

REPRESENTING POLITICS — POLITICISING JOURNALISM

EXPLORING COMMUNICATIVE
DILEMMAS IN THE COLLEGIAL
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SWEDISH
JOURNALISTS AND POLITICIANS

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Introduction

Drawing upon three particular media texts, a newspaper article and two television interviews, I will investigate some of the discursive strategies delineating the relationship between the investigative journalist and the politician — and their recent developments in the Swedish context. With an interest for how relationships in the media can be constituted and reworked my focus is on how participants talk, in the media — as interviewers or interviewees as well as how they address the media and are knowledgeable in media dramaturgy. How the roles of the investigative journalist or the investigated politician are worked up. And, what their part in the public sphere and the debate can be.

Texts, conversations and images are part of a process of meaning making, of the constituting of public events and arguments and should be seen as exchanges in a publicity flow which is constantly recreated. Texts and events are linked to other texts and events that should contribute to our understanding of how public, political and critical communicative positions are upheld and developed. In this way rhetorics is not separated as an “element,” a “technique” or as a particular strategy to reach a certain preconceived end (which can then be formally studied); it is, rather, part and parcel of all communication where relationships between people, the conversational flow and the managing of self have to be upheld, and it can be studied as part of the sequential organisation of communication¹.

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The approach follows a discourse analytic tradition studying interactions in the media.² The particular focus is on how the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is managed in media texts and how this relationship is worked up in a dialogical process³. The emphasis is both on how media texts are sequentially organised, what communicative work is done by questions, answers, statements but also images and dramaturgical editing techniques, and on how these can be used to create a factual account of an event⁴. What is studied is, in a sense, actual interactions, conversations, reported on in particular media formats that are, ultimately, framed by the editing power of the media⁵. This, albeit an obvious factor, is an integral part of the act of making a journalistic argument also in the particular sense that elements of the process of getting information not usually shown to the viewer/reader are increasingly used in the mediatexts. Situations that seemingly show how journalism is done, in the making, are included in broadcasts and in the process reconstitute various notions of what it is to be a journalist — and a politician. My interest is in how this is done⁶.

The Swedish Openness

With the advent of commercial television in Sweden, in 1990, many new formats have evolved that can be said to blend entertainment and journalism. At the same time, the ongoing relationship between journalists and politicians has developed, sometimes along well established paths of information gathering and image managing, sometimes inspired by new formats. There is nothing new in this, but it is important to constantly study the various ways media and politics reconstitute their relationship in particular stages in Swedish public culture.

The notion of the fourth estate of democracy (“*tredje statsmakten*” literally translated: “the third state-power”) has, in Sweden, been associated with the particular form of accessibility and “openness” of the governance structure — most information is publicly accessible, as “public documents.” The authorities are required to keep minutes and documents readily accessible and the citizen have a right to look through the archives. As in most western countries the media is seen as a legitimate corrective of power and this is a role that can be drawn upon by journalists themselves; but, it is also often used by politicians to confirm their openness and legitimacy as public representatives. Simultaneously, the relationship between, and working conditions for, both journalists and politicians are conditioned by a certain form of “collegiality”⁷, with its historical roots and ongoing development.

Who’s Who in Debate — and What’s What?

In Swedish media lore, the start of investigative political journalism is attributed to the three journalists (the three O’s: Orup, Ortmark & Olivecrona) who in the sixties started to ask follow up questions to politicians, connoting the shift from a reverential to a more investigative, stance taking style of journalism. The contemporary situation, though, focuses on the confrontative and personalised relationship between journalist and politician.

One of the strongest themes in the Swedish debate has over the last decade centred on morality and alleged corruption with a key word being the supposed “contempt for politicians” on the part of the general public. Whether or not this is used as a rhetorical trope by journalists it can safely be said to form a backdrop to much political reporting. It helps framing the way a news feature can be publicised. And, more in

detail, how various roles, ways of address and images can be constructed. And, thus; this theme has also become a part of what the Swedish viewer or reader may expect to find in a contemporary news feature.

