

Introduction: from policy and polity to politicking and politicization

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Titles such as *Redefining Politics* (Leftwich 1983), *Changing Boundaries of the Political* (Maier [ed.] 1987), *Defining the Political* (Howard 1989), or *The Concept of the Political Revisited* (Heller 1991) flourish today even in the anglophone literature on politics. For a continental scholar the anglophone literature has all too often avoided the conceptual question of interpreting the political by referring to the difference between the three words politics, policy and polity, which appear to be self-evident to the ordinary English speaker.

In fact, the most important attempts to interpret the difference between politics and policy or between all of the three terms seem to have been written by foreigners (cf. de Jouvenel 1955; Aron 1965; Rohe 1978) or emigrants (esp. Heidenheimer 1986). By comparing these distinctions, and the queries on embassies, conducted by Heidenheimer (1986, 21), it is striking to notice that the distinctions are by no means clear. The attempt to 'solve' conceptual questions by a more precise vocabulary only shifts the problems of interpretation somewhat further.

Still, the differentiation of the polit-vocabulary can be used as a starting point for interpreting conceptual oppositions by linking them to the history of the concept. Expressed in linguistic terms, politics is a concept, whose history requires both the study of conflicts of signs (*Bezeichnungskonflikte*) and conflicts of meaning (*Bedeutungskonflikte*) (for the terminology cf. Klein 1989, 1991).

Using my research on the conceptual history of politics in Germany up to 1933 (Palonen 1985) and France up to the mid-sixties (Palonen 1989b) as a starting point, I try to relate the English vocabulary to the conceptual changes in continental contexts. Without conducting empirical research on original sources, I make use of neologisms in the vocabulary as a reference to conceptual changes.

The horizon shift from discipline to action

My starting point is Reinhart Koselleck's (1972, 1979) thesis on the qualitative shift in the meaning of all of the political and social concepts during the period from 1750 to 1850, at least in the German-speaking world. A contemporary reader cannot, without an interpretative operation, understand the use of key concepts in the texts earlier to this *Sattelzeit*, as Koselleck calls it.

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One aspect of this conceptual shift is the introduction of time into the concepts. While the concepts before the *Sattelzeit* were static, the new concepts are *Bewegungsbegriffe*, notions of movement, which refer in one way or another to the past, the present and the future.

What does this signify to the concept of politics? In a sense, this question is falsely posed. *The Politics* (*Tà politikà*) is the title of Aristotle's great book, but its subject is, of course, not 'politics' but *polis*, or the political in the sense of that which concerns the *polis*. Until the 18th century, Politics remained a title of a discipline, such as Ethics or Metaphysics, but did not refer to an activity. To speak of politics as action has only become possible during the *Sattelzeit* period, according to my research both in Germany and in France since around 1800 (cf. Palonen 1985, 23-31; 1989b, 25-31, 37-40). This conceptual horizon shift – as I call it – from a discipline title to a phenomenon of politics (cf. Vollrath 1989) renders a notion of politics as action possible. This horizon shift has hardly been recognized by the authors and it can only be detected in retrospect with a specified searchlight of interest.

The concept of a discipline was, in early modern times, divided into two types: science and art. When understanding politics as an art, it is often difficult to distinguish between the art as a discipline and the practice of the art. In comparing, for example, *Du contrat social* by Rousseau (1762) with Guizot (1821; 1822), it is, however, possible to detect that *la politique* as an art has, in those contexts, a different significance. Rousseau (cf. e.g. the note to ch. II.3.) still uses it as a discipline in applying the norms of the art to practice, while in the texts of Guizot the art *la politique* refers to the qualification of a practice, as an artistic action. In Germany the corresponding shift in the 19th century is also marked by a differentiated vocabulary, distinguishing *Politik als Kunstlehre* from the practice of *Politik als Kunst*.

While the horizon shift was hardly noticed, the older usage did not suddenly disappear. However, as a general trend, in the second part of the 19th century the older usage became obsolete, both in German and in French texts. To speak of politics as action also opened, as an unintended by-product, a new conceptual horizon for interpretation, although this was only slowly realized. It led to novelties both in the vocabulary as well as in the re-interpretation of the phenomenon.

