

The Discourse of Politics in Action Politics as Usual

Ruth Wodak

Nowadays we have unprecedented levels of access to information; politics and the media share a closer relationship than ever before, and the more successful politicians acquire the status of quasi-celebrities. Despite this, there is widespread disenchantment with politics, a growing cynicism about the political process, and much concern about the so-called 'democratic deficit'. And yet, how much do we actually know about the real world of politics? Is our eroding trust in politicians based on a lack of understanding about the activities they actually engage in?

In an extensive critical ethnography of the European Parliament, typical 'orders and disorders of discourse' are identified that illustrate the discursive mechanisms by which politics are organised in this and other (transnational, national and regional) arenas. The intricate complexity of 'power-knowledge' in the daily quest for hegemony is analysed in detail, carefully documenting politicians' movement across many 'communities of practice', employing a huge range of genres, conversational styles, argumentative moves, and (in)direct pragmatic devices, as part of their 'professional habitus'. Furthermore, this critical discourse analysis is juxtaposed with its fictionalised representation in the American TV soap *The West Wing*, which constructs an idealised version of this 'backstage', conveying to a global audience a highly simplistic account of what politics entails. This book goes behind the scenes of politics, uncovering the reality of daily 'politics as usual', and contrasting this with the glamorised, often sensationalised world of politics presented to us on television.

CONTENTS:

List of Figures, Tables and Photographs

Preface

'Doing Politics'

The (Ir)rationality of Politics

'Politics as Usual' on the 'European Stage': Constructing and performing 'European Identities

One Day in the Life of a MEP

Everyday Politics in Television: Fiction and/or Reality?

Order or Disorder: Fiction or Reality? The Implications of 'Power and Knowledge Management' on the Organization of 'Politics as Usual'

Appendix

Notes

References

Index

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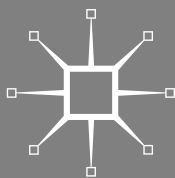
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