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NORDICOM is an institution within the Nordic Council of Ministers
Nordicom’s overriding goal and purpose is to make the media and communication research undertaken in the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – known, both throughout and far beyond our part of the world. Toward this end we use a variety of channels to reach researchers, students, decision-makers, media practitioners, journalists, information officers, teachers, and interested members of the general public.

Nordicom works to establish and strengthen links between the Nordic research community and colleagues in all parts of the world, both through information and by linking individual researchers, research groups and institutions.

Nordicom documents media trends in the Nordic countries. Our joint Nordic information service addresses users throughout our region, in Europe and further afield. The production of comparative media statistics forms the core of this service.

Nordicom has been commissioned by UNESCO and the Swedish Government to operate The Unesco International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen, whose aim it is to keep users around the world abreast of current research findings and insights in this area.

An institution of the Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordicom operates at both national and regional levels.

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Nordicom offers a Nordic information service covering media developments. A prime goal is the production of reliable comparative statistics.

Nordicom gathers and collates data on a variety of media in all the Nordic countries. These data are processed, analyzed and reported in a series entitled Nordic Media Trends.

Children and Media Violence
Nordicom has set up an international clearinghouse on children and violence on the screen. The Clearinghouse receives financial support from the Government of Sweden and UNESCO.

The Clearinghouse is to contribute to and effectivize knowledge on children, young people and media violence, seen in the perspective of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen informs various groups of users, researchers, policy-makers, media professionals, teachers, voluntary organizations and interested individuals, about:

- research on children, young people and media violence,
- children’s access to mass media and their media use,
- media literacy and children’s participation in the media, and
- regulatory and voluntary measures and activities in the area.

The Clearinghouse publishes a yearbook and a newsletter.

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Foreword

The 14th Nordic Conference on Media and Communication Research was held in beautiful summer weather on the 14th–17th August 1999, in Kungälv, on the west coast of Sweden. Hosts of the meeting were the Swedish Association for Media and Communication Research, FSMK. More than 350 scholars from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden gathered to discuss current research and research findings. Some dozen colleagues from the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania also attended.

As usual, the conference programme comprised working groups, plenary sessions and a number of social and cultural events. The unifying theme of this year’s conference was Where do the front lines of mass communication research run today?, a question which particularly the two plenary sessions addressed. Two prominent scholars from outside the Nordic region, professors Sonia Livingstone, Department of Psychology, London School of Economics and Political Science, and Horace Newcomb, Radio-Television-Film Department, University of Texas at Austin, had been invited to contribute their perceptions from a broader international horizon. They were joined by roughly a half dozen Nordic colleagues who spoke on the conference theme.

Working groups have been the meat of every Nordic conference to date, and the fourteenth conference was no exception. More than 170 papers were presented and discussed in 20 different working groups:

- Media and Global Culture
- The Structure and Economics of Mass Media
- Multi Media and Internet
- Local and Regional Media
- Media History
- Public Service Broadcasting in Transition
- Radio Research
- Political Communication
- Journalism Research
- The Sociology and Aesthetics of News Reporting
- Reception and Audience Studies
- Children, Youth and the Media
- Media Education
- Popular Culture
- Film and Television Fiction
- Pictures in the Media – Reality and Metaphor
- The Language and Rhetoric of the Media
- Media Constructions of Gender
- Public Relations and Purposive Communication
- Mediated Risk and Crisis Communication

A number of conference papers have been revised by their authors for publication in this special issue of Nordicom Review. The articles, which were selected with the advice of the working group chairmen, include the work of both senior and younger researchers. They provide a good idea of the breadth and depth of inquiry in the field of media and communication research in the Nordic countries today. All addresses to the plenum are included here, as well.
May I take this opportunity to thank the authors for the time and effort they have put into making this anthology possible.

The Nordic conferences for media and communication research play an important role in the development of the research field in the Nordic countries. We hope that the contents of this anthology will also interest our colleagues abroad.

Göteborg in September 2000

Ulla Carlsson
Editor
On the Cutting Edge, or Otherwise, of Media and Communication Research

SONIA LIVINGSTONE

Research at the forefront, new fields for research, the cutting edge? Given this rather ambitious and possibly grandiose brief, I began by asking around among my colleagues for their views, I kept my ears open at the recent ICA in San Francisco, so as to listen out for the new ideas in the air before they reached the always-delayed publication stage, and I scanned recent issues of the media and communication journals. But while the ICA was full of interesting ideas and people, I did not detect any major new orientations. Similarly, my colleagues looked rather blank when asked for the cutting edge in media research. And the journals are, by and large, publishing the same kinds of articles on the same kinds of subjects as they always do.

In this brief paper, I offer some general remarks about the state of media and communications research, using audience research as my example. These remarks focus on the disciplinary status and ambitions of media and communications research, and are certainly not intended as any kind of attack media and communications research or researchers: there is a huge amount of interesting, valuable, productive and thought-provoking research going on across many fronts, though in the main, I see it as contributing more to the task of consolidation rather than of innovation.

By contrast, if we consider how the study of media and communications fits into the rest of social and cultural debate, there are, I suggest, two widely acknowledged cutting edges, both of which have a strong interface with media and communications. One states that social theory is where the action is: obvious and important examples include the theory of late modernity, globalisation, the public sphere, individualisation, network society, post-Colonial theory and ethnic or cultural diaspora. Primarily but not entirely arising from the engagement between continental philosophy and sociological theory, this interdisciplinary enterprise is generating a new set of concepts for thinking about the importance of media and communications, among other things, in a globalised world (Giddens, 1991; Thompson, 1995). The other states that new technological developments in media, information and communication technologies now lead social research: hence the return of medium theory, the shift towards studies of users rather than of audiences, research on interactivity at the interface between interpersonal and mass
communication, on hypertext and the end of linear narrative; basically, research on the Internet.

These two cutting edges are, of course, increasingly related - the Internet is closely linked to globalisation, digital television promotes and is promoted by individualised consumerism, interactive video games depend on the pleasures of virtual participation, etc. - whether we see technology as shaping or shaped by cultural processes of late modernity. In short, it will hardly be news if I draw the conclusion that developments in social theory, and developments in technology, are now the key drivers of innovation within media and communications research and elsewhere.

While they are, as 'cutting edges', clearly very different kinds of influence on research, they are similar insofar as both undermine two premises on which much media and communications scholarship has been established. First, they challenge the view that media and communications should represent a discipline; i.e. not just an ad hoc collection of approaches addressing a common problem but a self-sustaining, theory-generating, data-accumulating autonomous discipline, institutionalised through journals, departments, conferences, careers. Instead, it looks at present as if other social sciences are driving media and communications.

Second, they challenge the view that media and communications should set its own agenda according to social and cultural considerations, rather than following the agenda set for it by technological developments, tracing the social changes brought about by technological determinants. Right now, it seems that we are tracking the new media, especially the Internet, being led by what's technologically new rather than what's socially new (Livingstone, 1999). Meanwhile, our main expertise looks rather dated, being concentrated on mass media, especially, television: we know most about mass culture, public service, national broadcasting, well-established genres, and so forth.

In other words, while both social theory and new technologies are posing exciting and productive questions for media and communications researchers, I am suggesting that the effect - in practice though not of necessity - supports the view that media and communications represents not a discipline but a diverse set of phenomena, informed by social theory, bounded by technology. Informed by social theory, bounded by technology: if this is a fair conclusion at least as far as the cutting edge goes, let me consider these two conclusions in turn.

Informing, or Informed by, the Larger Social Scientific Enterprise?
Forefront of what? Is acceptable for the theoretical innovations and impetus to come from outside media and communications? For if we accept this, then the cutting edge, the research at the forefront, though it may be conducted by its researchers, will be research at the forefront not of media and communications but of political science or psychology or history or anthropology.

Perhaps it may be considered that the benefits to media and communication research are sufficiently great: that this is the kind of interdisciplinarity which is exciting, not undermining, of media and communications (as a field), and that social theory does indeed offer the potential to overcome the traditional divides against which scholars have railed for so long - qualitative and quantitative, humanities and social science, theoretical and empirical, critical and administrative.