The differentiation of the political from other areas is already visible in the early 19th century, for example in Guizot's attempts to distinguish 'political crimes'. Today, this corresponds to the conventional usage of viewing politics as a sphere or sector. More interesting for the present purposes are later novelties, which introduce a qualitative aspect view of politics. In the late 19th century, a qualitative sense of the adjective appears in German, for example in the formulas *politischer Kopf* or *politische Urteilskraft*, which refer to the ability to judge things politically. Such a vocabulary is widely used especially in Max Weber's Freiburg

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inaugural address (1895). Related to it is the transformation of the adjective into a noun, *das Politische*, which is found already in Jellinek's *Allgemeine Staatslehre* (1900, 158), while in French I have found *le politique* in the sense of the political (and not of the politician) for the first time in the 1920's.

The most important neologism seems to be, however, *Politisierung*, which was probably introduced by Karl Lamprecht in 1907 in the quite harmless sense of a greater interest in public affairs. But the word was rapidly utilized by others, such as the expressionist *literati* Ludwig Rubiner and Kurt Hiller, who used it both in re-interpreting the political and as a demand for politicization. In French, *politisation* appeared only in the thirties and remained mainly pejorative (cf. Palonen 1989a).

In general, both the extension of the vocabulary and the downfall of old etatist politics brought about in the aftermath of World War I created a huge interest in re-thinking the concept of politics in Germany. A simple return to the old usage or to some commonly accepted usage in general was out of the question, while the claims of re-interpretation reached the 'core' of the concept. Carl Schmitt's *Der Begriff des Politischen* (1927/1932) forms, by its explicit opposition to the old etatist sense, a paradigm for polemically re-interpreting the concept. In somewhat less dramatic and explicit forms, a similar re-thinking of the political can be found in France after World War II, especially in late fifties and early sixties.

From polis to politics

Let me end my recapitulation of the German and French discussion here and return to the English usage. No comparable controversies and attempts to re-think the political has been found until recently, at least if we exclude emigrants such as Hans Morgenthau (1946), who had already as a young specialist in international law written original contributions on the subject both in German (1929) and in French (1933), or Hannah Arendt (1958/1960). Still, something like a horizon shift to an action-concept of politics seems to have taken place even in the English usage¹.

Polit-neologisms in English are not always noted in the dictionaries even today. Dictionaries notwithstanding, at least **politicking** and **politicization** have been introduced into English in this century. For my present subject they are important references to understand politics in terms of a *Bewegungsbegriff* even in English.

In a sense, the three traditional substantives of the political in English are not as symmetric as they are presented by Karl Rohe (1978, 62-68). Rather they have different histories and a different sense of importance in contemporary usage. Rohe and Andreas Dörner also note, in a later article comparing the German and

¹ My approach remains at a formal and microscopic level and thus disregards some interesting aspects of the debate on the political, especially its relations to the public vs. private distinction.

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English usage, an asymmetry between politics and policy. Politics has undoubtedly become a concept, which is subject to different interpretations, but policy does not appear as an entry in British encyclopaedias (cf. Rohe & Dörner 1991, 49n).

Politics has become a concept in the sense that it has replaced *polis* as a horizon of reference for the whole polit-vocabulary. A linguistic sign for this transformation is the replacement of the original plural with the singular. **Politics** refers to 'that which belongs to polis' or later, when this specific reference has lost its actual meaning, to 'that which belongs to the subject area of the discipline Politics', comparable to the Latin plural *politices*, used for example in titles of university chairs in early modern times. **Politics** is refers to a concept, for which the grammatical plural has lost its significance. According to my hypothesis, this change can be read as one corresponding to the horizon shift I have noticed in German and French usage, although the polit-vocabulary in German appears to be more differentiated than in English (cf. Dörner 1992).

Historically, polity and policy are both rooted in the ancient *politeia*. The former retains the sense of order: like *politeia* in the Greek world, it can be judged both normatively and in purely formal terms, referring to the 'political system' or 'political sphere' in general. Policy as a line or plan of action is of newer origin, more or less directly related to the sense of politics as an art, retaining the finalistic sense of being oriented towards something, and the normative sense of being at distance with the actual state of things².

However, policy is, like *une politique* in French, always a figure of thought, an action as it is planned in advance, a reflected line of action. Politics is then an action more or less following the line thought out by policy in advance. Politics-as-policy-conceptions in this sense can be found from early 20th century Germany, mainly from neo-Kantian traditions (cf. Grelling 1916; Nelson 1924; Gross 1931 and my interpretation in Palonen 1985, ch. 5.). When politics is understood as action, it is confronted with unpredictable situations and with opposed policies, which cannot be previously reflected into a policy. Thus even for these conceptions, stressing the relative continuity in politics introduced by the reflected 'line' of a policy, some distance to policy is always required for politics, in order not to be too rigid or too predictable to the adversaries.

