

## Book Reviews

Lowe, G.F. and Jauert, P. (Eds.). (2005). *Cultural dilemmas in Public Service Broadcasting*. Nordicom. ISBN 91-89471-32-6 (330 pp.)

It is not often that one reads a book and immediately thinks, this is a must have and obligatory material for everyone interested in the future of public broadcasting. *Cultural dilemmas in Public Service Broadcasting* is such a book. It consists of 18 actualized and fully rewritten contributions to a conference called RIPE, an acronym for Re-Visionary Interpretations of the Public Enterprise and is meant to simulate collaboration between media researchers focused on the public interest in electronic media and senior managers in public service broadcasting companies. The 'RIPE process' consists of a bi-annual conference followed by the publication of a RIPE reader in the 'off years'. *Cultural dilemmas in Public Service Broadcasting* is the second publication and has been edited by two of the founding fathers of Ripe: Per Jauert and Gregory Lowe.

Part of its 'must read' character is that the book will give readers an updated vocabulary to discuss new challenges and solutions to the so-called 'crisis in public broadcasting', which calls for a renewal of the Enlightenment Mission of PSB (p. 28). Jauert and Lowe write: "The cultural role of public service broadcasting (PSB) today is about building social capital." In doing so, they refer to Robert Putnam's famous book *Bowling Alone* (2000). According to Putnam and his followers, social capital is a key element of civic engagement and social connectedness. Ironically, while newspaper reading is associated with high social capital, Putnam blames television as one of the main sources of its decline. Television would reduce civic engagement, because it competes for scarce time; it has psychological effects that inhibit social participation, and the specific programmatic content on television undermines civic motivations. Is he wrong, or is the situation in Europe so different from the USA? The short answer would be that compared to the USA, European Public Broadcasters and European media professionals share and underline a different democratic 'ethos' for Europe and for PBS. The long answer would demand a critical re-analysis of the assumption of Putnam that of all media, only newspapers (and only very few quality-news programs) might be celebrated in terms of stimulating active citizenship. It seems unimaginable to Putnam c.s. that television as such and entertaining genres in particular would be able to have a positive effect on social capital. The editors of *Cultural dilemmas in Public Service Broadcasting* provide the long answer. They claim four important cultural and social

functions for contemporary public service broadcasting as a whole. Genre does not follow function might be their motto:

1. PSB can and should be a beneficial socializing agent
2. PSB can and should be a robust discursive medium, not only as a witness to events, but also as the medium for ‘working through’ the events. What do they mean and how does it affect our lives, be it through news, talk shows, documentary, drama, or soap opera.
3. PSB can and should be an essential civil society organization, providing an essential forum for reproducing culture and facilitating growth in social capital.
  - a. “Civil society is the forum for reproducing culture in all its forms and where people build social capital and refine norms. It is the greenhouse where cultural values blend and evolve. Public service broadcasting has an irreplaceable role as a civil society organization. Economic consequences are of secondary importance. The goal is to facilitate trust, reciprocity, fairness, and all the other attributes that figure in the quality of life.” (p. 30)
4. PSB can and should be about democratic mediation for intercultural communication as both lubricant and glue in pursuit of multicultural pluralism.

The introductory chapter of Jauert and Lowe which fleshes out these arguments should be obligatory reading material for both scholars of media studies and policymakers, but the rest of the book might be just as relevant especially for those who are looking for an outline of and a way out from the cultural dilemmas of public broadcasting.

The book consists of three parts, entitled: PSB Quality, Performance Assessment and Accountability, PSB Legitimacy in Content and Functions, and Emerging Strategic Issues for PSB. In his chapter, Tomas Coppens makes clear how, despite seemingly perfectly in line with the wishes of modern management gurus, national and supranational political authorities, the new performance driven PSB-policy schema mainly reaffirms and illustrates the decennia old dilemma challenging public service broadcasting: culture versus commerce. He even wonders whether it would be possible to reconcile a businesslike approach with a fundamentally cultural remit. Yes, would be the answer of Bardeel, D’Haenens, and Peeters who describe how the Dutch public broadcaster comes to terms with the new policy directions of the European Union and the Council of Europe regarding the precise definition of the public broadcaster’s distinctiveness in terms of tasks, missions, and performances. They discuss meaningful instruments developed for quality assessment such as visitation procedures and a ‘quality card’ with verifiable

performance criteria. An equally urgent question is posed by Brian McNair: “What does ‘public service’ mean in an era when every viewer has access not to four, or forty, but to 440 channels, supplying every conceivable taste and preference?” (p. 101). The introduction of a not-for-profit Public Service Publisher might be useful in this respect. It would distribute public service programming not just on television and radio, but also on the Internet and down mobile phone networks. Eric Saranowitz illuminates the potential and limitations for public service quality television in a multicultural society. He uncovers the often ‘empty pluralism’ of TV executives “which differentiates the ‘other’ but never makes visible its own privileged position in terms of class (predominantly middle or upper class), color (usually white), or gender (often male).” Even though the case in point is Israel, I found his deconstruction of the supposedly neutral notion of quality TV very useful.

The legitimacy of PSB has been challenged by an ever more critical audience, by politicians, and by commercial broadcasters. It seems to be high time to define anew its distinctive qualities, not only in relation to commercial broadcasters, but also to other public institutions. What is the meaning of Broadcasting in the Digital Era asks Paddy Scannell; and Hanne Bruun continues: Should entertainment be part of it? Unni From answers this question by pointing out that domestic and popular drama productions construct a sense of shared reference, a ‘cultural commons’ which supplies the national audience with a collective meeting point and the emotional feeling of being part of a community. Scannell and Bruun agree on the potential gluing experience of watching television. According to Bruun the public value of entertainment is “to include everyone and to exclude no one from the atmosphere of sociability, playfulness and belonging that it created”. Scannell argues for the irreplaceable communicative affordance of live broadcasting, because it “uniquely spans several orders of time – my time, the time of the day, the time of institutions, the time of the event – and brings them together into a gathered now that joins the lives of individuals with the life and times of the world.”