If so, I would ask, more ambitiously, whether we can make the argument stick that media and communications is not just another domain for the application of social
theory but one that actually plays a key theoretical role in the conditions and processes of late modernity identified by social theorists. In other words, that we cannot conceptualise the workings of the public sphere, or of cultural processes of individualisation, or of globalisation, or consumerism, or of information networks, without articulating a key role for the media? This, surely, would be research at the forefront, and research which might have a chance of making it clear to those outside media research why our analysis of the media is valuable, powerful, and not simply to be reinvented from the outside.

Yet at present, those working in fields bordering our own, from economics to political science to sociology and social theory, the media are little discussed and media research even less so, while attempts to generate more funding for media research in relation to consumption, leisure, identity, community, social exclusion, etc. are seen as low priority by national funders. For example, frustratingly for those of us interested in audiences, the ‘implied audience’ is generally rendered invisible within, say, discussions of which new media technologies will ‘take off’ or which public policies will ‘be acceptable’ or which political arguments will ‘work’ (Livingstone, 1998a). Yet none of this is seen as problematic.

Interestingly, this relative neglect of our field—especially noteworthy at a time of increased interdisciplinarity—is generating a crisis of confidence within the field. For example, the argument for radical contextualism in the field of audience research (Radway, 1988) has led to the curious charge of ‘media-centrism’ being levelled at media researchers, problematic in leading us away from texts and audiences though valuable for integrating us with others interested in people, or families or citizens more generally (Schrøder, 1994). Indeed, there is a sense in which many media researchers are genuinely not very interested in the media. Very often we find that when the research gets really interesting, it is because the issues at stake concern not media but democracy, or culture, or social exclusion, or gender, or just the endlessly fascinating practices of everyday life. Again the problem of disciplinarity arises: for concepts of democracy, or culture, or inequality, and so forth are often more effectively theorised elsewhere and we, as media researchers, may lack the expertise to do this, unless we are also, originally perhaps, a something else (psychologist, anthropologist, sociologist—ever less the case as media and communications is becomes widespread at undergraduate level).

**Media and Communications: Bounded by Technology?**

Perhaps one reason which partly explains why we appear unconvincing to those outside, is that we appear to be stuck with the ad hoc collection of objects included in the category of ‘media’. For what, apart from technology, holds together such diverse questions as regulating the BBC, integrating the Internet into schools, identifying the pleasures of video games for children, questioning the political agenda setting role of the press or recognising the role of music in peer culture? Hence, I would also ask, is it acceptable for the phenomena we study to be defined by technology, and thus to change as technologies change?

For if what holds our field together is defined in lay terms (and the public does not doubt what the media are though they may be surprised at how we study them), or in technological terms (i.e. technical innovations, with an associated cluster of institutional producers and regulators), then we should not be surprised that our starting point is often not theoretical but rather the desire to contradict public moral panics or to counter the technological (or sometimes, economic) determinism of inventors and policymakers. Certainly, I observe that much media research relating to children and young
people often starts - sometimes with considerable frustration - with a repudiation of public anxieties or moral panics surrounding the issue. And similarly today, much work on new media begins by critiquing the technological determinist hype accompanying the introduction of these media. While such a repudiation or critique is often justified, it both distracts us from the careful construction of a theoretical starting point and leads us to underplay, or even reject, the valid expectation upon academic researchers that we should address issues of public concern.

This kind of starting point often leads us to assert, straightforwardly, that the media have never been so important, so all-encompassing, so all-pervasive, that the public are very concerned about their impact, and so we are working in the right field, our task being to chart how media are penetrating every aspect of life. Doubtless, this is how many of us open our lectures and articles. But this assertion remains agnostic about the significance of media studies or media science as a discipline. For when asked for our agreed theoretical premises, our standards and procedures for empirical methodology, our significant historical thinkers or, crudely, our unique selling point, we become less confident, and our guiding principles appear unresolved. Such a lack of resolution may itself be productive, and at times in media and communications research this in itself has been the cutting edge - bringing together qualitative and quantitative, humanities and social science, administrative and critical, text and audience, political economy and the culture of everyday life - but right now I think this excitement is fading.

If we try to rectify matters through the concept of the media, I suggest no real defence is possible. The study of media is a multidisciplinary collection of ideas, findings and middle-range insights which has a worthy history, which has produced a valuable body of knowledge, and which represents a legitimate specialism for an academic career or programme of study. But it is not a self-sustaining discipline. I say this in the knowledge that interdisciplinarity has also, in recent years, provided a cutting edge across the academy, making my concern with disciplinarity possibly old-fashioned (though I would argue that the case for interdisciplinarity has been somewhat over-blown and that it has proved somewhat less successful institutionally than the initial radical claims made for it).

However, in relation to communication, a defence can be mounted, and many have done this. In Britain, the term 'communication science' has relatively little meaning, but in America it is far more successful; perhaps the same is the case in the Nordic countries? The defence would assert, I think, that the key processes of communication - meaning, influence, interpretation, persuasion, relationship, institutionalisation, identity, and so forth - do refer to important debates, genuine intellectual histories, self-sustaining research programmes, and so forth. But necessarily, this includes interpersonal communication as central and only as a matter of contingency does it include the media.

Learning from a Past Cutting Edge: The Case of Audience Research

Perhaps one can only identify significant developments or emerging themes in retrospect. We might look back rather than forward, and ask what the previous cutting edges have been, and, when we identify them, whether they delivered what they promised and so turned out to be a good thing in the end. To illustrate some of these points, consider what has happened in audience studies.

Ten years ago, audience research - together perhaps with cultural studies, the public sphere, and feminist theory - was surely at the cutting edge of media and communic-
tions. It was exciting, innovative in theory and methodology, stimulating for researchers outside the field as well as inside. Thus I would contrast my presently rather gloomy view with the mood I observed in conferences during the 1980s, ICA among them, where audience research, particularly reception studies, was the focus of considerable interest, and also with conferences in the early 1990s, where the ethnographic turn had taken over and was the subject of excited debate. Today, many of the then-influential audience researchers have left the field. And when a colleague canvassed opinion on the merits of starting an academic journal on audiences the feedback was ‘no’, the heyday of the audience is over, and researchers hardly believe in the concept of the audience any more. It is a concept firstly tied to just one technology, namely broadcast television, secondly tied to a dated conception of mass society, thirdly so overextended as to have lost its value, and fourthly corrupted by the commercial and administrative agendas of media institutions.

While I disagree with this pessimism, the critical debate has been valuable (Livingstone, 1998b). I do not find it plausible that audiences have wholly transmuted into new media users, or wholly dissipated into the everyday contexts of domestic life, or never existed in the first place except as the malevolent invention of the broadcasting industry: yet somehow they have become, again, somehow optional. However, I would be more inclined to agree that insofar as recent audience research has not just been research on audiences – valid, interesting, informative – but also research at the cutting edge, its success contained the seeds of its downfall.

It seemed to be making claims about political resistance which caught the attention of political scientists, and then failed to impress. It seemed to be making claims about identity and the pleasures of consumption, which caught the mood of cultural studies but then became indistinguishable from consumption studies generally and no longer much to do with media specifically. And it seemed to be opening up an exciting interface with literary studies, but lost its purchase and now they – with at times a rather cavalier approach to empirical methods – are reinventing what we already knew about audience interpretation.

All these and other disciplines on the interface with audience research thrived on the excitement of a cutting edge, and possibly – the jury is still out – each gained from it within their own discipline. But none saw it as their task to build up, to inform or further develop, a core body of research on audiences per se. The result is that, after some years of vigorous activity, it is still not easy to refer clearly to audience theory (possibly a conservative ambition on my part) or to collect together the main empirical studies beyond those which have become canonical (Livingstone, 1998b). In the language of bureaucratic management, while more usually media and communications is a net importer (citing other disciplines but less cited ourselves), for the duration of the cutting edge moment in audience research, we became net exporters. I think the same is happening again over excitement with the Internet. But in the long run, neither does us much good, for both situations are unbalanced.