Using Arendtian terminology, the opposition appears more radical: politics refers to action, while policy refers to fabrication, explicitly expressed in the current term **policy-making** (cf. Summa 1992). For example the attempts of planning bureaucrats to replace politics by policy can be seen as one of the latest attempts to replace action by fabrication in the understanding of politics (cf.

² In this respect, my interpretation differs from that of Arnold J. Heidenheimer, who rather stresses the links between policy and the concepts *police* in French and *Polizey* in German (1986, esp. 7-19).

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Arendt 1958/1960, ch. 31). But doing so signifies a misunderstanding of the role of policy as a reflective guidance for action. Not to follow a pre-determined policy is not always a sign of weakness, it can also be a sign of a clever, 'politic', use of opportunities and as well as acknowledgement of the limits inherent in thinking about action situations in advance.

Politics as correlate of politicking and politicization

This horizon shift in the autonomization of politics into a concept opens a new conceptual space for interpretation. The introduction of the neologisms **politicking** and **politicization** is another indication of the **autonomization of politics as a specific concept**, to which both are referring, even linguistically³. Perhaps a re-actualization of the adjective **politic** also becomes visible at least in politicking. In some contexts even the form **politicalization**, referring to the adjective, can be found (e.g. Arendt 1968, 78), but politicization has become more current.

Another sign of both the late introduction of politics as a concept and of the horizon shift required for it is the lack of a single verb for expressions such as to act politically in most languages, including German and French (e.g. the intransitive *politisieren* in German only refers to talking about politics). The interesting feature in both politicking and politicization is their **verbal character**, referring to aspects of politics in the strict sense of a *Bewegungsbegriff*.

In this sense politicking is an elegant expression. Although its normal connotations are pejorative, this could be judged as an expression of attempts to restrict speaking of politics to a sector. For conceptual purposes, it would be best suited to use politicking as a single verb for 'acting politically', as better expressing the qualitative and verbal sense of politics as an activity (cf. Gallie 1973).

Politicking is seldom understood as a notion requiring an interpretation. In the almost the only contribution to it W.B. Gallie writes:

"... there is nothing logically absurd about elimination of all traces of political rule from what we might call 'post-political' societies, whereas the suggestion that all forms of politicking could ever be eliminated from human society certainly is absurd" (Gallie 1973, 447).

This sentence contains interesting advice for the use of Occam's razor in interpreting politics: politicking should be used as a basic or elementary operation for understanding politics, while political rule, that is polity, would only be present in specific circumstances. The assumption of the necessity of the polity can be interpreted as another expression of the old ideology of order, as opposed

³ According to the examples mentioned in *The Oxford English Dictionary* from 1989, both terms are introduced, in the sense used here, in the twenties or thirties, at first often with quotation marks and in a more or less pejorative sense, cf. vol. XII, 34.

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to politicking as a movement.

But politics as a concept of action is not exhausted by the activity of politicking. Correlative to it (and vice versa) is the **activity of politicization**. The word is also used quantitatively, in the sense of a transference of the boundaries of the political further from its 'center'. Related to the political as an aspect and of more interest is qualitative politicization, in the sense of **re-interpreting some phenomenon from a political point of view**. This detects the political aspect in a phenomenon not earlier considered as political or some new dimensions of the political in a phenomenon already acknowledged as political.

The difference between politicking and politicization lies in their character as actions. Politicking is action in the **performative** sense (cf. Austin 1962): it refers to opposing to others, acting cunningly and cleverly. Politicization is an **interpretative** action, opening new playgrounds for politicking in showing that there is some *Spielraum* for action, that is choices to be made, questions to make about 'givens', a possible opposition against some generally accepted 'truths'. Using the metaphor of playing, **politicking takes place within some games already recognized as political, while politicization re-interprets the situation in the manner of rendering them as ones in which there is something to play** within the situation, and opening them as playgrounds (spaces, times etc.) for politicking.

In this sense, politicking and politicization are related to each other. From a nominalistic viewpoint, nothing can be taken as 'naturally political', rather politics itself can be understood historically, as an unintended product of activities which today may be called politicization. The German historian Christian Meier (1980), for example, has interpreted the reforms of Kleisthenes and Ephialtes in Athens as movements breaking away from something which was earlier considered as a given, and sees at this point 'the birth of the political in Greece'.