The various ways of “public address” that both journalists and politicians use can also become part of the “vocabulary” of the viewer; i.e. not in the sense that people might start talking like a journalist or a politician, but in their developing of a knowledge of how journalists and politicians **speak**. The media might not so much create a stable “image” of a phenomenon as, rather, possible ways of relating to, and talking about, it. From a discourse analytic perspective this notion emphasises interaction and recontextualisation where generations of meanings⁸ are shifting between various media and everyday discourses. Extending this notion to comprise the particular dilemmas not only of producing or receiving media texts, usually seen as two distinctly separate activities, but rather as co-produced and negotiated meanings, we can begin to see how new metaphors of interactivity challenges established media “use” — the ways people act, and the ways people are used to see other people acting in the media. Thus the inventiveness of media workers when it comes to developing formats that play with the expected roles of the “talking head,” newsreader, commentator, expert, investigative journalist, politician, or for that matter the audience member, can be studied and put into perspective.

This perspective of studying communicative events⁹ in the media comprises emphasising dialogical aspects; how people interact, establish common ground and manage to keep a conversation going, i.e. upholding a relationship. In media events concerning political issues in Sweden, the last decade has seen an increased use of everyday communicative formats — conversations, familiarity, and intimacy — both from journalists and politicians¹⁰. This can also be seen as a part of the increased blend of elements from various television genres usually denoted “faction,” “infotainment,” or “human interest.”

Representations, for example statements or claims made by a journalist about someone or something are constituent parts of the process of “publicising” he/she ongoingly constructs¹¹. Facts are constructed as facts as a part of the textual, argumentative formulation. Many formulations can be put to work; the framing of an article as “debate” or “editorial,” the headline, or the way of narrating an event, attributing agency or describing a person.

I Told You So

The first example to illustrate this argument can be said to rework suppositions about the relationship between the investigative journalist and the investigated politician. It brings persons and roles into play as well as forms of address, interplay between story telling and accusation and, ultimately, between narrative and debate. And, in the background, there is always an “invoked audience” which can be appealed to, used as a resource or a legitimisation. This fragment is cut out from an article on the culture page of the largest Swedish morning paper, on March 1994. It features a person from the “political elite” that allegedly appointed himself to a high post in the Swedish representation to the European Community: “Or, for that matter, how he already on the 9 of October 1994, before any other candidates had presented themselves ... could tell this writer about his coming nomination (you shouldn’t trust a journalist, not even over a glass of wine).”

The journalist has started this article with an essayist narration on the corruptive qualities of power and the informal giving and receiving of privileges — an important subject and a question of principle and democratic accountability. This then leads to a “case” where this politician has apparently revealed that he can influence the process of nomination for a position he wants for himself. But this is not merely any kind of hearsay, that can be questioned; it is **told to** the journalist by the politician himself — and written in a form where he is the active part. The politician tells and the journalist listens; and what has been told is “explained” by the parenthesis that leaves no doubt that this is some “secret” or inside information we see displayed before us. Given the framing already given as the investigation of power and corruption the investigated politician can be made out to be either plain stupid or exceedingly unscrupulous. Similarly, the journalist marks his role as listener and quickly, through the parenthesis, relates this role to the role of “The Journalist” — the public’s representative. The parenthesis is written with an address towards both the politician and the reader marking a kind of “gotcha” as well as whose side he is on — the fourth estate of democracy in the service of the public.

The journalist shows us, through his way of structuring the narrative, the choices he makes as to how to view a politician. The politician is identified as belonging to a particular power sphere, the corruption and nepotism of which is once more confirmed by yet another slip of the tongue. In a kind of implied recontextualisation of the well known “fact” that politicians are corrupt, the narrative draws on many previous cases and puts this one in the same file. In this sense a narrated event is made to take on a quality of factuality¹² and furthermore works to give the reporter credibility and distance. The politician is tied to the already known “gang of political insiders” which the journalist just “reports on” — from the outside.

Wineglass Rhetoric

Through this type of rhetorical common sense the journalist also invites the readers to view him as their representative that can look into the workings of power “objectively,” i.e. without a personal stake. Connoting the particular Swedish definition of the fourth estate of democracy where the investigative journalist is a national asset he can here lay claim to the concept of objectivity. In the short example above, though, this can serve yet another purpose. The emphasis on his own position as “The Journalist” can solve another potential communicative dilemma; to simultaneously legitimate and detach another form of collegiality; between the politician and the journalist himself. The kind of close relationship that allowed him to get his information — “over a glass of wine.” The important parenthesis in the text becomes, addressed to the politician personally, exactly a parenthesis to the role the journalist possibly takes in their everyday relationship — as two related co-producers of public policy and debate. Addressed to the reader, the parenthesis confirms the role of the journalists as representatives of truth that do not coerce information — it just comes to them. The wineglass becomes the rhetorical trope establishing this role and allows the journalist to be seen in a situation of objective information gathering — just as the job stipulates. It legitimates him as Journalist and unfocuses the fact that he, I would argue, was administering the usual collegiality between the journalist and the politician, or rather, between two power- and representative positions that are in constant contact at press conferences, interviews, meetings or dinners.