**The Future for Audience Research**

Where does this lead audience research? From a theoretical point of view, I think the stress should indeed be on communication rather than on media, as I suggested above. Instead of asking what audiences, conceived as an artificial reification of a particular technological interface, are really like, we could better conceptualise ‘audience’ as a re-
lational or interactional construct, a way of focusing on the diverse relationships among people mediated by historically and culturally specific technological forms (see Livingstone, 1998a). Our central concern would then be that of communication, and our media-centrism would represent a legitimate specialism in the context of other communication scholars looking at other forms of communication. On this view, the audience becomes a shorthand way of pointing to ways in which people stand in relationship to each other, rather than a thing of which people may or may not be a member and whose peculiar ways must be discovered. The advantage, from my point of view, is that this reading of audience research puts audiences at the centre of media and communication research, rather than locating them – or worse, deferring their study – as the last stage in a long chain of more interesting events.

The new media are changing this anyway. For example, in a paper about content analysis some years ago I thought I was being mildly challenging in arguing for audience-centred categories; i.e. for analysing texts in terms of audience reception rather than first analysing texts and then asking if audiences get it right or not (Livingstone, 1989). Now, as I face a new project on Internet users I find we have no choice but to do this, for to analyse the text in advance is impossible. We can only reach the text through an analysis of the user’s selections, sequencing, generic classification and interpretation of contents, and even that is not easy.

Charting the possibilities and problems for communication, or relations among people, insofar as these are undermined or facilitated, managed or reconstituted by the media, does seem to me a challenging agenda, though maybe not a cutting edge. However, it might interface effectively with the many and diverse debates around social theory, where questions of communication can sit happily among discussions of information, public, identity, technology, risk, globalisation, and so forth. However, from the point of view of the field of media and communications as it negotiates its relation to neighbouring disciplines, funding competitions, evolving policy agendas and the public interest, I also think it legitimate to set our agenda according to the cutting edge of new media technologies.

Most simply, our concepts, methods and experience will serve perfectly well in the enterprise of tracking the ramifications in everyday life of changing media and communication technologies: it is near impossible to figure out what the Internet will be or will mean in a few years time, but describing its current forms and uses can only be valuable. But more ambitiously, as media and communication research comes to terms with the end of the dominance of mass communication and the growth of more diverse forms of communication technologies, our task changes commensurately, and we must ask how far we can draw on what we know of communication, especially of mass communication, in researching the new media environment.

In short, our job is no longer that of charting how the predictable mass audience gets on with the business of making sense of what it’s given. In the early days of television, the household acquired a single television set, placed it in the living room, and negotiated how they were going to use it. On the screen you could view one, or perhaps a few, national channels, each intended to appeal to the entire public, each broadcast during much, but not all, of the day according to a fixed and familiar schedule. Under these circumstances, it was clear that the interesting questions concerned texts (as each nation transferred its cultural traditions onto the screen) rather than contexts (which were relatively homogenous and deeply familiar), just as it was also more interesting or pressing
to consider questions about ideology rather than conditions of production, and about effects rather than lifestyle.

Today, households are acquiring multiple television sets along with the capacity for multiple channels and, in lesser proportion, multiple video recorders, personal computers, telephones, and now the Internet. And we have shifted our focus so as to study the diversifying conditions of production, along with their economic and policy considerations, studying also the contexts of use and associated lifestyle choices. This means shifting from the mass to the interactive, from a single medium to inter-linked media, from public service to diverse, more commercialised forms of content delivery, from the national to both global and local, etc.

Does this invalidate our knowledge of the mass audience and the mass media? How far are we seeing a radical switch to the new, and how far are old and new co-existent, or even mutually transformative? And what about the audience? It seems fair to observe that in key ways, people are becoming users rather than just audiences insofar as new media and information technologies open up new modes of engagement with media – playing computer games, surfing the Internet, using the computer, etc, while the term, audience only really satisfactorily covers the activities of listening and watching. Yet this admission complicates rather than simplifies. For if the crisis over the concept of the audience focused on the apparent untenability of the central concept of watching television – how can we define it, measure it, place boundaries around it, and in whose interest is it if we do so anyway? – these problems are magnified in the face of an innovating and diversifying media environment.

However, what we know already about television audience reception may yet prove illuminating for new media, for example, allowing us to go beyond the ill-defined and excessively-hyped concept of ‘interactivity’ by applying well-established concepts which draw on semiotics, on theories of genre, narrative, openness or modality, on a history of the textual and social management of spectatorship, on a social psychology of interpretative resources, and so forth. Once again, if I may eschew the grandeur of a cutting edge, I will end by suggesting that these questions represent an interesting challenge.

Bibliography

Searching for Landmarks at the Forefront of Media Research

Horace Newcomb

Identifying innovative and commanding work that directs or redirects research and scholarship in communication studies is more difficult than for many other areas. This is so, I maintain, precisely because ours is not a discipline. Those of us who prefer the concept of a “field” to describe the broad focus of our efforts use the term in two ways. One is the common usage, the conventional sense of an area of study. The other, the one I prefer, is more metaphorical. Used in this sense our activity can be described as attempts to make our way across broad expanses.

Some areas are marked and fenced, clearly bounded. Sometimes these areas are even more severely restricted as in the culture of my youth. Hunters knew that land owners could place signs along the boundaries of their property, identifying it as “Posted.” This meant that no hunter could legally cross onto that land, or could do so only with special permission. (To pre-figure some of my later comments, I will suggest here that in intellectual activity, it is often the poachers, those who transgress such boundaries, who end up providing truly innovative scholarship and research.)

Other areas of “the field” are open, however, inviting all who would so attempt to explore, map, and measure. These open areas, of course, are not without their own dangers. Those who venture there may find themselves in swamps or bogs, buried forever in questions without answers. But other areas are well-defined, cultivated, planted, and fertilized. Here, planting and re-planting occurs in familiar furrows. For the most part, successful work in such areas is best described as improvement and refinement, and this is significant, because even here there is no such thing as a predictable harvest.

But our work is not defined by metaphors. Our focus is on hard problems, on issues related to the lived experience of citizens throughout the world. Communication technologies, the messages, meanings and issues carried within them, and the problems and promises attendant to those complex phenomena are among the most fundamental and important in societies and cultures everywhere. At one time, perhaps, many of us felt assured of how best to study those issues, problems, and promises. We could measure and evaluate the content of media messages, consider the effects of mediated material, the policies regulating practices, the economics, both classical and political, enabling and restraining communication. Later approaches challenged these boundaries. They focused
on variable responses as well as effects, on forms of expression as well as institutional practices, on cases rather than abstract economic or social functions. The newer approaches were, for the most part, defined by what some scholars considered deficiencies within existing modes of research and analysis. Work was often developed on the assumption that wrong (or put more generously), flawed, questions had been asked. These challenges to received approaches, contributed to what I would refer to as the “theory wars,” discussions and debates that wracked many fields of study throughout the 70s and into the 80s. These newer approaches vitally refreshed the intellectual soil in which many of us work, and by definition that is for me one kind of cutting edge.

But there is another way to identify such a boundary. From this perspective we must first acknowledge the existence of problems defined not by us, by the intricacies wound within our assumptions or methods, but rather by circumstances altering the very objects of our study. Shifts and changes in the development, application, and deployment of newer communication technologies now demand, I argue, new approaches in our work. I do not mean to suggest here that our tasks should be “determined” by technology. Rather, I am concerned with how we create truly new questions. For me, cutting edge scholarship and research are most often defined by the questions in which they are grounded. To be innovative we must clear a narrow path between questions defined by prior research and questions defined by those who control the industries, technologies, and applications we explore. Moreover, we must acknowledge that questions from both our own histories and from those working within industries are important aids to innovative work.

The new questions must address developments such as the massive expansion of distribution channels, the consequent shifts caused in both commercial and public service sectors of electronic communication, the policy challenges faced by regulators resulting from these changes, the global convergence of ownership and the creation of media conglomerates dominating the newer media environments. I also refer to potential convergences among technologies, most of which are linked in some fashion to digital transmission via the internet. We must re-examine and perhaps redefine what we mean by very familiar terms such as “mass,” “audience” or “media text” or even “media industry.” We must rethink what we mean by concepts such as “the public sphere.” We may have to invent new formulas for analyzing economic structures and certainly we will have to reconsider our approaches to “political economy.” Some aspects of all these factors surely remain the same, but some are new and the overall mix seems at the moment to be in constant transition.

