there was no »zero hour« in intellectual history. As Schildt argues, about eighty percent of West German intellectuals had been active during the »Third Reich«, many had compromised themselves politically. In fact, as Schildt makes clear, a previous employment for the Nazi propaganda newspaper »Das Reich« turned out to be more of an asset rather than a liability for intellectuals in the postwar period because it allowed them to reactivate previously existing networks. Because of this strong continuity, it is also not surprising that there was a strong conservative tendency within the intellectual scene of the early Federal Republic. It manifested itself either in an anti-modernist, cultural pessimistic version or a Protestant, nationalist version continuing the tradition of the anti-democratic conservative revolution of the 1920s. An important part of Schildt's story, which he had analyzed in previous publications as well, is the gradual transformation of this conservative tradition into a Western-oriented, liberal conservatism.

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The readjustment and transformations of political traditions in the early Federal Republic also constitute an important part of the edited volume. Like Schildt, Martina Steber's essay points to important developments within the conservative tradition. Interestingly, she highlights particular conservative sensibilities with respect to political language, in particular with respect to the use of the charged and politically compromised term »conservativism«. Ultimately, she identifies two different strands of conservatism, one more liberal version represented by the Swiss philosopher Hans Barth, who was willing to embrace postwar historical changes, and an illiberal version represented by Armin Mohler, who also features prominently in Schildt's account and who remained firmly attached to the antidemocratic ideals of the interwar conservative revolution.

In another essay, Jens Hacke, perhaps the most recognized expert on the subject, analyzes the formation of a distinct and somewhat defensive West German liberalism (or liberal conservatism) centering on the ideals of capitalism, democracy and freedom, mainly as a result of the confrontation with the antiliberal and anti-capitalist stances of the New Left. Marcus Llanque, finally, points to the persistence of an often neglected republican tradition in the deliberations about the new West German basic law, which was represented by figures like the Social Democrat Carlo Schmidt. Rather than an emergency clause for the protection of democracy in moments of danger, Schmidt favored a republican mobilization of citizens for the defense of the democratic order.

As Schildt's monograph makes clear, the confrontation with the Nazi past played an important role in this process of resurrecting or reinventing political traditions. Church publications especially functioned, as the author describes it with a felicitous phrase, as »de-browning agencies for NS-compromised intellectuals« (Schildt, p. 155). But Schildt also recounts the quixotic campaign of Kurt Ziesel, a former National Socialist, who felt excluded from postwar debates and made it his mission to expose and scandalize the Nazi past of West German public intellectuals in order to criticize their hypocrisy and postwar conformity. Many intellectuals' utter helplessness in the face of these accusations reflected a broader unwillingness to confront the legacies of the Nazi past.

The edited volume also illustrates how any intellectual history of the Federal Republic has to engage with the vexing question of continuity and rupture across the caesura of 1945. This question features prominently especially in those essays that adopt a biographical or a disciplinary approach. Ellen Thümmler contributes a more conceptual essay on the promise and potential of intellectual biographies. And several contributions analyze how individuals and entire disciplines negotiated the transition from fascism to democracy. Most of these articles confirm Schildt's findings of widespread avoidance and disavowal of the Nazi past in the early Federal Republic.



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It is fascinating to see how seemingly intra-disciplinary tendencies served as a way to avoid a difficult past. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, for example, shows, how West German sociology's relentless focus on the present of an industrial society also served as a way to circumvent a compromised past. Sociologists' emphasis on structural developments seemingly without alternative undermined the possibility of moral and political choices for which one needed to bear responsibility. Similarly, Jan Eckel illustrates how the definition of West German contemporary history as the »epoch of those who lived through this period« implied that succeeding generations ultimately lacked the necessary understanding of this period and hence could also not pass any judgement.

Schildt's book and several contributions of the edited volume also highlight the significance of analyses of the failed interwar Weimar Republic as central to the »self-commentary« (Gallus et al., p. 240) of the Federal Republic. A particularly intriguing example is Michael Dreyer's exposure of the notion of »militant democracy« or the presumed lack thereof in Weimar as one of the Federal Republic's founding myths. According to a widespread interpretation, the Weimar constitution had lacked some of the safeguards and defensive mechanisms that supposedly ensured the Federal Republic's relative political stability. Yet Dreyer's analysis not only shows that the Weimar constitution did, in fact, include such clauses, but also that West German elites, most of whom had been active during the Weimar Republic, deliberately advanced such structural explanations in order to distract from their own historical responsibilities for the failure of democracy. This article will actually force me to rewrite my standard lecture on the topic! In another fascinating article, Hendrikje J. Schauer demonstrates how competing preferences for German poets Hölderlin and Heine reflected different ideological and political positionings – Heidegger opted for Hölderlin, Adorno was for Heine, not the least because the latter's distancing from and engagement with Germany reflected Adorno's own ambivalence toward his native country.