Constructing Roles

This fragment of text, read in the context of the rest of the article and, further, the article as placed and recontextualised in a series of media events framed as the story of politics and corruption, can also give insights into the process of how investigative journalism is made and into how some of its rhetorical elements are made to work. The journalist in the example accounts for his position. As argued above, the parenthesis is also the journalists attempt at handling the particular dilemma towards the reader — if he so easily got this information, what then is his personal relation to this particular politician? Do they often drink wine together? Regardless if they often meet in official functions where wine is served the wineglass trope can also easily connote intimacy and personal involvement. So, the journalist must handle the potential reader question about the relationship. He then breaks the original address of the text: “...could tell this writer about his coming nomination,” with the parenthesis: “(you shouldn’t trust a journalist, not even over a glass of wine.)...,” to breach the type of collegiality that could lend him problems of legitimacy towards the reader.

Instead the parenthesis works to assess that the information was really relevant — since it comes from the politician himself. As noted above, the effect can then be to create the image of him as either stupid or unscrupulous to talk loosely about his own activities, (or perhaps he was drunk) and in any case he is unreliable and surely unfit for the important position he manipulates to get.

This way of rhetorically reading the journalists text and the way he constructs himself and the other can enable the unpacking of media events and roles. The journalist uses a mode of indignation as the investigator and uncoverer of corrupt practices which also makes himself credible as the representative of the public. At the same time he displays his professionalism and objectivity in this way giving his text(s) legitimacy as investigative journalism and not, for example, “debate.” Furthermore, the article was published in March, when the politician had been appointed and the wine drinking took place the previous October. So, the journalist here lets the politician first commit the rule breaking to appoint himself before he commits the collegial rule breaking of writing about it. He has the power not only to wait the politician out, but also to define the heading, and thus framing, of the article — on the culture page and not the debate section — and thus to place it in, or administer it on, the public debate.

As It Happens – Showing the Process

A further development in Swedish political reporting is the increased emphasising of the dramaturgy and form itself as a part of the argumentation. In television, investigative journalists have started showing parts of the editing and dramaturgical process of how the feature is made. A form of reporting on reportage. The conscious self referentiality is a seemingly reflexive process but it also helps the journalist make his point and work up similar media roles as in the example above. The next example is an interview filmed with opposite cameras, on the reporter and one on the interviewee. It was shown in the Swedish Television broadcast “Striptease” and it features the then minister for industry, a question of principle and an element of surprise¹³:

Journalist: a person finding himself in your position, a hypothetical question, but a person who’s known to be mean, would that be more questionable than in your case

Politician: the only thing that is crucial is if one has confidence in that person, if he is competent, if he has integrity, that’s crucial...and then we’re all different

J: but one could say, it wouldn't be good if the person had for example a questionable past, for example had...

P: no obviously! if one had a questionable past, that would be questionable if you've, had, been convicted or, fraud or something, then its obvious that the question would be raised

J: what then for example with your own tax deductions in the 80s, you don't think that's bordering on what is questionable

P: not at all, because that has only to do with assessments, questions that come up all the time. It's never been a question of anything like, either faulty income statements, false statements, or even incomplete income statement or anything, but just assessments, questions that come up anywhere

J: what has that been about then, I mean what's the question...

At this point in the interview the ministers press secretary rises from his chair at the back of the room and intervenes, as it were, into the picture. One of the cameramen captures him in the frame without too much disturbance of the image:

Press secretary: this is not what we agreed on, this is not...

J: what, but this is a question on principles

PR: no, this is a different matter

J: no it isn't, this is important, isn't it

PR: no, you have come here to ask questions on the affairs with Tage Petterson...

J: yes I have started with some questions on that and I'm coming back to that

PR: Thomas we can't have...old stuff...