“Cutting edge” research asks, depends on, or suggests the right questions about these changes and the material and conceptual implications resulting from them. This does not always mean, however, that cutting edge research is totally dependent on the “newest” work. Rather, it often indicates an appropriation and a new application of previous work now seen to have unexpected significance. Let me illustrate these propositions with examples related, for the most part, to my interests in television studies.

In order to develop suitable questions for a new wave or research it is necessary to describe and attempt to define the circumstances surrounding our work. This is especially difficult if one seeks to meld questions of technology and economics with complicated issues of aesthetics and expressive culture; story-telling, representation, narration, and technique. Both the difficulties and the promise of such attempts, however, can be found in two works that are, for me, ground breaking. The first is John Thornton Caldwell’s 1995 book, Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television.¹ There
Caldwell develops his theory of “televisuality,” or “excessive style,” as a new mode of television production, narration, and programming. He presents televisuality as the outcome of the crisis noted in his title, a crisis caused by increasing pressure on American network television from greatly increased competition: new distribution systems such as cable, satellite, and home video, and other technologies such as the remote control device. Television producers and distributors, however, were fortunate that at the time of the crisis, they were also given access to new technologies of production with which to reinvent (or at least perform cosmetic surgery on) themselves. The Steadicam, lightweight field equipment, digital recording and post-production devices, digital compositing systems and many other machines made possible a stunning range of visual effects and narrational experimentation. Caldwell makes no claim that the “crisis” he cites has ended. Nor does he argue for shifts in the goals and intentions of U.S. network television - the creation of capital through the sale of audiences to advertisers. The point, however, is that he and others have defined fundamental changes in the U.S., and in my view, world television systems. Televisuality, then, presents what I consider one of the best descriptions of what Caldwell and others refer to as “post-network television,” a new industrial and cultural formation. One key aspect of televisuality is that we must acknowledge that practitioners, the makers of television, are often as theoretically informed about the consequences of these new devices as we are. This newer configuration of production, distribution, and reception of television alters most if not all aspects of what we have studied in the past and Caldwell’s assessment of the new situation is mixed.

So, too, is that of Michael Curtin who explores similar themes in a recent article in the Journal of Communication, “Feminine Desire in the Age of Satellite Television.” Curtin is less certain than Caldwell regarding the passing of the network era, and prefers the term “neo-network television” to describe current conditions. His definition echoes Caldwell in outlining the problems we face and some of the ways in which we should explore them.

... two strategies are now at work in the culture industries. One focuses on mass cultural forms aimed at broad national or global markets that demand low involvement and are relatively apolitical (e.g., Hollywood films or broadcast television). By comparison, those products targeted at niche audiences actively pursue intensity. They seek out audiences that are more likely to be highly invested in a particular form of cultural expression. These firms do not aim to change niche groups. They aim instead to situate their products within them. Among industry executives, these are referred to as products with “edge.”...

We are therefore witnessing the organization of huge media conglomerates around the so-called synergies that exploit these two movements. This is what I refer to as the neo-network era, an era characterized by the multiple and asynchronous distribution of cultural forms.

Curtin also refers to this situation as characterizing an era of “indeterminacy” within media and culture industries, and suggests that “We need to recognize that gaps, contradictions, and inconsistencies are much more characteristic of this era than what might be suggested by more common representations of highly integrated media juggernauts run by powerful moguls like Rupert Murdoch.” Curtin concludes with the argument that “An understanding of the neo-network era asks us to rethink our assumptions about the homogenizing power of global media conglomerates, pressing us instead to explore
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this terrain as a site of contest, and a productive space within civil society. Such an approach neither denies corporate power or uncritically celebrates popular culture. Instead it suggests how scholarly criticism might help us identify locations in which to construct alternative images of feminine desire. I would add that these newer material conditions also place communication studies in a similar “era of indeterminacy,” and that many topics – feminine desire is only one example – are now open to reconsideration in the age of new media formations. What these analyses also suggest is that we must reconsider not only our individual or cultural attention to television from the standpoint of representations and meanings, but also in more formal, political senses.

And this leads to my second set of cutting edge examples. One of the discussions I have found most interesting in recent years is that surrounding the topic of “Cultural Policy.” Most strongly put forward by Tony Bennett and other scholars in Australia, the call for a “turn” to cultural policy studies was narrowly focused at an early moment by a phrase Bennett later modified. I refer to his call for scholar/teachers to assist in the creation of “cultural technicians.” However unfortunate the phrase later proved to be, it did indicate a primary concern for researchers: how does our work have applied, immediate significance in public life? Addressing this question required a reconsideration of the history of “cultural studies,” a critique of cultural studies’ focus on “textual studies,” and a strong move into areas such as museum policy, arts funding, and so on, areas somewhat removed from the heavy emphasis on “media” that had informed much work done in the name of cultural studies.

The specific debates flowing around the “cultural policy” topic seem to me to have subsided somewhat, but they are, in my opinion, now more fully applicable than ever before in the realm of mass communication studies. They are necessary because of changes in both the European public service and in the commercial broadcasting systems in the U.S. and other countries. Just as the representations cited by Curtin have become unstable in an era of rapid technological developments, so too have policies and economic foundations. In many ways, for the first time, the two types of system are closer together than ever before, because both now face the fact that “policy” is being made not by governments but by corporations. This has long been the case in the U.S., of course, but new forces and events have made it more evident than ever. To deal with such a situation we must reconsider definitions of policy. If “policy” merely refers to governmental actions, there is little to say other than to chart responses and changes. If, however, policy is defined in terms of how boundaries are set, answers to those questions should be found on a cutting edge.

Little research exists in this area, but one probe should be cited here. Patricia Aufderheide’s Communication Policy and the Public Interest does not always define terms in new ways. But it is a thorough exploration of the implications of the U.S. Telecommunications Act of 1996. In showing how the Act becomes the site of struggle among competing definitions of “public interest” Aufderheide begins a new approach to the analysis of policy in the present economic and technological contexts in the U.S. Moreover, that legislation has both implicit and explicit consequences for global communications industries as well.

A third set of questions pointing toward a cutting edge comes from geographic and cultural regions long taken for granted as entirely beyond the fringe, cultures and societies often framed narrowly as on the “receiving end” of mass communication, developing nations throughout the world. These locations have often been figured as victims of global media systems, ripe for homogenization and subjugation. Scholarship from
within those regions, however, challenges such easy notions. I will cite only a few examples here. Again, the examples are not particularly new, but the questions they frame have recently taken on new significance.

Néstor García-Canclini’s Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity, was first published in Spanish in 1989, and translated only in 1995. Exemplary of a much larger body of his work in Spanish, this text explores specific situations in Mexico and Latin America. Some of the concepts he presents are developed even more fully in work I would add to his, that of Jesús Martín-Barbero whose concept of mestizajes captures my point best. First published in 1993, Martín-Barbero’s study cites a time ten years earlier, a time when he and other researchers were entering a new stage of awareness as media researchers. His realization is worth quoting at some length.

We suddenly became aware that virtually nothing of the way people work out the meaning of their lives, the way they communicate and use the media, could fit into our predetermined schema. Put in another way, the social and political processes of those years – authoritarian regimes in almost all of South America, continuous liberation movements in Central America, enormous migrations of the leaders of politics, the arts and social research fleeing into exile – all tended to undermine the old certainties. For the first time, many people came out of the world of academia and government planning offices and had to confront the cultural reality of these countries: the new combinations and syntheses – the mestizajes – that reveal not just the racial mixture that we come from but the interweaving of modernity and the residues of various cultural periods, the mixture of social structures and sentiments. We became aware of the memories and images that blend together the indigenous Indian roots with a campesino culture, the rural with the urban, the folkloric with popular culture, and the popular with the new mass culture.