The issue of continuity and rupture presented itself differently for emigrants or committed anti-Nazis. Frank Schale highlights the continuities in the work of Franz L. Neumann and Karl Loewenstein, as they transitioned from their earlier focus on constitutional law (*Staatsrecht*) to the new discipline of Political Science. Faced with the experience of totalitarianism, their focus shifted from constitutional ideals to less-tangible factors such as a »constitutional feeling« (Loewenstein) or the analysis of emotions such as fear in politics (Neumann). Along similar lines, Sebastian Liebold analyzes the public activities of the remigré Arnold Bergstraesser on behalf of the Federal Republic's attachment to the »West« after he had assumed a professorship in Political Science at the University of Freiburg. Interesting too is Magnus Klaue's discussion of the conservatism of the late Max Horkheimer in his self-chosen Swiss exile. Horkheimer had difficulties in processing the dramatic sociocultural changes of the 1960s and continued to



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evaluate them through a »rigid lens« (»erstarrter Blick«, Schildt, p. 306) dating back to the 1950s. Finally, Roman Yos elaborates on his pathbreaking monograph on the »young Habermas« with an interesting article on Habermas' attitude toward the neutralist »without me« movement of the 1950s, which Habermas did not see as a form of political apathy but rather as a »product of the specific experience of total collapse« (Gallus et al., p. 324) after 1945.

Both Schildt's monograph and the edited volume highlight the all-determining impact of the Cold War on West German intellectual life during the 1940s and 1950s. In fact, as Schildt argues, any analysis of West German intellectual life that does not reflect »the pressures of the Cold War would miss its mark« (Schildt, p. 219). He also makes clear that the Cold War was not just a framework for intellectual debate but that the prevailing anti-Communism defined virtually any intellectual exchange in the Federal Republic. Schildt's contribution to the edited volume thus also highlights the »pressure to take sides« for intellectuals during the Cold War. Ironically, these pressures also could have a democratizing effect, for example with respect to West German conservatism's »opening to the West« and the gradual embrace of parliamentary democracy.

Friedrich Kießling's contribution is the only one that explicitly focuses on the German/German dimension of postwar intellectual life. Kießling makes the stunning but quite persuasive observation that East German intellectuals initially exhibited greater conformity with their state than West German intellectuals, many of whom only gradually integrated themselves into the West German political order and »made it their own« (Gallus et al., p. 61). But the path to this intellectual self-recognition was long and twisted, its final conclusion in the 1980s was supposed to be the subject of the last part of Schildt's book, which he was no longer able to complete. East German intellectuals, by contrast, experienced the reverse process of increasing alienation from their state, leading some of the most prominent of them to leave the GDR and move to the Federal Republic by the late 1950s – a fact which Schildt highlights as crucial for West German intellectual history.

The waning of Cold War tensions by the late 1950s also created the ideological and political space for the continued growth of an important critical left-wing tradition within West German intellectual life, including a gradual incorporation of Marxist ideas. This is an important theme in Schildt's monograph. Returning left-wing emigrants from the Frankfurt School were crucial to this tradition, even though they tended to deemphasize their earlier Marxism. But the critical Left also included homegrown West German intellectuals, especially the group of writers that made up Hans Werner Richter's legendary »Group 47«. As indicated above, Schildt makes much out of the migration of dissident Communist intellectuals, like the philosopher Ernst Bloch and the literary scholar Hans Mayer, from East to West Germany. These figures contributed significantly to a broader (left-wing) politicization of intellectuals against a conservative dominance and



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against a West German state that was increasingly perceived as proto-authoritarian, especially in the aftermath of the infamous »Spiegel«-affair of 1962.

This process then points forward to the emergence of the New Left in the second half of the 1960s, which, according to Schildt, cannot be explained solely as the product of a sudden generational conflict but rather resulted from more long-term transformations. Intellectual history, Schildt argues convincingly, is particularly well suited to explain the »utopian excess« of the West German »68ers«, many of whom exhibited a veritable »hunger for reading« and infatuation with theory (Schildt, p. 764–765).

Schildt's focus on media intellectuals also has the advantage of bringing into focus individual figures who have not featured prominently in (intellectual) histories of the Federal Republic yet nevertheless exerted considerable influence on public debates. These individuals include Walter Dirks, the left-wing Catholic and founder of the important journal »Frankfurter Hefte«; Karl Korn, the head of the feuilleton of the »Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung«; the journalist Friedrich Sieburg as an ubiquitous conservative voice, or the writer Alfred Andersch as the program director of the South German broadcasting station (SWR). On the very conservative end (and occasionally crossing the line into neofascism), Schildt highlights the activities of Armin Mohler, who strove to uphold unapologetically the ideals of the anti-democratic conservative revolution in the Federal Republic.

Theodor Adorno was perhaps the one intellectual who managed to bridge the gap between academic and public life best. He was a frequent presence on the radio, at some point almost every week, and his considerable rhetorical skills led some of his antagonists to avoid having to engage with him in live-discussions on the air. Schildt also restores somewhat forgotten figures like the Jewish socialist Kurt Hiller to their rightful place within West German intellectual life. Hiller observed the West German intellectual scene from London for a decade before remigrating to West Germany. Among the future 68ers, the writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger managed to have an extensive media presence, also and especially on the radio. Interestingly, while the onset of television in the 1960s created new forums for intellectual debate, there was no full-scale transition to a TV culture but rather a return to print media. The highest circulation of print media in West Germany was in the year 1983.