J: but seriously, isn't it important that we clear these things up

PR: ...no, its, you haven't asked to...

J (to P): what do you yourself think

PR: ...we must keep to the rules

P: as I'm saying I don't think they have anything to do with this

J: no, but since the question of principle here is that you're saying that it is not the case that I should have to get rid of all assets in the family business to get rid of all suspicions, but its rather the question that people should trust me

P: by that I mean that there is all the reason to do so

J: that's right, and then I'd like to talk about some the affairs you did in the 80s where you were engaged in advance tax planning

P: no, I repeat, nothing, nothing can be held against me

The display of the politician's way of defending himself is made into a kind of disclosure; that he does not seem to grasp what the journalist is aiming at together with the press secretary's intervention create a strong effect. In the ensuing argument about who should define the situation, the press secretary's impasse rather confirms that the politician is in trouble. Interestingly this continues:

P: these things were a question of assessing, these come up many times, when you have some wealth there can be questions of assessment, that's not strange

J: but the fact that you twice have been turned down according to the law on tax fraud, doesn't that mean that you are a person who's very rich, but who still, so to speak...

PR: but please Thomas you must understand that you can't put the questions you haven't asked to...

J: I don't understand

PR: yes, you, you have asked to come here to ask about the Volvo affair...

J: can't the minister himself answer the questions

PR: you and me have an agreement and you can't...

J: but I, this is a part of the question of principles, isn't it

PR: the question of principles is how one works as a journalist, one comes to make an interview, to ask questions on a matter...

J: but isn't it important that a member of the government of Sweden answers these questions

PR: ...do you see

P: As I'm saying, there is nothing

J: sorry?

P: there is no ground what so ever, all these affairs have been hundred percent clean, thirty, forty years I've been at it

When the same intervention is made again the cameraman is also ready and captures the press secretary in the moment he reacts and just before he rises from his chair in a smooth camera movement. The politician uses the, slightly unfortunate, phrase “thirty, forty years I’ve been at it” and he seems strangely inapt with coping with journalists’ questions. Of course, he has been interviewed several times before and he is not a newcomer in politics. Rather, the whole situation has been built on the switching of codes, or of collegiality, where the question—answer sequences are at first centred on the general issue of accounting for holding assets when you are an elected representative. Then, it switches to the personalised accusation—defence, and, in the press secretary/journalist exchange the journalist can rework the notion of the important question of principles to encompass not only the politicians accountability but also the legitimacy of the interview itself. The press secretary is shown as the gate keeper and the viewer gets a short glimpse of how the “system” works, seemingly behind the scenes — literally outside of the usual two-camera arrangement. The journalist can easily work up the position as the representative of the people seeking legitimate information from obviously reluctant sources and the press secretary, in this case by his own doing, is made into the censor who has strong claims on how journalists should work and on what the issue is: “ the question of principles is how one works as a journalist, one comes to make an interview... .”

Laying the Ground

The next development is the use of hidden camera that was taken up by “Strip-tease” a few years ago and by “Kalla fakta,” “Cold facts” last year, both being top ranking formats of investigative journalism in their respective channels, Swedish Television and the commercial channel 4.

The issue in the next example is the accountability of a politician that has himself objected to the covertness and lack of openness in the European community. The journalists difficulties in getting information from him is the dramaturgical feature that is used to frame the reportage. Shown twice in the reportage is a sequence that is not filmed with hidden camera but it is used to preempt the next that is. It is an attempt at making an interview at the airport on the politicians way to Brussels where he has his seat in the EU parliament.

Journalist: Hi, Thomas Kanger TV 4

Politician: yea, Hello

J: I’d like to do a short little interview with you

P: I don’t have the time now

J: no time

P: no

J: Can’t you talk to me now

P: not now

J: can we make an appointment? I wanna ask you a little about how much your surplus is on the travel allowance

P: I don’t have any confidence in TV 4

J: but how, what do you do with the money, how much do you give away

P: no answer to your question

J: but you see we’ve brought out your airline bookings and we’ve figured that you make about nine and a half thousand every trip, you claim that you give away five thousand and I’m wondering what you do with the rest of the money

P: thanks for the interview

J: don’t you think a politician should speak the truth

Politicians assistant: Isn’t it better to do this in more normal circumstances.