The point I wish to assert here is that even in the single decade since 1989 newer communication technologies and configurations of those technologies have, to a degree, transformed all our cultures into hybrid cultures, that the mixtures described by Martín-Barbero in 1993, in countries and cultures far from where most of us experience our lives, are those we live among. Other evidence of these alterations and adjustments from other regions can be found in the work of David Morley and Kevin Robbins and of my colleague, John Downing. Focusing on Europe, especially on newer national and regional developments since the collapse of the Soviet Union, these scholars illustrate both the inadequacies and new directions for received media research. And lest the argument be raised that none of this cultural blending and mixing is the case for the U.S., I will assert that 50+ channels of cable television have increasingly led to the exhibition of the huge variations of cultural experience lodged in that geographical expanse, that the “edginess” cited by Curtin has become a defining feature of production design and programming strategy. But that is another paper.

Clearly, what I have tried to describe as the general configurations of media industries and contexts in contemporary settings is related to what some would refer to as postmodernism. I do not like the term and do not wish to enter debates regarding whether or not contemporary mass media cause, reflect, or exemplify a postmodern condition. I do, however, find it interesting that even one of the master theorists of postmodernism finds himself somewhat mired in paradox when facing changes in contemporary culture, changes intensified by contemporary mass media. In a recent article, “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” Fredric Jameson wrestles with con-
conflicting views on the value of high art and mass culture, on the values of nationalism as a unified concept in light of the great variety of differentiated cultural experience enhanced by transnational mass media.11 Defenders of “nationalism” he suggests often mount their cause, linking certain types of art and politics, in order to conceive of “a great collective or national political project such as was envisioned on the Left and on the Right during the modernist period.”12 Such positions intend to oppose “the encroachments of the world market, of transnational capitalism along with the great capital-lending power centers of the so called first-world.”13 Then comes a problem for opposition:

That in the process [of mounting such opposition] it must also oppose the dispersals of a postmodern mass culture then places it in contradiction with those for whom only the activation of a truly grassroots culture of multiplicities and differences can oppose, first the national state itself, and then presumably what lies beyond it in the outside world (even though, paradoxically, it is often elements of that outside and transnational mass culture that are appropriated for such resistances: Hollywood films being sometimes the source of resistance to internal hegemony as well as the form external hegemony ultimately takes.)14

Jameson resolves his quandary to some degree with a turn to Hegel and an application of the dialectic. Still, his concluding comment, calling on all of us to make a similar turn, exhibits some of the problems we face in the study of communication. I have included this example primarily because it points to the necessity for defining precise questions in order to map our search for cutting edge scholarship. I believe Jameson indicates an excellent set of questions, even if his answers are, if not predictable, somewhat familiar.

A nother essay in the same collection offers a related perspective, but also provides, in my estimation, a more powerful indication of the cutting edge.15 It is not coincidental that the author, Alberto Moreiras, is a Latin Americanist and that his essay returns again to issues echoing those explored by García-Canclini and Martín-Barbero.

Although he is not primarily a media scholar, much of his commentary on relations among regions, nations, and cultures speaks directly to the situations in which we seek a new compass for our field. The problem, as put by Moreiras, is to find a way to discover the “outside” of the global. For if there is no outside, then pessimism – the drowning of cultural distinction in the homogenized ocean of indifference – is the only conclusion. But Moreiras and the scholars and researchers he follows will not accept such a negative conclusion. Instead, they turn the negative critique back onto the dominant order, they locate, create, and map interstitial or peripheral spaces from which to respond, appropriate, and contest. He refers to these cultural spaces as “folds” within the larger global culture, not outside it exactly, but folded into it as valleys are folded into the heavy terrain of mountains, as arroyos and gullies are folded into the flatness of the prairie, as alleyways are folded into urban grids. “This would be a thinking of historical disjuncture,” Moreiras says, “where a dialectical relationship between negation and affirmation may not quite obtain. Globality may not be overcome or arsened by ‘interstitial sparks,’ but spaces of coexistence may be implemented, folds within the global system, where an exterior to totality emerges as the site of a possible, concrete freedom...”16

I will assume that all of us hope that mediated communication and our studies of it will somehow contribute to fields cultivating sites of possible, concrete freedom. I believe we are now at a moment when opportunities for those sites might be realized, though it is also a moment when more and more of them could be closed off. The works I have cited here offer strong pointers for exploring our fields in new ways but few pre-
cise markers guide us. We have no detailed maps of the folded landscapes of our cul-
tures. I believe scholarship and research on the forefront should always be like this. The
grand moment is always the one when we cannot quite see over the next hill or around
the bend in the road—because we know, in spite of uncertainty, that is where we still
must go.

Notes

Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995
1999, 55-70.
3. Ibid., p. 60.
4. Ibid., p. 62.
5. Ibid., p. 68.
6. See among others, Bennett, Tony, Culture: A Reformer’s Science. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage,
McGuigan, Jim, Culture and the Public Sphere. London, New York: Routledge, 1996. Miller, Toby,
Technologies of Truth: Cultural Citizenship and the Popular Media. Minneapolis; London: University of
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9. Martín-Barbero, Jesús. Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediations. London,
10. Morley, David and Kevin Robbins. Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and
12. P. 75.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 94.
ON THE EDGE

A Meta-Analysis of the State of Media and Communication Research

KLAUS BRUHN JENSEN

In 1983, the Journal of Communication published its now famous theme issue, entitled ‘Ferment in the Field,’ which took stock of approximately three decades of media and communication studies, and outlined an agenda for further research. One of the contributions summed up a skeptical position in its title: “What Ferment?” (de Sola Pool, 1983). The author, Ithiel de Sola Pool, went further:

I wish there were some ferment, but I fail to find it. Fermentation is a productive process; the enzymes produce a feisty brew. Is current communications research in ferment, or is it at a dead end? Is anything new and productive being done, or are we treading water? My answer is an optimistic one, but more because of what the world is doing to the discipline than because of what is happening within the discipline. (p. 258)

These questions serve as a reminder that, whatever metaphor one chooses, the notion of research in ‘ferment,’ at ‘the forefront,’ or on ‘the cutting edge’ is inherently controversial. The answers, whether optimistic or not, similarly carry theoretical as well as political premises. For example, de Sola Pool assumed that “we” are an established “discipline,” rather than the ad hoc “field” referred to in the title of the journal issue. But, is there a ‘we’? And, is there even a ‘field’? What ferment? What field?

Before one begins to identify singular exemplary studies, let alone entire theories or methodologies that might represent the wave of the next millennium, while assigning others to historical oblivion, I propose to examine some of the premises of such an evaluative enterprise. In the first and main portion of this presentation, I take the opportunity of the conference theme to engage in a meta-analysis of what is ‘a cutting edge,’ with reference to prototypical examples from previous research. Second, I begin to confront the question of where the cutting edge of media and communication research might be in the future – if the edge and the field both exist.

My own premises for examining those of others, in brief overview, are as follows (see further Jensen, 1995: chaps 9-11). Media and communication researchers established
themselves initially as two distinctive academic subcultures, recalling C.P. Snow’s (1964) sensitizing simplification regarding arts and sciences. Much effort has gone into theoretical and methodological reintegration and ‘convergence,’ particularly since the time of the ‘Ferment in the Field’ issue, in order to tap the best of both worlds for the production of more, more valid, and more socially relevant knowledge. The current end result of that complex historical development, at least in the Nordic countries, is a ‘field’ which is on the verge – on the edge – of becoming a ‘discipline.’ At the core of the field are the various media technologies, their social institutions and characteristic textual genres, even while countries and universities may cut up the field differently: Is film, for example, one medium among others? Is journalism a privileged area of research and professional training, or one of many genres? In terms of the frameworks that produce scientific continuity – departments, journals, conferences, and consultancy to public and private clients – the field of media and communication research is now a de facto discipline in the Nordic countries, boasting academic presence as well as public legitimacy. The edge is no longer departmental status, nor even convergence of formerly antagonistic traditions within and between departments, although struggles, not least over the conditions of convergence, remain part of the ongoing business of research (e.g., Rosengren, 1996; Jensen, 1996).

In his ‘Ferment’ article, Ithiel de Sola Pool (1983) had referred to the common distinction between forces which are internal, respectively external, to scientific research, suggesting that he was optimistic because of “what the world is doing to the discipline” (p. 258), rather than vice versa. While I go on to question the distinction between basic and socially relevant research, this distinction provides a familiar frame in which to assess competing conceptions of ‘the edge.’ In this first part, I critique four earlier interventions, two each from basic and applied perspectives, returning in the second part to a less critical, more reconstructive discussion of where the field might find its next edge.