Without the existence of something which has already become politicized, there is no room for politicking. But the sense of politicking lies in an actualization of this room through politicking. It presupposes that the interpretative action will be followed by the performative, without being able neither to guarantee that this will be the case – all possibilities created by politicization will never be realized in politicking – neither will it give advice for the agents about what they should do.

One aspect of the difference between politicking and politicization is related to time. The time of politicking is the present: the action is always here and now, it is opportunistic in the literal sense of seizing the occasion and having no goal outside the action in the situation itself. If there is an inner relation to time in politicking – as opposed to those mediated by policy and politicization – it refers both in memory to the experiences and in strategy to expectations concerning the agents and their opponents' own ability in the art of politicking. In this sense it is just politicking which could be compared with a performative art (cf. Arendt

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1968, 153-154).

As opposed to this, the time of politicization links past, present and future together. Politicization is conceptually related to the past, opposing some aspects of that which has not earlier been considered as political. The act of re-interpreting phenomena, claiming that something political is related to present, occurs in the present, here or now, and is not necessarily a single act or decision but includes series of moves, which together form the politicizing re-interpretation. But it also refers to the future action of politicking by opening a horizon to it.

The historical and finalistic character of politicization also refers to its constant opposition to depoliticization. But this opposition is asymmetric. What has once been opened to politicking by interpretation, what is rendered as open to choice to agents and to conflicts among them, cannot, except under extraordinary circumstances, be easily forgotten or re-interpreted as necessary or closed. An active appeal to depoliticize a question is, as Carl Schmitt (1932, 21) remarked, a move in politicking, even an extremely intensive form of politicking, a movement towards closing the horizon. A different figure is passive depoliticization, based on exhaustion or on a diminishing interest in the horizon of politicking. Depoliticization in this sense does not close the horizon opened by politicization, it only renders it insignificant, irrelevant or obsolete.

Politicking and politicization thus appear as correlative to each other. It may be of strategic importance for the agent to decide, whether to act now by politicking (directly) or by politicizing something (indirectly). **Politics as an action concept is just the correlate to which both refer and through which they are linked together.**

Politics: dealing with contingency

Judged from the viewpoints of politicking and politicization the concepts of policy and polity by no means need to be abandoned. They have only to be freed from their quasi-naturalistic connotations, assuming that a wise politics would replace politicking by a policy respectively, that all politicization is related to a stable order of polity⁴. Rather they can be understood as referring to static **limit situations** of these figures of movement. Policy refers to an extremely rigid form of politicking based on a line reflected in advance, while polity refers to that which is 'surely politicized'.

In order to make these differences precise, I introduce a key concept for understanding the specificity of politics as an activity, namely contingency. On the key role of the **contingency** for politics J.G.A. Pocock comments in this quotation:

⁴ Note that this conceptual architecture of the polit-vocabulary is more nuanced than Gallie's (1973), who opposes polity (political rule) to politicking.

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"If politics be thought as the art of dealing with the contingent event, it is the art of dealing with *fortuna* as the force which directs such events and thus symbolizes pure, uncontrolled and unlegitimated contingency." (Pocock 1975, 156).

The "art of dealing with the contingent event" can now be related to polit-vocabulary. Polity and policy refer to attempts to **regimentate** (polity) or to **regulate** (policy) the contingency characteristic of politics as action. As opposed to them, politicization refers to **opening** new aspects of contingency in the situation and thus expanding the presence of the political in it. Politicking may be interpreted as the art of **playing** with the contingency, using it both as an inescapable moment of the situation to be considered in any case and as an instrument against opponents less ready to tolerate or make use of the presence of the contingency.

As playful contingency of politicking, the Arendtian idea of politics as an action, characterized by initiative and unpredictable and uncontrollable consequences, can be well expressed. Policy can be seen as the stagnation of politicking to pre-determined actions, to regulating the contingency and the opportunities proper to politicking. But policy may also be used as an instrument of politicking, as a moment of guidance for clever politicking by forming a clear line of action thought in advance. Policy is then understood as something not to be followed too strictly and even to be wholly broken down, if the situation calls for this.