The displaying of the “failed” attempt to make an interview is here, in a sense, used as a reformulation of a situation; the legitimate attempt, almost the right, to get information at any time. The journalists asking of a question is the “token” that gets emphasised, formulated as “... a short little interview...,” “Can’t you talk to me now” and “I wanna ask you a little...” phrased as not too untimely requests. The interview is to be “short” and “little” and the politicians answer to the effect that he has not “the time now” is retorted with “no time.” This phrase can be a question, a questioning of the politicians will to answer or a request for clarification. It gets a short “no” whereby the journalists persists “Can’t you talk to me now.” His next turn, asking about making an appointment is quickly followed by the main issue he wants to ask “a little” about; what is the politician doing with the supposedly surplus travel money. Here the interaction could have taken a different path; if the politician had started negotiating times and places for an appointment rather than continuing with the refusing style stating he has “no confidence in TV4”¹⁴.

Choosing the Ground

The situation here could be said to be characterised by the untimeliness of time and place. The politician does not want to be interviewed but there is no way of telling whether it is because he is generally hostile (towards journalists), in a hurry in danger of missing his plane, or having something to hide. The point here is not to resolve this puzzle of speculation but rather to show the delineation of some interpretative options, or suggestions, that are laid out in the sequence. All or none of these might be valid but the point is rather to see them as invoked possibilities of interpreting how this person acts. That it does fit the story the journalist wants to tell is in a sense self evident since it is included in the reportage, but in what way is it made to fit? Would it, for example, have been included in the reportage had the politician agreed to book a time for an interview? Or is the effect of showing him as a person that does not want to talk about his own affairs its most important feature?

The situation is presented as something that is in the process of occurring; the journalist is in the process of doing his job — attempting to ask questions, but the politician, who is, so to speak, doing travelling is captured in a situation where that can be represented as dodging questions rather than, for example running to catch the plane. This framing sets, I argue, the possibility of continuing the narrative thread in the next sequence which does take place in the politicians office. But here, though, it is framed as the real life, everyday encounter, rather than the more formal setting of, for example, the politicians office, the parliament or studio — his home ground — or at least settings that are prearranged for interviewing. And, furthermore, in this sequence he is an active part — he does refusal in words and in the way he acts, walking swiftly away and turning his back to the camera. Framed as an interview — a publicised event — this act could be conceived of as an insult. But interactionally defined as some other type of event, the politicians actions are more oriented to catching a plane, negotiating with a journalist about possibly making an interview. From the politicians point of view this is not an interview. But when it is broadcast it, of course, becomes an interview where he is construed as dodging. And, he too is seconded by his assistant who helps him avoid the trickiest, most legitimate and general questions a politician could get: “don’t you think a politician should speak the truth?”

It is important here to stress that making and giving an interview is part and parcel

of the working conditions of both persons and that the negotiations about demanding and refusing the interview are negotiations about the framing of the interview situation. On whose ground is it to be made, who would feel most at home, and where. In a sense, the showing of these negotiations is the reversal of the situation where the journalist would try in vain to get hold of information and people to interview because of dodgings and refusals, and where he/she would ultimately close the file because of unavailability of material — and there would be no reportage.

Hiding the Trumps

The constant negotiation of the circumstances in which one could get, or would give, information is, of course, one of the most important features of public discourse. And, part of the public sphere of any culture serving it with issues for debate and, ultimately, as a corrective of power. What I'm pointing at here though, is that the journalists display of how to get the answers does communicative work not only to the effect of re-establishing the legitimacy of interviewing itself but that it also reformulates what it is to be a journalist, and a politician. A politician is someone who has something to hide but should also be available for interviewing, i.e. accountable, at all times. In fact, the first notion is confirmed by the public displaying of his refusal to consent to the second. This could seem a quite suitable situation for a journalist; it preserves both the stuff and the working conditions of political journalism.

On one level the negotiations are about the working conditions of journalists and politicians, on another it is about the legitimacy of public power. The notion of "behind the scene," the "hidden agenda" which in a sense is reformulated in the notion of investigative journalism is enhanced by showing the politician in situations where he/she is also something other than a politician delivering his/her reformulated statements — a traveller, a person sitting behind a desk trying to avoid the questions, and, saying things he/she would never have said in front of the camera? So, when, finally, the journalist in this example does come into the offices of politics he is not unaccompanied:

Speaker: So we went to Hans Lindqvists office instead, but even that was to no avail. We got a paper with some non committant answers to our questions, just stating that Lindquist gave money to EU critical activities, but nothing about how much.

