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Book Reviews

Ferrell Lowe, Gregory, Van den Bulck, Hilde, and Donders, Karen. (Eds.). *Public Service Media in the Networked Society*. Göteborg, Sweden: Nordicom, 2018. Pp. 265. ISBN: 978-91-87957-73-4. Free @ <https://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/publikationer/public-service-media-networked-society>

This book compiles articles and chapters for RIPE@2017, an acronym for Reinvigorating the Public Media Enterprise. The reader tackles the paradigm of a networked society (Castells, 1996) and public service media in wider Europe. The publisher blurb gives a summary of the main objective: to clarify and critique the concept of networked society in relation to the public interest that public media embody. Networked communications offer benefits but present obvious prob-

lems for universal access and public service. Potential issues entail threats to individual's freedom to activate or link into a network, or vulnerability to hacking and geo-blocking. The chapters prioritize the public interest over other benefits by examining the role of public media organizations within the framework of networked communications.

The book is the eighth RIPE Reader in a series published by Nordicom since 2003. This collection appears as a result of the RIPE 2016 conference sponsored by the Flanders (Belgium) based public service media and the University of Antwerp and the Free University Brussels. Public Service Media (PSM) in Europe at least, faces challenges that affect conceptualization, organization, remits, and practices, since the world in which they were originally born as Public Service Broadcasters (PSB) has now developed into networked communications.

Separated in three sections, 15 chapters cover some important challenges for European PSM. The sections are: (1) concepts and critiques, with contributions from academicians well known in the area of public service media analysis, such as Peter Goodwin and Graham Murdock; (2) public policy, structures, and governance, which give an overview of differences and similarities in regulation across several European geographical areas; and (3) audiences, distribution, and service challenges. This last section tackles some of the key dilemmas for PSM, such as distribution, or the relationship of certain audience segments with public service content.

The opening chapter, Goodwin's "An Impossible Challenge for Public Service Media? The Intellectual Context of the Networked Society," introduces the book by examining why PSB have been marginalized in the networked society. The author gives the theoretical background to the collection of contributions. Goodwin explores topics such as globalization, neo-liberalism, participatory culture, and start-ups, and the place of European PSB as publicly owned corporations facing these topics. "[W]ith PSB's traditional remit being tightly specifically formulated on broadcasting, hostile governments and commercial rivals find it easy to argue they shouldn't be intervening in these new forms of communication" (p. 39). The author suggests answers to the question of what it would take for the established PSB in Europe to play a central role in the networked society: to invest substantial resources in areas quite outside their traditional areas; to adopt a far more democratic and participatory attitude to their net-

networked society. The focus on the concept of Public Service Media may not be as general as the book blurb suggests—not all PSM in Europe have the same business structure or financing system. The Reader draws on Northern-Central European PSM experiences mostly, with several examples from Flanders, leaving out other interesting systems such as the ones in Italy or Greece, or Portugal or France for that matter. However, the information on how PSM are dependent on commercial platforms in the networked society is clear and illuminating for the lay reader. Perhaps the situation we are now experiencing throughout the world (COVID-19) may affect how we regard information and content in PSM and its future will become most important for our democracies.

—Almudena González del Valle-Brena
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Gunn, Joshua. *Political Perversion: Rhetorical Aberration in the Time of Trumpeteering*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2020. Pp. 196. ISBN-13 978-0-226-71330-4 (cloth) \$67; 978-0-226-71344-1 (paper) \$28; 978-0-226-71358-8 (e-book) \$26.

“Trump will disappear from office—perhaps even before this book is published. *Political Perversion will not!*”—Joshua Gunn, 2020, p. 5.

As I process the recent, gory memory of the Atlanta hate crime—yet another U.S. mass shooting among several others—on March 16, 2021 against six Asian American women out of eight victims, these ominous words from Joshua Gunn haunt me (Fausset et al., 2021). I am haunted because it has been impossible to disarticulate former President Trump’s racist rhetoric pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (e.g., “China virus” and “Kung Flu”) from this bigoted, racist, and perverse act of gun violence in March, 2021 that targeted members of the Asian American community, among others (Salcedo, 2021). And it is in this perverse space of a willful haunting (to remember Jacques Derrida’s ethical fidelity to historical trauma), that I review Joshua Gunn’s *Political Perversion: Rhetorical Aberration in the Time of Trumpeteering* (Derrida, 1994, p. 133). Gunn’s text is a playfully somber ode to what he considers a “perverse style”

inhering “[p]erniciously perverse rhetorics” (p. xi) with Trump as the spectral zeitgeist haunting the current U.S. political discourse (and all the other discourses to come...if at all).

Psychoanalytic rhetoric of the Freudian/Lacanian ilk and critical-cultural thought (Frankfurt school primarily) form the theoretical backdrop of Gunn’s part therapeutic, part ominous tone to make sense of what he means by political perversion. Drawing on the psychoanalytic idiom, Gunn explains clearly that common perversion is the normal orientation of the human experience: “Perversion is not an aberration (Freud)” (p. xii). However, as Gunn argues, Trump’s cultural impact in ushering in an era of “psychosis and perversion” is epochal because it embodies “the perversion of perversion—dehumanization of human subjects . . . that makes perversion mean and harmful” (p. xii). Political perversion is structural perversion on dehumanizing steroids as opposed to the normal/common/universal kind. Therefore, when Trumpian perversion is understood as a structurally “stylized habit” or “patterned disposition” of relating to civic infrastructures/relevant others, it translates into a “structured disavowal of consensus reality at the core of a political ecology, which is both exacerbated and exposed by speakers, screens, and (communicative) speed” (pp. 5–81).

To explain further, Gunn’s main argument is that “political perversion” inheres Trumpian discourse, a structural and cultural shift in American public discourse that is becoming “more generally perverse or culturally pyretic . . .” (p. 5). As a public figure and as an “expression of U.S. culture,” Trump’s structurally perverse rhetoric exemplifies what Gunn laments as a “general decline or playfulness, creativity, and compromise and the ascent of a spiteful, scripted sentiment of demand in the popular imaginary” (p. 5). Gunn locates evidence for his critical lamentations for this perverse structure in a bi-level manner based on Trump’s discursive form and his stylistic, that is verbal-visual assemblage of “speech, tweets, tone...” and “looks, body comportment, gesture, and so on” (p. 23). An example of ethical lapse in civic playfulness emerges as the seemingly benign and quotidian us of the phrase: “I don’t know” (p. 130). Gunn suggests that when playfulness assumes the form of, “dirty work,” as is the case in political perversion, everyday communicative habits devolve into a state of irresponsible refutations, compulsive defenses, and denials such as saying: “If [Hillary Clinton] gets to pick her [Supreme Court]