Kim Schröder and Louise Philips investigated the interplay between television news and citizens and are remarkably optimistic and positive about the situation in Denmark. Of course, there is some room for improvement for the National media (stop adding fuel to the fire of public debate is one of the recommendations), but Danish democracy is in good health. Graham Murdock does not share their optimism and argues that Public Service broadcasting has to reinvent itself as the “the pivot of the digital commons”. He suggests that by moving the modal point of entry to the Internet, public broadcasters can keep on addressing every one and in so doing counter fragmentation. PSB programs or web-based

activities would supply its national audience at least with a minimal base of shared experience.

Jeanette Steemers illuminates the core dilemma of the BBC as juggling to serve a domestic audience as well as the increasing economic necessity to export its television programs and formats. "Britain, Britishness and a British concept of public service 'quality' is no longer a selling point because the international broadcasting landscape has moved on." The inherent dangers for the BBC in serving the international marketplace are that it affects the nature of the institution and the programs it produces. Marc Raboy, David Tarasand, and Kenton Wilkinson discuss the question of PSB from a North American perspective which is illuminating as an indication of the particular situation of European broadcasters. To conclude, the book offers very insightful and well written reading material about the new cultural aims of European broadcasters, with only one minor disadvantage that the rapid developments in the new media prevented a thorough discussion of the new web based forms of public broadcasting. But I am sure that the next RIPE book about Public Service Media (Internet included) scheduled for early 2008 will fill this gap.

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Höijer, B. (Ed.). (2007). *Ideological Horizons in Media and Citizen Discourses: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches*. Göteborg: Nordicom. ISBN 978-91-89471-45-0 (165 pp.)

Birgitta Höijer took the challenge to edit a volume in which researchers from the Örebro University in Sweden develop a brand new concept: *ideological horizons*. They want to free 'ideology', with its long and emotionally charged history, from its classical Marxist interpretation. The metaphor of the horizon is used to express the idea that different actors in a globalizing world, and especially the media, dynamically influence what lies within the scope of our perception and consciousness. Alternative viewpoints, however, are kept out of sight because they lie beneath the horizon.

The authors refer to the ideological horizons as historically and culturally conditioned ways of making sense of a complex reality (p. 8). Two aspects seem of particular importance in this perspective. First, in both theory and empirical accounts there is a focus on the social agents who

carry out the 'border-control' within a certain period of time. For example, in his contribution, Nohrstedt refers to the global war on terrorism, in which hostilities can be represented as 'our' good intentions that turn out badly or as the consequences of 'their' awful actions. Second, it is acknowledged that both emotions and cognitions are of importance for meaning-making processes and identity formation. External experiences are converted into representations in people's minds, which in turn form schemas for future interpretations. Consequently, ideological horizons stand for multilevel phenomena.

Because of the holistic character of the theoretical foundations the authors opt for a multi-method approach. Therefore, the volume's subtitle suggests that the authors also offer methodological approaches to study the new concept. However, this aspect forms the main point of critique, because it is hard to find any manageable suggestion as to how ideological horizons could be studied empirically. Admittedly, there are clear theoretical chapters and some very inspiring case studies, in which content analyses and focus groups are used, but even these authors wrap their method section largely in mystery. This is a missed opportunity as many scholars try to get a grip on what lies beyond the horizon, that is, discourse that is not that explicitly articulated and other latent aspects of media content, which are taken often for granted, whereas they nonetheless occupy our consciousness.

Scholarly norms prescribe that we should always provide our colleagues with sufficient information about the steps taken so they can redo the analysis and come to comparable results. However, this kind of research is always difficult to repeat, because, regardless of any analytical procedure, the perceptive mind and the sensitivity to uncover hidden patterns and structures in the media content are the main analytical tools these scholars are gifted with. Consequently, the volume contains some masterly examples of qualitative analyses, which offer a clear insight into some of the most tempting issues of our time, but which may raise some skepticism concerning methodological aspects.

Olausson, in her contribution, illustrates how media coverage of cases in which ethnic minority groups are involved incites Swedish citizens to legitimize national power structures. Östman's contribution includes the intriguing finding that, in the cases of immigration, trafficking, and drugs, the use of military language suggests that there is much more at stake, that is, an 'innocent' nation-state and its future generations. In the next strong case study, Rasmussen explores how the media too easily make a causal connection between mental illness and violent crime. Especially after the murder of the Swedish foreign minister Anna Lindh these two different phenomena were frequently bracketed together. Kamin provides the only non-Swedish contribution to the volume. She

argues convincingly how different types of Slovenian media represent health as something to be consumed, and not only as something to strive for. In her contribution, Fogde focuses on how, in working life, the responsibility for getting a job has shifted from the governmental policy to the individual. Flexibility and employability, that is, being attractive for the labor market, are two characteristics that became indispensable for the contemporary employee. Finally, Berglez discusses the consequences of the theoretical concept and the studies' findings for journalism, and pleas for forms of global journalism, which may result in a radical social change.

Because communications studies could benefit from an own distinct set of concepts that may underline their autonomy as a discipline, this bookwork deserves praise. Both the theoretical contributions and the case studies shed light on research questions that are central to communications studies. On the other hand, it is important to avoid that we set up an abundance of concepts that overlap and might probably cause confusion. After all, some will probably refer to these cases as issues of representation, and which I, from my point-of-view, would categorize under the heading of the 'framing' concept.

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