J: why don't you want to give more detailed information

Politicians assistant: first of all it is so, that, we don't have any obligation to do that ... prove that we have the obligation to do that and we'll do it

J: But you don't give an answer to my questions

J: how large is the surplus, how large is the surplus

P: But I cant say how large the surplus is since it varies in different weeks...

J:...but in the interview...

P:...you'll get your answer

J: but in the interview the news did with you when they met you at Arlanda, I've brought the original tape, you're saying that you give away five thousand, and that you don't have a surplus, and then I'm wondering where does the thirty thousand go to, the in-between for the trips

where do they end up

P: this, this doesn't...

J: let's look at it

P: this is fruitless, I'm sorry, you're getting this answer and...

J: but why, it's to your advantage to clear this up ... there is a suspicion here that you're not telling the truth

P: the answer I'm giving you there, that's the answer you're getting, that's my official answer

J: but do you wanna look at these bookings, I know exactly what your tickets cost

P: so do I

J: yes and then you know that there's a lot more than five thousand in surplus ... isn't that so

P: well, but now you've got my answers there
 J: but Hans Lindqvist
 P: I'm sorry, I'm sorry
 Politicians assistant: You've got those answers now...
 P: I'd be grateful if you left me alone, you're not filming are you
 Cameraman: course I'm filming
 J: You're taping, aren't you
 C: you're taping, aren't you
 P: right, this is impertinent
 C: this tape recorder you've got is on
 J: he's put on this tape recorder
 C: if you don't want me to film now you'll have to say so
 P: would you please turn it off
 C: well I'll turn it off then.

Speaker: Hans Lindqvist who was the organiser of the No to EU referendum committee has been one of the politicians who has criticised the EU for its covertness. Since November last year we've tried to get Lindqvist and his associates to account for how he himself uses the taxpayers money he gets from the EU. But there the will to openness ended.

So, the reportage ends with a quarrel on who is recording who. And, with the image of the politician stopping the information seeking. Here, too, there are two conflicting definitions of what the situation is which becomes obvious when the politician discovers, or rather, suddenly suspects that the camera is on. When this is confirmed the cameraman also becomes an active part of the reportage in person, joining in the interaction. The reporter and the cameraman jointly manages the discussion to focus on the issue of the legitimacy of filming, taping and recording. Making the hidden camera appear also confirms the politicians unwillingness to be interviewed, or recorded, just as in the preceding sequence, and again by the politicians own doing.

The politician and the journalist have different notions, or interpretations, of what the situation is — on tape, or not; front stage or back stage; an interview or the negotiation of making or not making an interview? But this is worked through as a conflict with a particular outcome; the politician can, of course, not succeed in not making the interview since it is already made, it is happening. And, it ends with him being construed as very unwilling to talk at all, this image confirmed long before the concluding speaker text¹⁵.

Concluding Remarks

In the Swedish context, I would argue, interviews where politicians and journalists in their communication dialogically work towards constituting the discourse and "image" of politics, can display a variety of collegial formats and strategies. From the, older, reverential, or investigative and confrontative to the most recent format of using camerawork and editing dramaturgy as part of the argument combined with showing the negotiations of what is a legitimate interview, who should make it, how and where it should be made. This style puts elements of journalists' concerns and features of journalistic processes in the foreground. Rather than separating form and content it tells the story of how stories are made — and resisted. In these forms both "parties" are co-creators in the sense that the broadcast displays a relationship worked out from particular points of view — from the position of particular representatives; of politics and of the fourth estate of democracy — all doing their job of addressing the public.

So, the present reconstitution of the collegial relationship between journalist and politician is structured by journalists who are increasingly beginning to draw on aspects of form and dramaturgy as a discursive strategy, by seemingly showing the jour-

nalistic process “as it happens.” Furthermore, this technique works in analogy with the image of the politician as inconsequential, as saying one thing **in front** of the camera and something very different in **real life** thus breaching the old collegial tacit agreement that politicians are representatives (of political parties, stances, authorities) that “make statements” in front of the camera as representatives and not as “themselves” — and that journalists just listen and tell the people.

