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Kari Karppinen. *Rethinking Media Pluralism.* Donald Mcgannon Research Center's Everett C. Parker Book Series. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. 239 pp. $30.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8232-4513-0.

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Since the rise and fall of poststructuralist thought in the west European academy, quite a widespread consensus has emerged that social and mediated phenomena can be explained through "pluralism." Acting as a necessary watchword for many politically correct academics trying to escape charges of determinism, reductionism, and deliberate structuring of all kinds, "pluralism" (with the post-fix "ism" strongly rooted as in any stated ideological position) often becomes a nickel-in-the-slot mechanism that clicks in a misplaced sentimental sense of relativeness in the realm of concrete intellectual and social query. At its best, "pluralism" is a close corollary to the diversifying ethos of classical liberal humanism; at its worst, it is a crude marker of the triumph of market capitalism and consumerist culture. Although there have been many attempts to grapple theoretically with the notion of "pluralism" in other fields of the humanities and social sciences, there have not been many endeavors in mass media and journalism studies, especially with respect to media policy discussions where it is often uncritically accepted and championed as a *sui generis* condition to policies advocating the glories of the "free market" and the power of the consumer. While attempting to promote "media pluralism" as an empowering rather than a prescriptive component of critical mass media theory, this book raises some important issues, especially with regard to the unproblematic use of "pluralism" as a self-evident value in consumer behavior and market competition as well as debates on media democracy and public functions of the media.

This book aims to reclaim "media pluralism" as a critical theoretical tool for addressing issues of mass media democratization, especially in discussions related to media policy. Early on, Kari Karppinen explains his preference for the term "media pluralism" ("the favored term in recent European media policy debates") over "media diversity" (which he calls an "umbrella term" more popular in the United States), noting that his choice is also a reflection of his interest in "the underlying values and ideologies of media policy"

(pp. 3-4). In the course of his exposition, the author rejects the possibility of universally recognized standards for evaluating mass media performance and quality, and displays sufficient skepticism for any view that proposes "media pluralism" as a "blind celebration of all multiplicity," a self-evident (necessarily positive) register of the consumer choice boom, or as an empirical register of the so-called egalitarianism automatically affected by contemporary advancements in media technologies (p.14). Indeed, the greater part of his book is devoted to stressing that, "in neo-liberal media policy discourses, pluralism is often reduced to a doctrine of free markets and individual choice that is in sharp contrast to the more philosophical defense of pluralism in political liberalism" (p. 8).

Particularly interesting in this context are chapters 6 and 7 in which the author revisits the old debate on public-service media in the west European context by analyzing recent documents of the European Commission (the Broadcasting Commission of 2009 which aimed to conceptualize a common European Union approach on the application of state aid rules to public service broadcasting by mapping areas of media concentration and pluralism). Here, he demonstrates quite well that the so-called empirical indices and indicators of "media pluralism" in these policy documents served only as indicators of a directional "politics of criteria"--"because the selection of data, definitions, and criteria always involves choices of what aspects of pluralism are deemed more important than others" (p. 179).

While this study is certainly useful for studying contemporary media policy debates, it is not a new theoretical contention that the use of empirical data is also political. Also, the book contains no references to the theoretical identification of the role of preconceptions in determining selection criteria in the first place (what Hans-Georg Gadamer identifies as "prejudice" in the realm of hermeneutics), or what Michel Foucault more generally identifies as the objects, practices, and architectures of pre-discursive legitimation of discourses in any field of knowledge.[1] The total absence of references to Foucault's conceptualization of power in this book is particularly surprising, for the author argues for a critical notion of media pluralism that needs to be understood as "more about power relations and less about defining or defending differences as such" (p. 10); and also refers to the Foucauldian concept of "governmental technologies" when critiquing the empirical bend in media policy discussions (pp. 18-19, 179-181).[2]

The crux of the book's argument is contained in the first three chapters: "media pluralism" needs to be reclaimed as a "meaningful normative principle" for evaluating the relationship between media and democracy, "with the aim of balancing existing structural asymmetries in communicative power and supporting political equality" (p. 14). The argument is laid out unevenly with broad demarcations of three possible entry points to redefine democratic pluralism: classical political liberalism, deliberative democracy, and "radical pluralism." Although the author places his bets on the third, there is little highlighting of the benefits of "radical pluralism" for critical media theory, beyond pointing out the obvious flaws of the idealized conceptions of the marketplace of ideas or the public sphere and the description of the mass media as "peripheral political institutions"--those that cannot be expected to produce rational solutions to questions of politics and democracy (pp. 45-46). Continued in this vein, "media pluralism" becomes sufficiently vague like the market pluralism it seeks to critique in the first place. Identified as a "policy principle" that "does not signify any absolute core value" (a contradiction in terms, for there cannot be any principles floating in the air without any supporting emotion-driven value structures), the concept of "media pluralism" is explained as a functional indicator of a "critical attitude that involves a continuous questioning and challenging of existing structures

of communicative power" (p. 81). The problem is that this can also be read as a slightly different reiteration of the old Marxist position of "doubt(ing) everything"--the starting point of ideology-critique. However, the process of doubting (and criticism) offers little solace without references to pre-existing (mediated) values: the doubting of anything becomes impossible unless one takes refuge in recognizable tropes (once again mediated) which then become the starting point for our doubt.[3]

The book also tends to skirt references to history. In fact, there are no references to the rich intellectual traditions of west European critical media theory; older forms of engagement with the ideologies of the mass media through ***Kulturkritik*** in the critical Marxist tradition*;* or other methods of engagement with the "pluralism" of mass media by diverse European thinkers like Walter Benjamin, Raymond Williams, Niklas Luhmann, or Pierre Bourdieu. While the book pays close attention to an important issue in media studies, it leaves space for other authors to continue the project of theoretically reevaluating the notion and functions of "pluralism" in mass media discourses of western Europe, especially an evaluation of its historical emergence and validity as a rationale of media policy.

Notes

[1]. Hans-Georg Gadamer, ***Truth and Method*** (1975; repr., London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 268-278; and Michel Foucault, ***Archaeology of Knowledge*** (1969; repr., London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 62-70.

[2]. For Foucault's explorations of political philosophy, including his analysis of the role and status of neoliberalism in political philosophy, see Michel Foucault, ***The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-9*** (2004; repr., New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). For a brief evaluation of Foucault's engagement with the "technologies of the government" from a critical Marxist perspective, see Thomas Lemke, "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique," ***Rethinking Marxism*** 14, no. 3 (2002): 49-64.

[3]. As Ludwig Wittgenstein has observed in a slightly different context, a process of doubting itself starts from the presupposition of some kind of certainty. Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Aphorism 115," in ***On Certainty*** (1950-51; repr., Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), 18.

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