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Book Reviews

Mackay, H. and Ivey, D. (Eds.).(2004). *Modern media in the home*. An ethnographic study. Rome: John Libbey. ISBN: 1-860-20598-4 (160 pp.)

Mackay and Ivey's *Modern media in the home* consists of five chapters that report on an ethnographic research project about the use of mass media in ten Welsh households in 2001–2002. The chapters are well-balanced and each starts off with a short introduction. In the second chapter a description of the involved households is presented. Chapter three explores the diversity of media uses of the ten households while chapter four illustrates how to make sense of the households and their media. This chapter is followed by the conclusions.

In the first chapter the research project is introduced. Mackay and Ivey stress that their work starts off from three particular qualities (1–2): “First, it provides an *up-to-date* account of media in the home – of media use in the multi-channel, internet era ... Second, our work is unusual in that it addresses the *breadth* of mass media in the home ... Third, our study focuses on *transformations*, the changes that are taking place in the contemporary media landscape”.

Chapter two describes what Mackay and Ivey introduce as an “ethnographic portrait” (11) of the ten households. The families are described meticulously, rendering rich information on households’ daily lives: “Its members, their occupations and ages; and their physical location, the nature of their accommodation, its rooms, and how they are used. Each cameo says a little of the history and lifestyle of household members, their work, income, activities (together and separately), cultural tastes (and the ambience of their home), and how they see themselves – their identities” (14). Furthermore, aspects of the breadth of media use are briefly documented as well as the households’ senses of the Welsh identity. The ten households differ in size and relationships. There are two single men sharing a flat, a couple without children, couples with children, a single mother, a divorced woman with children, and couples where the husband has already retired. This illustrates that focusing on the ‘household’ rather than on the ‘family’ (in terms of biologically related people) gives a broader view on different ways of ‘living together’.

Chapter three investigates the households’ diversity of media use. Four mass media are investigated: the press, radio, television, and new media, with a special interest in how media use is changing in these households. This is a descriptive chapter that, in general, does not add new issues to known research findings, for example, talking about television viewing as a background to other activities or the babysitting abilities of the

television set. However, it does provide a lively account of how quantitative research material can be interpreted. An example of this is when a single mother reports that she often watches television in her bedroom because she finds it too quiet downstairs after her daughter has gone to bed. This gives an insight into the different reasons why people 'statistically' have multiple television sets in their home.

In chapter four, the ethnographic accounts are placed into a theoretical framework in order to construct a rich analysis. It consists of the analysis of five core issues: temporal rhythms, domestic space, gender, spaces of identification, and the Welsh language. The first core issue, temporal rhythms, presents an analysis of the ways in which media use structures household time. Mackay and Ivey conclude that "individuals still shift time and construct their temporal routines around the media. The importance of the idea of emergence, however, is that, whereas we might have measured the passing time in some synchronic or snapshot form, we now see a diachronic process of engaging with news, events, and programs as they happen. Viewing in real time not only shrinks space, and time, but also the distance between subject and object, between the viewer and what is viewed" (117). With regard to the domestic space, the authors analyze the way in which media and household space can be used to make a space more open or closed to other family members. This is connected to the concepts of public and private space. The authors found that media use is an important factor when households construct the ascribed meaning of certain spaces in their home. A third core issue is the way in which women use new technologies and their attitudes towards them. Although these are aspects that might be gender-related, it is a pity that a core issue such as gender is narrowed down to women and new technologies. It would have been interesting to have an insight in how youngsters (boys and girls) relate to new technologies and whether or not this reveals gender differences, since new technologies are more known and more accessible to this age group. The two remaining core issues, spaces of identification and the Welsh language, are related to the ways in which media use contributes to the creation of the Welsh identity. Although it cannot be fully understood without reading chapter two and three, chapter four is the most interesting chapter in this book.

Throughout the different chapters the authors use an extensive number of quotations from fieldwork diaries and interviews with the households. The authors must be complemented on using these in such a way that they do not hamper the flow of thoughts. These quotes are an asset and make it clear that we now live in a multimedia environment and that media use should be investigated in this changing environment. This means that, for example, internet use should be seen as intertwined with other media uses in the family home. With their book Mackay and

Ivey succeed in sensitizing us to the fact that people's media use and the meanings ascribed to it cannot be studied outside its context.

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Biegert, K. (Ed.). (2004). *News of the other. tracing identity in Scandinavian constructions of the eastern Baltic Sea region*. Goteborg: Nordicom. ISBN: 91-89471-26-1 (241 pp.)

The recent enlargement of the European Union with ten, mainly eastern European, member states is the starting point of this edited volume, containing ten profound contributions. The focus of the multinational research is particularly on the Nordic mass media (newspapers, TV) and how they report about the Baltic Sea region: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia. One should not expect large scale, quantitative content analyses. Instead, the contributors rely on often small scale samples from limited time frames (e. g., one week), but the thoroughness of their investigations and the unique cross-national and historical comparisons make this volume worth reading and definitely inspiring for everyone who is interested in identity construction by the media, as reflected in news stories as well as in images.