But the reworking of the relationship is rather the present constitution of a constant ongoing negotiation of the boundaries between politics and journalism — a process which takes this particular form in my chosen examples. Those are of course selected to do my argumentative and dramaturgic work in much the same way as I argue that the journalists have done their work; and, thus not excluding social science from politics or journalism. I use similar techniques of selection and emphasis and in a sense, the selections are as well suited to this type of analysis as are the politicians dodgings and clumsy answers for the journalists claims and accounts. But are politicians dodging or are they simply caught unaware? If the relationship is defined by the display of various communicative situations featuring the politician acting on a different definition of the situation and thus always giving the “wrong” answer, he/she can of course be said to be unaware. In the examples I have discussed politicians are prevented from accounting for themselves, or are led to give a “wrong” account, from not being able to establish common communicative ground. The framing, in words and images of the situation is accomplished by the journalist as much in the choice of setting as in the after the event power of editing. There are communicative dilemmas in all human interaction, especially between parties of unequal strength. Managing interaction towards mutually acceptable common ground is what we usually do in everyday life. The power to shift this common ground, and here specifically by using the very fabric of communication itself, is what has set these encounters apart — by making them public. The journalist can explore the communicative formats and dilemmas — as can, of course, the social scientist.

The perhaps most intriguing effect these communicative reporting strategies can have is the undressing of the politician into the “ordinary” person who becomes deprived of his representativity, particularly as it comes at a time when many politicians feature in game shows and other forms of entertainment and the relation between public and private is contested and reworked. But is it also a way for journalists to legitimise the media as a viable democratic arena in the public sphere, albeit with themselves at the controls?

Notes:

1. Adelswärd, Economou, Forstorp, Linell 1997.
2. Fairclough 1995b. Linell 1997; MacMillan & Edwards 1997; van Dijk 1988.
3. Linell 1995, 1997.
4. Potter & Wetherell 1987; Edwards & Potter 1992; Potter 1996.
5. In this article I will not use transcriptions but extracts from media texts which are necessarily shortened as well as being translations from Swedish. The television examples are accompanied by video clips with English subtitles available from the author.
6. A similar approach is developed in MacMillan & Edwards: “Our more general analytic concerns are with the status of information, reportage, fact and accountability, and their various elements,

examined as journalists' oriented-to textual concerns. Rather than examining reports' factuality, sources, positions, etc, by comparing media texts to a set of external criteria (derived, for example, from newsroom ethnographies, independent data, notions of political economy and press ownership, interviews, access to original sources, etc.), the approach is to examine how those concerns are managed as oriented-to features of news report content itself." (MacMillan & Edwards 1997, 1).

7. Economou & Forstorp, 1997a

8. Fairclough, 1992, 1995a, 1995b, Linell 1995, 1997.

9. In Hymes (1973,29) a very broad spectrum of what can be studied within this concept is presented: " ... (1,2) the various kinds of participants in communicative events - senders and receivers, addressors and addressees, interpreters and spokesmen, and the like; (3) the various available channels, and their modes of use, speaking writing, printing, drumming, blowing, whistling, singing, face and body motion as visually perceived, smelling, tasting and tactile sensation; (4) the various codes shared by various participants, linguistic, paralinguistic, kinesic, musical and other; (5) the settings (including other communication) in which communication is permitted, enjoined, encouraged, abridged; (6) the forms of messages, and their genres, ranging verbally from single-morpheme sentences to the patterns and diacritics of sonnets, sermons, salesmen's pitches and any other organized routines and styles; (7) the topics and comments that a message may be about; (8) the events themselves, their kinds and characters as wholes - all these must be identified in an adequate ethnographic way. p 22-23. He also sees the concept of communicative event as "the metaphor, or perspective, basic to rendering experience intelligible,".

10. Economou & Forstorp, 1997.

11. Potter 1996.

12. Potter 1996.

13. NB: All transcripts are simplified, translated subtitles versions designed to follow the videoclip.

14. For more detailed discussions on interview interaction, see Clayman 1990, 1993.

15. Another Swedish example using this technique is the interview which was continued after the politician thought the camera was switched off and where he presented an informal view as opposed to the political stance he took when the camera ran. The interview was then broadcast as a whole and its effect was that of a front stage - back stage display where the politician was made out as a liar, and as a highly immoral person, something that the journalist also confronted him with.

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