Correspondingly, the polity can be interpreted as a limit concept for politicization. It can be seen as a name for the area of past politicizations available for politicking, which stagnated into a more or less definite 'regime'. It may attempt to restrict politicking to a play within the present polity, try to oppose to politicizing themes, to claim that actions related to them remain unpolitical, to normalize the politicized questions etc. But it also contains a converse element, seeing in politicization an achievement necessary to the formation of the polity itself as well as defending the autonomy of politicking 'within the regime' against the claims of replacing it by mere administration or policy-making. Elections can be seen as the very paradigm for the kind of regimentated contingency which is proper to a polity: the results of an election are open and subject to the contingent choices of the voters, but the political significance of elections lies rather in the manifestation of a stable regime.

With the language of playing the attempts to restrict or at least to concentrate politicking around a polity try to reduce the games, styles, strategies, tactics etc. of politicking in a manner which makes politics appear more or less **like a single and definite form of play**. Politicization in turn can be interpreted as a figure of opposition to this reduction of politics which emphasizes, on the contrary, the presence of **plurality** and the possibility of **novelties** at all levels of playing.

This opposition between politicization and polity can be understood purely heuristically and nominalistically. If polity is all that which has been stably politicized, it may have a significance also as a temperance towards new attempts

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of politicization: it is not always wise to use politicking in the newly politicized fields instead of the old ones. The historical layers of newer and older playgrounds have their specific significance for politics, and it may sometimes be wise to return to the possibilities of action which belong to fields politicized long ago. In this sense, even the sectoral sense of politics, referring to a polity understood as political by convention, without further reflection, may retain some value of reserve for politicking, at least against tendencies of depoliticization, always co-present with the politicization in the situation.

The ideological and rhetorical tendency to play down the contingency has been in tune with the mainstream in European intellectual heritage. Even an author as critical of the thinking of the 'Socratic school' as Hannah Arendt writes:

"Der Grund, warum wir unfähig sind, das Resultat und das Ende einer Handlung mit Sicherheit im Voraus zu bestimmen, ist einfach der, da ein Getanes kein Ende hat... Diese ungeheure Fähigkeit des Getanen... könnte eine Quelle menschlichen Stolzes sein, wenn Menschen imstande wären, diese Last von Unwiderruflichkeit und Unvorhersehbarkeit, die gerade die eigentliche Kraft des Handelns ausmachen, auf sich zu nehmen. Da dies nicht möglich ist, hat man immer gewußt." (Arendt 1958/1960, 228).

My nominalistic lecture of politics as action taking place in the two correlated horizons of politicking and politicization has, in a sense, attempted to deconstruct the prejudice in favor of stability and order, expressed also by Arendt in the last sentence. Polity and policy should not be interpreted as paradigmatic forms of politics but as limit situations. Regimentation and regulation of contingency are surely legitimate responses to it, but if they are made paradigms, they tend to exclude even attempts to provide other kinds of responses, which politicization and politicking as horizons of action render possible.

The rhetoric of reading the political

Understanding polity and policy as a complementary – polity forms the moment of a more or less stable order, which is changed in regulated forms by policy – paradigm of the political also has rhetorical consequences for talking about politics. They are valid for the experiences of actors, the commentaries and to the research as well. The appeal to the paradigm has a clear vision both about what is political and about what is central, typical and visible in politics. Politics is nothing to outsiders, but insiders can obtain a more and more precise picture of it. In the early days of political science the metaphor of a map was explicitly presented as a model for improving knowledge on politics.

To question the paradigmatic role of polity and policy and to understand them only as limit situations in the horizon of politicization and politicking also revises the ways of reading the political. There is no need for a 'romantic' apology for the marginal, the pure and the subtle etc. A **deparadigmatizing** reading is enough. The attention can be directed to unconventional forms of the political – to the

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strategic marginals, to pure ideal types in the Weberian sense, or to the non-obvious, which does not appear as political to the 'bare' eyes of an experienced observer. All this requires a microscopic approach to both distinguishing the political from the mixture with other phenomena and to singularizing the political aspect present as a means of relativizing the paradigm.

This kind of reading the political can be characterized as **demapping**. It does not destruct the maps presented, it rather directs attention to the principles used in drawing the maps, such as to the rhetoric of invariances and regularities, structures, functions, processes, i.e. of figures, which are more or less unable to express the contingency fundamental for the experience of the political. Or the research may use the existing maps, but read them differently. It can detect for example in the political geometry and architecture of names – left, right, center; progressive, reactionary; radical, moderate; and so on or in the use of authorities and other historic or conceptual references – already objects of politicking and politicization, not explicit for the agents but still shaping their choices and the contingent consequences of their oppositions. For reading the political a simple literacy is often not enough, interpretations are needed.

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