**What Is a Cutting Edge?**

In basic research, a key issue, even the main justification for the existence of the field as such, has been the study of ‘effects.’ An important resource in this area has been the volume, *Milestones in Mass Communication Research*, subtitled ‘Media Effects’ and edited by Lowery and DeFleur, whose title explicitly associates it with the notion of a ‘cutting edge.’ For my present argument, its most interesting aspects are, first, which ‘milestones’ have been left out and, next, which milestones were moved along the way of its three editions. From the first to the second edition, from 1983 to 1988, the main, relatively uncontroversial change consisted in the addition of two milestones, namely, agenda-setting research (McCormbs & Shaw, 1972) and the 1982 status report on television and social behavior from the US National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 1982). By the end of the second edition, an interesting reference occurred to what the authors called “the meaning paradigm” (Lowery & DeFleur, 1988: 455). Although their account primarily referred to classical sociology and anthropology, rather than critical and Continental theory, their exploration of ‘meaning’ in the context of “the social construction of reality” (p. 456) signaled an openness to a variety of theoretical sources and their potential convergence, which was gaining momentum in the 1980s. By the opening of the third edition, however, Lowery and DeFleur had changed their course, with little explanation of what had happened to ‘the meaning paradigm’:
It is clear [...] that the dominant mode of inquiry – the major methodology – that has been moving the cutting edge of [the] discipline forward is quantitative research conducted within the theoretical perspectives and methodologies of social science. [...] it is the accumulation of quantitative research completed within the guidelines of the scientific method that has made the most significant contribution to our emerging understanding of the process and effects of masscommunication. (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995: xi)

This voice, from deep within American mainstream social science, also echoed in the milestones added to the third edition. Besides a belated recognition of early uses-and-gratifications research on radio soap opera (Herzog, 1944), the addition was “a relatively obscure study of Iowa corn farmers, and the way they took up a new kind of seed,” which arguably led to “a theory of the adoption of innovation” (p. xiii). Whereas this last study might be said to contain seeds of theoretical and methodological innovation, the argument recalls, when seen in the big picture of the past several decades, Jeremy Tunstall’s complaint 30 years ago that “too many American studies are about the magazine reading habits of 50 pig farmers in S. W. Iowa” (Tunstall, 1970: 32). A volumelength review of audience research, employing milestone and cutting-edge terminology, and updated from 1983 to 1995, which lacks coverage of any or all of, for example, The ‘Nationwide’ Audience (Morley, 1980), Reading the Romance (Radway, 1984), or “The Social Uses of Television” (Lull, 1980), is not on, but over the edge.

If the ‘milestone’ volumes thus are symptomatic of a persistent methodological fundamentalism in their (now self-nominated) dominant paradigm (see also Gitlin, 1978), an equally deep-seated type of limitation has been produced by the theoretical relativism that has been widespread in the other main subculture of media and communication research. A representative position statement from audience studies is Ien Ang’s Desperately Seeking the Audience (1991) (see further Jensen,1991a). Like much of the cultural-studies tradition, Ang aligns herself with the position of Michel Foucault. His seminal work is frequently construed to imply that the very production of scientific knowledge is an act of social violence and that, accordingly, the purpose of critical research must be to show that knowledge, as commonly understood, is literally impossible, in the process deconstructing any other position that dares to know anything specific. This politics of research normally involves a moral condemnation of those who exercise power over their ‘others’ by claiming to know something specific about them. Ang, for one, wanted to rescue television viewers from peoplemeters, a new ‘technology of surveillance’ in 1991, which she wanted to replace, not complement, by ethnography, because:

[...] ‘television audience’ is a nonsensical category, for there is only the dispersed, indefinitely proliferating chain of situations in which television audiencehood is practised and experienced – together making up the diffuse and fragmentary social world of actual audiences. (p. 164)

Far from offering the kind of ‘concrete’ understanding of ‘actual’ audiences being promised, this position tends to produce a different kind of reification than the dominant paradigm, this time through abstraction. Meaghan Morris (1990) has pinpointed such a self-serving rhetoric that prides itself of its own reflexivity:

[...] people in modern mediatized societies are complex and contradictory, mass cultural texts are complex and contradictory, therefore people using them produce complex and contradictory culture. (pp. 24-25)
Unless critical researchers are willing to commit themselves also scientifically, by committing virtual violence as they categorize and interpret reality, the likely outcome is an ‘endless ethnography’ in which the map is as large as the territory - a form of research which has been unable to deliver on its social commitment to counteract real-life violence.

My first two examples, identifying the dual danger of basic research - methodological fundamentalism and theoretical relativism - were drawn from other European and American scholarship, which, to a great extent, has set the agenda for Nordic media and communication research. Beyond the attempt to think globally in its basic studies, the Nordic research community has also acted locally in its applied studies.

Six years ago, the present company had another opportunity, the twentieth anniversary of these Nordic conferences, to take stock of the field through the eyes of younger scholars in dialogue with scholars well-established since 1973. One of the most notable contributions was Frands Mortensen’s (1994) personal statement on his itinerary from being a classic intellectual committed to revolution, in part through media research, to being a pragmatic defender of public-service media as the last ditch of social commitment. A part from being a clear and courageous intervention in itself, his article will be a valuable source when the early history of the field in the Nordic countries is to be written, hopefully before too long. The last few lines of the article, however, could be said to repeat history. Having traced the political and theoretical retreat of 1970s critical studies, Mortensen now turned his own defensive to an offensive against other, especially younger scholars at the same conference, asking “What is your project?” (p. 48, my translation KBJ). My own response, then as now, is that I do not have a project, and I do not think that I should have one, but several projects, depending on where my research orients me, and how it may address the given historical and social context. In my view, the sense of intellectual as well as political retreat stems, in large part, from the momentous miscalculation, now acknowledged by Mortensen and others, of what practical difference critical research might make. I would, additionally, want the procedures of research to be an insulation of sorts from such miscalculations in the future. Although I agree entirely with Frands Mortensen about the value of public-service principles in the current cultural environment, and believe that I, too, can offer evidence to that effect from my own research, I fail to see why this should become the project. History might prove Mortensen wrong once again. Even if the purpose of research is to change, rather than describe, the world, what distinguishes research as a reflexive practice from political practice, is that it allows its practitioners to examine several hypotheses, and to be proven wrong, without resorting to a tragic position, personally or professionally. Two disproven hypotheses may ultimately do more for society than one good cause.

Alongside critical activism, research may hope to make a social difference by institutionalizing its efforts around special issues. A recent example of such efforts is the International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen, financed by UNESCO and the Swedish Government, organized by Nordicom, and located at the University of Gothenburg. The implicit premises of the organization appear to be that the impact of media representations of violence on children could hardly be anything but negative and, further, that research can document, and should counteract, such adverse impact. In the words of its director, Ulla Carlsson, the Clearinghouse will inform various user groups about “measures and activities which aim to limit gratuitous violence in the media” (Carlsson, 1998: 10), whatever “gratuitous” might mean. Despite the cautious rhetoric of its newsletter and yearbook, the Clearinghouse taps into the broad social concern about media impact, not least on children, which, in past public
debate as well as research, has repeatedly swelled into moral panics (Cohen S., 1972). Furthermore, the Clearinghouse constitutes a marked departure from the original role of Nordicom in documenting and disseminating media research and, more recently, media statistics - a role which has deservedly generated international respect, and which may now benefit the Clearinghouse. To me, the shift raises two concerns. First, although the findings are complicated and mixed, some seventy years of research have not, in my assessment, documented more than marginal effects of media violence on the opinions and behavior of audiences, when all is said and done. Second, a further unstated premise of much work in this area is that the impact of media violence on children should be avoided at almost any cost. By contrast, I find it necessary to state that a severe negative impact on, perhaps even the death of, a number of children may be a price to be paid for media, as for other modern technologies, to be weighed against the benefits on several parameters. One twentieth-century parallel is the automobile, whose effect is far from marginal, and unequivocally documented. The fact that cars kill hundreds of people on Nordic roads every year is accepted in practice as a cost of modern living. My aim is not to be cynical about human suffering, whether on public roads or in private homes, but to suggest other dangers in pretending that, if only more research were available, politicians as well as citizens would know which priorities and value judgments to make in this area.

