

The subsequent five chapters are organized thematically. Chapters two and three deal with those interactions that used to be primary functions of street space—economic exchange and social connection. At the beginning of Ladd’s chosen period, street hawkers sold everything from pickles to live animals to mounds of peat, and even bankers and doctors conducted their trades in the street. Wherever urbanites used street space for diverse purposes, they also encountered diverse others, generating constant opportunities for “social friction” (109) and attempts to regulate unsettling confrontations between classes and genders. A process that began as separating out zones for shoppers and traffic for control and convenience—widening streets, raising sidewalks, and designating spaces for market stalls—ended with the withdrawal of most shopping from the street behind enclosed storefronts.

Chapter four examines the most celebrated transformation of the street: the removal of its filth. This chapter includes some familiar stories, like the introduction of sewers, but also some less familiar ones, like the evolution of public toilets. What is most distinctive about Ladd’s account is his attention to the human infrastructure that modern plumbing replaced. Here, as throughout, he argues that the very processes that made the street more hospitable were also those that emptied them of their life. The familiar figures of the crossing sweeper with his broom and the gutter crosser with his plank disappeared along with the offending filth from which they had protected people’s shoes and skirts. Finally, chapters five and six take on the closely connected themes of transportation and public order. Ladd emphasizes how, entering the twentieth century, the desire of the state to control and the needs of traffic to move freely coincided, both demanding the elimination of unruly crowds.

The book ends with a lovely conclusion comparing two contrasting approaches to the street. The first is the “magisterial” view of the planner (or perhaps the wealthy apartment dweller from his balcony, or a contemporary urbanite navigating from her phone), who sees streets from outside or above as systems of routes through the city. The second is the street-level view of the pedestrian, who encounters the street at eye level from within its crowds. Ultimately, Ladd’s book is a celebration of the pedestrian view as a way of experiencing the street, and also as a method for understanding its history. Despite all the changes Ladd recounts, the bracing feeling of locking one’s door on a winter evening and setting out, giving oneself over to the unpredictable—and not always pleasant—sights, smells, and sounds of an urban walk is still part of life in Europe’s cities. This is certainly a feeling Ladd’s history has allowed me to appreciate even more than I did before.

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## **Demokratie. Eine deutsche Affäre – Vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart**

**By Hedwig Richter. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2020. Pp. 400. Cloth €26,95. ISBN: 978-3-406-75479-1.**

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The Federal Republic of Germany is an established parliamentary democracy. It exists since 1949. The Republic faced a lot of challenges and mastered all of them (or is working on it). The Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (*Grundgesetz*) says: “All state authority is derived from the people” (Article 20, paragraph 2). That is the source of political energy and

health for the German state. But democracy cannot be taken for granted at all times. German history especially teaches us that. So it is an exciting and worthwhile project to describe the details of Germany becoming a democracy. Hedwig Richter wants to inform a greater readership about this special aspect of German history. Critical readers will possibly be deterred from reading her book by seeing the title: the word “affair” reminds you of interpersonal relations or fraudulent practices, ending the careers of politicians or managers. You may never have heard of democracy as an affair, even if a political system has, of course, something to do with human relationships. Unfortunately, the strange title sets the “standard” for the whole book. In terms of content and language, the book is (I am sorry to say) not really good. There are several reasons why I cannot recommend this book.

First of all, let us cast a critical eye over the content. Richter wants to describe democracy, but she does not explain the term “democracy,” to which the book is dedicated, after all. Instead, one can find a hodgepodge of terms in the introduction. Again and again, democracy, the rule of law (with all its aspects such as legal protection and human rights), and elements of the welfare state are mixed up or used as if they were synonyms. Richter mentions four theses in her introduction: the history of democracy has mostly been an elite project, a history of restrictions, and an international history, mainly taking part in the North Atlantic countries (11–15). These three theses are not new. They have been sufficiently verified by many historians before. A real problem is the fourth thesis. Richter writes that the history of democracy has been essentially a history of the human body, of its mistreatment and dignity (13). The author does not prove any of her theses, especially not her very own creation, the fourth thesis. She just claims a relation between democracy and the human body several times. It is not enough to mention four theses without verifying them.

But there are more weaknesses of this book. The author sets the wrong priorities. It is astonishing how briefly and superficially she deals with the Weimar Republic (the first German democracy) and with the peaceful revolution in the former German Democratic Republic in 1989. If one wants to show the strength of democratic ideas, the example of 1989 is one of the best one may find. However, Richter talks for nearly thirty pages about National Socialism, but the Nazi regime had nothing to do with democracy. It ended democracy for more than twelve years. Furthermore, there are many other factual mistakes. Just some examples: Richter tells us the German Reich, founded in 1871, had been a democracy (183). In fact, the constitution had some democratic elements such as the suffrage and the Reichstag, but the Reich was not democratic until November 1918 when a revolution took place and the Kaiser left Germany. Richter says that the Nazi Horst Wessel died in a street fight (227). That is wrong. He died after an attack in the world of prostitutes and pimps rather than in a political brawl. Italy became a republic in 1946 and not, as Richter writes, in 1948 (255). And why does the author draw a line between the misery at the end of the Second World War and the constitution adopted by the National Assembly in St. Paul’s Church in 1849 (252)? The cruelty of war had nothing to do with any constitution, especially not with the constitution of 1849, which did not even come into effect.

Let me say a few words about the language used: Richter uses a lot of catchphrases, slogans, stylistic blunders, and poor or wrong comparisons (e.g., the history of democracy as a history of the human body). A specially annoying example (in my own translation): “The Nazi regime meant a simplification of the government by the people and an elimination of checks and balances, a triumph of the fist and strong majorities” (222). National Socialism was never a government by the people and never a triumph of strong majorities. It had nothing to do with democracy or majority decisions.

I am sorry to say this: Do not read this book if you are really interested in German history or in the history of German democracy. There are many other books (in German, English, and other languages) that will help you more.