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# David L. Altheide: Media Edge: Media Logic and Social Reality

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## David L. Altheide: Media Edge: Media Logic and Social Reality

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Communicating, sharing, and narrating have always been a means of transmitting information to the masses. From the end of the 20th century onwards, media have been developing and expanding: humankind has been creating new types of media that have facilitated and sped up communication. Do new media types emerge because the old ones are not advanced enough to cover the richness of social issues that appear apace? Is media's tendency to focus on negative events to be blamed on the easy access to all the information since nowadays anyone can post whatever they choose, which makes it impossible to keep information secret? Could it even be the case that both aspects have merged, hence making media and social

issues inseparable ones? What is the relationship between information and media? In other words, how is „media logic" that David L. Altheide defines as „a form of communication and the process through which media transmit and communicate information" (p.22) constructed today?

Altheide's *Media Edge: Media Logic and Social Reality* is an endeavor to reveal how today, or to be more precise, during the last one-and-a-half decades, media shaped our reality, provoking certain issues and consequences while relegating other ones to the background.

Altheide attempts to demonstrate „how technologies shifted the focus from events to how we play with, and in, those events," and therefore he inve-

stigates media's change to the „more instantaneous, visual, and personal" (p.1). In addition, the author argues that the focal point of contemporary media is „immediacy" whereas „meaning" obscures (see p.2). He explains this with the wide-spread distribution of high-tech gadgets like smartphones, tablets, etc. that enable their users to quickly create and post or send videos and photos worldwide. Hence, the visibility and agility of information is the key feature of our time and a guiding principle for media. Another factor that media indeed apply and exploit to the limit is „the appeal to emotion" (p.19). However, the main emotion that media have tended to arouse or evoke over the last decade or so is „fear" (see p.37-38). According to Altheide, the evident explanation of this is the intimidation of the population (especially of US citizens) by the several terrorist attacks after 9/11. Media, therefore, is now chiefly used as a channel of political propaganda – „dramatizing" (p.57) certain facts media „demonstrate the importance of expanded surveillance" (p.58). However, the fact that „popular culture promotes fear as entertainment" (p.65) entails important consequences, namely the population's constant fear of „terrorists and immigrants" (p.65). Therefore, Altheide claims that media turn „terrorism [alongside some other issues into] exaggerated threats to public safety" (p.72). To support this point, the author scrupulously analyzes some recent political events, namely the wars in Gaza (2008; 2012), the Arab Spring (2011), the Boston marathon bombing (2013), Edward Snowden's revelations of US espionage (2013), Russia's annexation of the Crimea (2014), as well as numerous shootings in public places in the USA, and seeks to investigate the role media have played in them. The detailed analysis that Altheide presents to his readers, therefore, proves his theory about fear and media legitimate.

Moreover, Altheide brings to our attention a problem of so-called „risk communication" (p.118) that „involves claims makers asserting that knowledge […] about a selected topic […] can produce known negative consequences/effects" (p.118). Finally, he provides a context for „shielding risk" (p.132), i.e., „the strategic use of dominant cultural symbols, narratives, and communication formats to deflect and often negate claims about risks" (p.132), and illustrates this by referring to the national obsession with guns as means of protection.

Today, in times of computers and smartphones, video streaming services, along with numerous social-network-sites and microblogging services, David L. Altheide's *Media Edge: Media Logic and Social Reality* is a perfectly current piece of scholarship. The book is a brilliant account, first, of the development and innovations in „media logic" and, second and most importantly, for its critical discussion of the interdependence and interweaving between this logic and „social reality," as the title suggests. For academics involved in media studies, communication, and/or journalism, or for anyone concerned with media's influence on society, Altheide's most recent book is a must read.

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