Geographically, the Baltic region is adjacent to the northern European countries Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Despite the fact that they are neighboring countries, the representation of the region in the Scandinavian news media is characterized by negative labeling and stereotypical portrayals. An example of this is the description of this region as less developed or, in the case of Russia, as threatening; in short, rendering spatial distance as non-essential in defining countries as more 'foreign' and 'inferior'. In Ekecrantz's contribution, for instance, we find indications that Swedish journalistic reports about the Baltic countries in the 1920s contain striking similarities with those of today. And this historical continuity is not due to the journalistic tendency to simplify complex situations, but news "constructs a very special and homogenized view of the world that has long been ensconced in the mutual exchange and misunderstanding across borders" (63).

Generally speaking, this book offers a refreshing view on the concept of the 'other' as the mainly Anglo-American theories are broadened with an inspiring Scandinavian view on the issue. Kivikuru opens the book with a discussion of the roots and ideological development of modern

Western collective identities. She, very originally, combines the insights of the usual suspects (e. g., Anderson, Gellner, and Hall) with those of Scandinavian scholars, and mainly gives clarifying examples of Finnish identity. And it is the latter which makes this theoretical chapter, often the less accessible one in a book, rather easy to get through.

Riegert and Åker elaborate on the idea of making foreign news comprehensible in a national context. According to the media, the Baltic states do not have a unique culture, but are dealing with their communist past and they have, among other peculiarities, a bad taste in music compared to ours. The mutual exchange between the diverse media flows is also demonstrated in the contribution of Lund about Danish journalism. She argues, for instance, that news about the European Union is often formulated and criticized in terms of national debates, and as such EU stories become part of ‘otherness’ and not of a new European identity.

The main shortcoming of the contributions is the absence of methodological clarifications. Making the methodological procedures more clear is not only helpful when one evaluates the validity of findings, but also for everyone who is struggling with conducting good quantitative and qualitative research. The study of Ellefson and Kingsepp is the scarce exception, for it elaborates substantially on theory and methods. What is more, they analyzed the front pages of not only Scandinavian newspapers but of other European countries, Egypt, and the USA as well, making it a very fascinating cross-national study. Following the tradition of structuralist analysis of narratives, this study demonstrates how the news story of the OSCE summit meeting in Istanbul reproduces a classic narrative of the hero, the villain, and the victim, where ‘we’ (the West) are the Good, Boris Yeltsin is the Bad and the Chechens are the Ugly, the victims. Additionally, Riegert includes some methodological notes in her contribution, but still there are no clear statements how exactly she identified the narrative themes and binary oppositions that showed up in Swedish and Danish television news of the Baltic region in the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, the findings of this study also point in the same direction, namely that there is not much evolution in the Scandinavian media portrayal of their eastern Baltic neighbors.

A differentiation of different ‘others’ can be found in Raitilla’s study, which consists of two cases. In the first, she investigated news coverage on the sinking of the ferry Estonia in 1994. Unfairly, the Finnish and the Swedish media initially publicized the suspicion that the fault lay in poorly Estonian seamanship. In the second case, which focused on Russians in newspaper articles, special attention is given to themes and means of expression, but also to the speakers and their mutual interaction, giving this research a surplus value. She figures out that the superiority of the Finnish was brought forward via the construction of “gener-

alized Russianism” and the large amount of crime news on the one hand, and via tolerance for Russians who embraced Finnishness and were “almost like us” (160).

Horst and Lolk’s study involves the perceived threat to Denmark by the Ignalia nuclear power plant in Lithuania. After they thoroughly expounded the theory on risks, they demonstrate how journalistic narratives about science are dependent on a small circle of experts and how assumptions from the Cold War period continue to shape news stories from the East. This study is particularly intriguing for those interested in national identities, since it shows how mediated stories of risks have the possibility of creating and sustaining the notion of society as an ordered place where authorities act responsibly towards any risk that threatens the nation.

As is regularly the case with edited volumes, this book also brings a diversity of contributions together under a heading that not always covers the overtones. A number of articles do not deal exclusively with the Scandinavian identity and the Baltic states. The book has some surprises in store, as for example the study of Hurd concerning the German and Swedish newspaper coverage about the German revolution of 1918–19. Another remarkable study is the one carried out by Åker who describes and analyzes five front page photographs in meticulous detail. He shows how depictions of ordinary citizens are used as metonyms for broader societal issues and for the nation’s inhabitants.

Again, we are very impressed by this contribution to scholarship from the Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom), an energetic organization with a clear international charisma that assembles communication scholars from the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden). For the future, we suggest tightening the bonds with the Baltic states. This could lead to a study about ‘mutual representation’, since the contributions at hand do not describe how the Scandinavian countries are represented in the Baltic media. Maybe it would also be fruitful to involve Baltic communication scholars in an analysis of the Nordic media. As it is stated in this volume (200), we all have limited understanding of specific values and myths in other countries, and in that respect it is advisable to set up international collaborative projects.

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