Boekbespreking van: The Media and Modernity

Smeets, I.

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society, or an alternative feminist one, which would emphasize the autonomy of care and time, rather than economic independence. I do not want to claim that these options are more accurate: my problem with Sainsbury's analysis is that she cannot see them because her model presupposes that the individual model is the most emancipated. In this sense there is a parallel with Esping-Andersen's typology: his analyses of typology of welfare states is rooted in the tradition of the power resources approach and reflects the assumption that social democracy and welfare go together; Sainsbury's research is biased through the assumption that social democratic states rectify gender inequality better than other ones.

Another problem is that Sainsbury did not include another continental country. A comparison with, for example, France would be interesting because France pairs a "conservative welfare state regime" with generous childcare and parental facilities. The whole idea of conservative welfare states has withered away in Sainsbury's book. That is a pity because it could have shown more about the meaning of gender for the interrelations between state, market and family, and therefore about ways to integrate gender in mainstream theory in welfare regimes.

Sainsbury's analysis of welfare states and gender strongly focuses on outcomes, rather than intentions and political discourses. More generally, the political dimension is missing throughout the book, despite the chapters on gender equality reform and welfare state retrenchment, which do show some important changes in welfare policy dating from the early eighties. I use the political dimension here in a rather broad sense: I refer to the meaning of the representation of political parties in government (this may be important particularly in discussion about retrenchment politics); political ideologies (especially in relation to familial ideology); the political meaning of similar concepts in different countries ("solidarity" for example, focuses in Sweden on individuals, whereas in the Netherlands it is understood to be solidarity between rich and poor families); as well as the influence of social movements, including the women's movement. I would like to have read more about the meaning of politics for the variation in welfare states.

Sainsbury has done a tremendous job in bringing so much material together and comparing so many aspects of social policy in various countries. The strength of the book lies in its detailed analysis of social policy; its weakness lies in the theoretical synthesis of data and in the feedback to the analytical models. This becomes most apparent at the end of the book. The last page is suddenly there – the moment one expects a feedback and an overall conclusion, Sainsbury stops and leaves it to the reader to draw his or her own conclusion. For me, as a reader, this conclusion raises a lot of questions. Nevertheless, these arise from a well-written book which makes an important contribution to welfare state analysis.

Jet Bussemaker

John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity. A Social Theory of the Media.* Polity Press, Oxford, 1995, ISBN 0745610056, £12.95

As a student of mass communication and political science I was pleasantly surprised to find a book on the development of modern societies in which the mass media command a central role. Such books are few, as in many sociological and political studies on the modernization of Western societies the mass media have been given only cursory attention. In the book reviewed here John Thompson tries to redress the neglect of communication media within the literature of social theory. In his latest book he puts forward a new social theory about the ways in which mass media have shaped and influenced social interaction, culture, and politics in modernizing societies.

Drawing on his familiar mixture of critical social theory, hermeneutics, and media theorists like Innis and McLuhan, Thompson's central claim is: "if we wish to understand the nature of modernity – that is, of the institutional characteristics of modern societies and the life conditions created by them – then we must give a central role to the development of communication media and their impact" (p.3). The reason being that the development of networks of (mass) communication has profoundly changed the relations of individuals to others, as mass mediated communication fundamentally differs from face-to-face interaction. As a result, the use of the communication media has transformed the spatial and temporal organization of social life, and has created new forms of action and interaction, and new modes of exercising power, which are no longer linked to the sharing of a common locale (p. 4) In eight chapters this claim is elaborated on with respect to the changing nature of social interaction, the influence of media on culture, and the nature of the public sphere.

In the first chapter of the book the nature of communication media is analysed. Both the distinctive characteristics of mass communication and the social contexts in which individuals produce and receive mediated symbolic forms are discussed. In the hermeneutic tradition, Thompson stresses the view that the meaning of media messages is not fixed and transparent, but rather the ever-shifting outcome of a process of interpretation, determined by the social-historical context of the recipient of the message.

The following chapters deal with such varied subjects as the development of modern societies and media institutions; the globalization of communication; the rise of mediated interaction; the nature of the self and the process of self-formation in a mediated world; and the transformation of tradition. Although much of the content of these chapters can be regarded as received knowledge, the author shows himself to be an acute observer, who can link a wide variety of concerns seemingly effortlessly. Thus, an analysis of the behaviour of (pop star) fans, which in its extreme versions may be regarded as the negative outcome of the process of self-formation enabled by the media, is as self-evident as an analysis of the media as a creative force in the (re)-invention of tradition, exemplified by the growing popularity of the Scottish tartan kilt in recent times.

To students of politics, the chapters on the transformation of visibility in the public sphere, and the reinvention of publicness in a media-saturated world may be particularly interesting. The former chapter addresses the question how the nature of publicness has been transformed by the development of electronically based media, in particular television. In a somewhat far-fetched critique of the disciplinary society of Foucault, Thompson claims that: "Thanks to the media, it is primarily those who exercise power, rather than those over whom power is exercised, who are subjected to a certain kind of visibility" (p.134). This idea is illustrated by the fact that for politicians the management of visibility is crucial to their retainment of power. It not only entails appearing favourably on television programmes, but also a continuous decision-making process concerning what is to be made public, to whom and how. Gaffes, outbursts, leaks and scandals exposed by the media are constant risks which must be avoided with careful PR-strategies. Although this account of the media as watchdogs of democracy contains a great deal of truth, a critical assessment of the complex and often symbiotic relationship between journalists and politicians would have put the analysis into more perspective.

In the last chapter of the book, Thompson poses the normative question how new forms of publicness could be created in our mediated society. Against the pervasive trend of mergers, takeovers, and cross-ownerships in the media industries, leading to large media conglomerates, he advocates a sympathetic, but rather utopian "principle of regulated pluralism". This principle should cultivate diversity and pluralism in the media. Through legislation and a clear separation of media institutions from state control "an institutional framework would have to be set up which would both accommodate and secure the existence of a plurality of independent media organizations" (p. 241).

In another optimistic proposal, meant as an antidote to the shortcomings of representative democracy, Thompson propagates a new kind of deliberative democracy, which is also a critique of Habermas' conception of the public sphere. According to Thompson, Habermas' ideas remain wedded to a conception of communication derived from the Athenian polis, where the public sphere is constituted by a dialogical conversation in a shared locale. Thompson claims that in an era of mass communication a deliberative conception of democracy is not necessarily a dialogical conception. In contemporary societies, individuals need not gather together in a common locale in order to discuss political issues. Instead, they can form reasoned judgements, often on their own, on the basis of the information they obtain from the mass media. Nevertheless, although Thompson's argument is appealing, he remains very elusive about what new mechanisms could incorporate the reasoned judgements of ordinary individuals into decision-making processes at various levels of social and political life. It is not unlikely, less optimistic observers might object, that the people who hold power are not too eager to share it with "ordinary individuals", as widespread disappointment arising from public enquiry procedures may attest.

In *The Media and Modernity* Thompson addresses a wide range of subjects pertaining to the question of how to understand human life, culture and politics in contemporary media-saturated societies. Apart from an overview of the relevant literature, and some provoking critiques of existing theories, he puts forward optimistic proposals to ameliorate the functioning of representative democracy. Inevitably, the broad scope of the book leads to a loss of depth in the analyses of different subjects, as students familiar with the literature in the field of mass communications and cultural studies may find. However, as an introduction to and an overview of the literature on the interrelations between society, democracy and the media, this book is a valuable text and may stimulate further reading in more specialist literature.

Ingrid Smeets