From one perspective, then, the Clearinghouse amounts to a way of thinking too locally, just as the one-project critical activism constituted a mistaken attempt to act globally. Like the theoretical provincialism of the 'milestone' and 'endless ethnography' positions, these political provincialisms are not likely, in my opinion, to bring media and communication research to any edge.

Where Is the Cutting Edge?

If one can agree that media and communication research is now a de facto discipline, or at least a well-established field, I want to argue, in this second part, that its cutting edge is located neither in specific theoretical debates, nor in socially committed research as traditionally understood. Rather, the cutting edge may be found at the interface of the field with other disciplines, departments, and, to a degree, other social institutions outside the academy. My premises for this argument are as follows, again in brief overview. The field has drawn on a variety of sources from the social sciences as well as the humanities in order to describe, interpret, and explain the main cultural forms of the twentieth century. Indeed, media and communication research can be taken as a characteristic case of how twentieth-century scholarship has frequently turned 'interdisciplinary,' as the terminology goes, to be able to account for new social realities. In this respect at least, all research is applied, and is itself a form of social action that feeds back into media and society, what Giddens (1984) has called the double hermeneutic. Media are hermeneutic vehicles, what I have called institutions-to-think-with (1991b), paralleling Claude Lévi-Strauss' (1962/1991) notion of objects-to-think-with in anthropology. Universities and other research entities are second-order institutions-to-think-with, enabling reflexivity about the nature and purpose of media, among other subjects. What distinguishes the present historical juncture as a particular phase of modernization, is the intensified role of 'information' and 'communication' for the purpose of imagining new realities, both in material production and in politics and culture (Harvey, 1989). It is at this juncture that media and communication research assumes a new position, in-
side as well as outside academy, and it is a position whose potential has barely been identified, let alone systematized, in the published literature, except perhaps in reference to ‘IT’ buzzwords.

In the consolidation of the field still to come, the traditional issues of classic scientific quality and social relevance, like those raised by my four prototypical examples, certainly remain important items on the research agenda, to be debated as a matter of course. My brief analysis of the examples was designed to identify some obstacles to consolidation which arise from an insufficient measure of, in one word, professionalism. With respect to scientific quality, the ‘milestone’ position seemingly remains willfully ignorant of well-publicized theoretical alternatives which do not fit a predetermined methodological matrix. In its turn, the ‘endless ethnography’ position shies away from conceptual clarity and methodological rigor to the extent that theoretical relativism becomes the logical conclusion: ‘You can have your theory, and I’ll have mine,’ or, worse, ‘let’s each tell our complex and contradictory story.’ With respect to social relevance, the critical vanguard of the 1970s was excused, in part, by its limited professional experience, but a refusal to incorporate past lessons into present research strategies bears witness to a subordination of professionalism as a global requirement to local, provincial commitments, as does the implication of the UNESCO Clearinghouse that research on children and media violence is continuously making significant advances with concrete consequences for policy.

The opportunity for media and communication research, I submit, is to build on past theoretical and methodological progress, as the field begins to question present disciplinary lines in the study of communication and culture generally. Whereas I realize that some colleagues see the very idea of scientific progress as an expression of discursive power, I believe that the field as such has advanced, not only institutionally, but substantially and professionally. To exemplify the state of the field (see further Jensen, forthcoming), since the 1950s, survey methodologies have shown assumptions about massive and direct media effects on opinions to be untenable; since the 1960s, cultural theory has expanded the notion of what ‘texts’ and ‘cultural forms’ may legitimately be studied; since the 1980s, qualitative reception studies have redefined the role of textual analysis as a source of hypotheses to be tested empirically; and from the 1990s, cognitive studies of film and other media have begun to undermine the stronghold of psychoanalytic metaphors in studies of audiences as bodies in the flesh (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

The time may be right for translating these contributions into a reconfiguration of the academy. Media and communication research increasingly overlaps with a variety of humanistic and social-scientific subspecialties, not just because of what de Sola Pool (1983) referred to as internal and external factors respectively, but also because the field was a latecomer and, perhaps, a late starter. The natural conclusion to the dramatically revised understanding, since the 1960s, of the phenomena of culture and communication across disciplines from literary theory and linguistics to sociology, anthropology, and geography, to me, is a revision of the institutional frameworks. Accordingly, media and communication research should become neither a field, nor a discipline, nor a department, but a faculty with a number of departments and other constituents. I anticipate much opposition to any such plan for financial, intellectual, as well as biographical reasons, certainly in other departments, but also among bureaucrats and within the field itself. In favor of the realization of this plan counts not only the history that I have retraced summarily, but also a social context in which both the political establishment and the population at large are tending to see culture and communication through the con-
cepts and terms of this field. Among the benefits of a Faculty of Media, Communication, and Culture could be a more thoroughly modernized approach to the study of human cultures, a more differentiated training of a central, expanding profession, and a reconsideration of what forms of culture and communication should be preserved for the future in museums and archives. The edge of the field, in sum, is its boundaries with other fields and institutions, which are ready to be moved.

Conclusion

In 1993, the Journal of Communication again took stock of ‘The Future of the Field,’ ten years after the ‘Ferment’ issue. By coincidence, all three speakers in this plenary session were among the contributors to two issues of continuing debate about fields and disciplines, scientific quality and social relevance (Jensen, 1993; Livingstone, 1993; Newcomb, 1993). I presume that stock-taking will take place again in 2003, with or without the participation of this panel, and my best guess is that a Faculty of Media, Communication, and Culture will not yet be in place in 2003. Nevertheless, in the longer term, my prognosis is that it can materialize. Compared to the otherwise trend-setting American context, where the outcome has been two separate subdisciplines of interpersonal and mass communications (Rogers, 1999), the Nordic contexts of media research are smaller as well as more homogeneous. In addition, both Europe and the US offer examples of ‘schools of communication’ with component departments and sections, even though I know of no reconfiguration on the scale imagined here. Moreover, those who remember previous conferences of the present company, and of the IAMCR (International Association for Media and Communication Research), recall that the reference used to be to ‘mass communication research.’ Now, in the Nordic context beginning with this very conference, we refer to ‘media and communication research.’ As Raymond Williams (1983) has reminded us, changes in such keywords are indicative of major changes of practice. One background to the new terminology has been the coming of the computer as an intermediary between interpersonal and mass communication, and as a meta-medium integrating previous media on a single platform. Another background to the fall of the ‘mass’ terminology, paradoxically, has been the consolidation of (mass) media research as a distinctive field which, as noted, has begun taking over the study of culture and communication from established disciplines.

Finally, it seems appropriate to credit the music which has accompanied the first phase of media and communication research. Despite the fact that music remains one of the most underresearched aspects of media, rock ‘n’ roll has, arguably, inspired new ideas about culture and communication also among the first generations of media and communication researchers. Leonard Cohen (1988) commented a decade ago:

They sentenced me to twenty years of boredom
for trying to change the system from within.
I’m coming now
I’m coming to reward them.
First we take Manhattan,
then we take Berlin.

First we took a Department, then we take a Faculty. Ladies and gentlemen, you can be an active audience. Let’s ‘take Berlin’.
References

The media scholar could finally show that among media Conservative papers liked Conservatives best whereas Leftist views would more often turn up in rags to the Left. This he supported with figures and tables and elegant curves.

What we’d thought all along, ‘though no more than a hunch, has therewith been elevated to a matter of fact.

Three decades ago my Swedish colleagues, Hadenius and Weibull, opened their prominent book on press, radio and television by presenting the above quoted quotation from Dagens Nyheter. It is hardly flattering that reactions from our skeptical audience indicate how media researchers primarily produce commonplaces. But let’s face it: We usually inform the public about subject matters that informed citizens already believe they know very well in advance.