There is no other publication that provides a similarly detailed and dense description of the West German intellectual life of the 1940s and 1950s as Axel Schildt's monograph. And yet, it might be in the interest of the author himself, who was always deeply invested in critical intellectual debate, to also raise some critical points. First, while the author names some of the blind spots of the West German intellectual debate, he never analyzes more profoundly their deeper reasons or implications. For example, the author notes that the public intellectual debate after 1945

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was almost entirely male. The public performance of almost exclusively male intellectuals was therefore deeply gendered. But it does not become clear how and why conceptions of masculinity informed these debates. Secondly, the author notes that the issue of racial segregation in the United States of the 1940s and 1950s was »rarely thematized« (Schildt, p. 355). Yet we don't learn what intellectual labor was necessary to exclude this issue from the extensive debates over »the West« as model for and telos of postwar West German society.

Finally, the author adopts some longstanding arguments from the historiography on the Federal Republic (to which his previous publications have significantly contributed) even though his own evidence occasionally seems to point into a different direction. For example, he states that the »1960s were the only period in the history of the Federal Republic in which an unbroken optimism about the future dominated« (Schildt, p. 626). Yet only a few pages later, he discusses the diagnosis of a pending »educational catastrophe« in postwar West Germany, which points to a persistent and important discourse of multiple crises that was part of the 1960s as well. Along the same lines, chapter titles such as »brightening« (»Aufhellung«, Schildt, p. 453) suggest a process of progressive enlightenment in West German intellectual life. This conceptualization not only appears rather teleological, as a story from dark beginnings to a brighter future. It also obscures the ongoing blind spots within the process of liberalization (for example with respect to »race« and gender), and it downplays the persistence of darker and more pessimistic visions of the future, which continued to shape West German intellectual life throughout the 1960s and beyond.

It is of course possible that such inconsistencies or omissions would have been corrected in another round of revisions which the author sadly was no longer able to complete. And while it is normal to quibble with specific arguments and judgements in such a massive historical work, such criticism should not detract from its towering achievement. Future scholars of West German history will have to recognize Axel Schildt's work as the indispensable stepping-stone for any further engagement with the topic. They will debate his many brilliant insights, will follow up his extensive footnotes, will affirm, and question his specific arguments. One can only assume that this is exactly what Axel Schildt would have wanted, and the larger scholarly community owes a deep debt of gratitude to the posthumous editors for making this book available to the public and thus ensuring Axel Schildt's academic legacy.

Considering both works together, the emphasis on public debate, on media, on a history of knowledge and public discourse for writing the intellectual history of the Federal Republic has obvious benefits. It succeeds in taking down intellectuals »from their angel-like flight in the name of the autonomy of the intellect to the earth of the historical facts of the Federal Republic«, as Alexander Gallus writes (Gallus et al., p. 35). This approach makes it possible to integrate intellectual history into the by now well-



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developed historiography of the Federal Republic. Pointing to the vibrant intellectual debates also demonstrates that the evolution of West German democracy was not an automatic outcome (»demokratischer Selbstläufer«, Schildt, p. 36), as Axel Schildt writes in his contribution to the volume. Instead, intellectual debates always also reflected the Federal Republic's possible futures. Taking them seriously helps to restore contingency to the Federal Republic and reduces some of the teleology that has tended to inform dominant narratives of liberalization, »Westernization«, or modernization. In this sense, intellectual history is not just an add-on to the existing historiography but also helps to cast a new perspective on the history of the Federal Republic more broadly.

That said, both publications' rejection of a more traditional intellectual history centering on specific works also comes at certain costs. It means that intellectuals who played a less visible role on the performative stage of various media outlets necessarily feature less prominently. In Schildt's monograph, for example, Alfred Andersch has almost twice as many entries as Martin Heidegger, Hans Zehrer more than Jürgen Habermas, Hans-Werner Richter more than Carl Schmitt. Such weightings might be appropriate on the basis of the public presence of these authors, yet they also tend to distort the persistent national and international significance of their ideas, in some cases to this day. This is true especially for figures like Schmitt and Heidegger, whose compromised Nazi past forced them into relative public silence. But it is also true for more academically oriented intellectuals who did not seek the limelight of public media.

Both publications thus necessarily privilege a variety of contexts – institutions, media outlets, disciplinary traditions – over specific texts. In so doing, they also leave the door open for somewhat different approaches to the intellectual history of the Federal Republic, one that would identify the various contexts in the texts themselves. The intellectual history of the Federal Republic also produced some highly significant works whose histories and enduring significance remain outside the confines of intellectual history as defined by these two excellent books. That said, it is the huge and enduring benefit of these two publications, and especially of Axel Schildt's monograph, to have elucidated the larger media structures in which West German intellectuals operated and to have demonstrated the formative influence of these media outlets on their ideas.



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