The mockers then (and their many followers) are perfectly right in saying that media and communication research rarely creates revolutions in terms of breathtaking sensations. But I strongly believe that Nordic media research – trivial as it may be – has been cutting edges of prejudice and ignorance in spite of the fact that many researchers live in splendid isolation and that specific projects only marginally influence the bulk of folklore about media and society. Against all odds we must go on patiently explaining to the outside world that the run of the mill is the rule of the game. Sensational results are dubious and exceptional – in mass communications as in most areas of academic scholarship.

This ongoing battle against prejudice is fought in the trenches of tedious “bread and butter research”. Like journalists, of course, most researchers fancy the original in tireless quest for the scoop, that collection of data so great and wild, you never have to apply for another research grant. No Nordic media researcher lives a full academic lifetime on one such spectacular cut. And that’s fine: A few celebrities do not constitute the true front line forces fighting ignorance.
“All quiet”, consequently, is indeed an expectable and respectable battle-cry, neither an alarming sign of crisis, nor a symptom of lacking brainpower among our rank and file. It is true, no doubt, that much research in this area lacks originality and depth, reproducing me-too designs rather than producing new angles and insights. In our line of work this is the price to be paid for normal science in the Kuhnian sense: After all, breakthroughs and new paradigms are not to be expected at a regular basis, according to sociologists of knowledge. By reviewing current (Carlsson 1998) and classical (Berg et al. 1977) contributions, however, three aspects of Nordic efforts in this field may be identified as particularly important when approached from a cutting edge point of view:

First of all, Nordic media research has contributed original insights by transforming and translating European ideas to the dominant English speaking (and American thinking) world of the mass media. Our mediating activities do not merely involve our local and national fonds of knowledge, but also include informed reading of the intellectually more profound contributions from French and German thought. The multilingual qualifications of Nordic academics have proven to be a very valuable asset when we set out to do front line services – be it in the capacity of commanding generals, liaison officers or simple privates.

Secondly, the Nordic research in mass communication has been strengthened by a notable tradition of cross border cooperation not only between different countries and languages, but also between the social sciences and the humanities. In contrast to specialized research tradition (particularly conspicuous in the USA) most Nordic departments of communication draw heavily on competing fields of scholarship combining methods, theories and skills from disciplines such as sociology, history, rhetoric, semiotic, ethnology, computer science etc.

The third accomplishment of Nordic research in mass communications has been gained through the continual competition between theoretical frames of reference. By cultivating an academic atmosphere of critical pluralism, e.g. keeping these biannual conferences in the glasnost spirit of NORDICOM, only a minority has become casualties of simple empiricism or barren dogmatism. The fierce fighting on the theoretical barricades of the 1970s did not result in few winners and many losers, but rather in a peaceful co-existence inspiring most Nordic mass media researches to be well read in competing schools of theory. This, in turn, has inspired many of us to combine apparently incompatible frames of reference thereby bridging unnecessary conflicts caused by academic vanity and petty rivalry.

Why this is so, and how this has been done, may be presented in terms of two basic schisms of international research: the dichotomies of the individual versus the collective, agency versus structure. The very center of attention has been massmediated texts in social context. Calling attention to such basics of our trade may illustrate the genealogy of Nordic mass communication research from the 1960s up to the coming end of the millennium.

The frontier of the 1960s may be characterized as attempts to comprehend mass media as agencies diffusing collective, textual action. In the 1970s the concept of agency was played down regarding mass communication as collective action in a structural framework. Context was everything – individual texts mere illustrations of structural trends. Ideology (and critique of same) were the names of the game. In the 1980s the structural focus was gradually moved from the collective to the individual level. Specific texts were primarily regarded as products of individual efforts (tabloid versus serious media, press versus television etc) framed by structural restraints, e.g. semiotics and political correctness. Discourse and hegemony became catchwords of the time.
In the 1990s we have experienced a move from structural frameworks towards new concepts of agency – particularly stressing the active part played by the individual user of mass mediated texts: Reception studies and focus on intertextuality made headlines in research journals. The construction of meaning is primarily seen as a negotiated translations and open question rather than a preconditioned content framed in structural context.

I could list a considerable number of learned colleagues who have been fighting battles along these lines. For every one mentioned, however, I would easily risk forgetting a dozen others. So instead of producing an incomplete lists of names and research projects, I have chosen one single illuminating example to illustrate how the three fundamental points of high quality research may inform further study in the future. The example chosen is The Swedish research programme The Roles of Journalism and the subsequent project Media Societies around the Baltic Sea initiated by sociologist Jan Ekecrantz and historian Tom Olsson.

The fundamental premise of these projects has been that mass communication in general (and journalism in particular) constitutes society, not only in terms of reinforcing social power relations, but more basically by editing institutional relationships, e.g. time and space in the public sphere of the welfare state. These social concepts are researched with reference to an empirical material consisting of national texts in regional and historical contexts. By combining elements from social science and the humanities, quantitative and qualitative methods, the authors wrestle with the crucial problems of rationality and modernity: How is society edited by mass media in different historical situations? How are forms and contents structured by individual and collective action?

By approaching journalism as texts in context Ekecrantz and his coworkers research mass communication as institutional practice. The crucial point, well taken, is that mass mediated texts must be regarded as individual as well as collective actions, instrumental to the construction and maintenance of the welfare state – in Sweden called “Folkhemmet” (the home of the people). On the other hand society and its citizens cannot be comprehended as social agents unless we regard “media society” as a contextual structure enveloping texts in the making.

It must be noted that this approach should not be mistakenly equaled to the textual fetishism of so called post-modernism. Ekecrantz and Olsson are neither social constructivists nor historical determinists. We may call them post-structuralists in the sense that they have moved through and beyond the structural and historicist front lines of media research of the 1970s and 1980s. The approach chosen may be regarded as an intelligent way of saving the qualities of critical theory without prescribing to a dogmatic ideology critique in order to take a stand outside the ongoing practice of text production.
What Ekecrantz and his co-workers do in theory and practice is to study texts not only because texts are where structured actions of modern society can be explicitly traced and intelligently criticized, but also because texts not only do things with one another: Society do things with texts, and texts do things to society. The result is cross-disciplinary strategies informing basic concepts of mass communication research:

As components of social acts, the texts help shape their own conditions – an “iron cage” of institutional truths. It is up to critical discourse analysis to reinstall the journalistic texts in their social context, and also to demonstrate how these contexts themselves are constituted in social interaction and gradually turned into institutions driven by a logic of their own. (Ekecrantz 1997:410)

One may characterize this line of research as genealogical – not only because genre-bound communication is in focus, but more fundamentally because the research objects are primarily studying subject matters taken for granted by mass and media. By studying such commonplaces in their making, Ekecrantz and his associates show us how things have been (and may again be) different from the rationality of today. Editing mass mediated texts is regarded as a continuous process of discursive translations – neither a linear diffusion of a given of material, nor the result of ideological determinism.

Regarding texts in contexts in this fashion produces important insights informing a number of concepts taken for granted in mass communication research. Ekecrantz and his coworkers have primarily perused this line of thinking in terms of the global joker “media society” used frequently by journalist as well as researchers, to describe a conglomerate of conflicting trends of late modernity.

From a text-in-context perspective “media society” should not merely be regarded as technologies and infrastructure. It must be regarded as an institutional order consisting not only of polity based on individual agencies in the organizational sense, but also as an integrated part of a cultural system structured and structuring the rationality and dramaturgy of media outputs. Continuous battles over rationality are performed discursively and cannot be singularly accredited to technological change or acts of specific institutions. On the other hand there is no omnipotent class structure in play that can be specifically identified as “the invisible hand” of economic, political, or cultural forces.

More specifically Ekecrantz and Olsson have convincingly demonstrated this development by analyses of text produced in the Swedish press 1925-1987. They now propose to go on by researching the concept of “media society” by comparing the changes in Nordic welfare states with transitions of Eastern European countries around the Baltic sea in the years succeeding the fall of the Berlin wall. It is claimed that the social transformations in the aftermath of 1989 call for reassessment of central premises of social theory and media research.

Before I comment on one such reassessment let me briefly return to the quote from Dagens Nyheter: After the fall of the Berlin wall what seemed to be a banality in the 1970s is no longer such a common place: Left and Right are no longer simple matters of fact – neither in the mass media nor in society writ large. What was once taken for granted and regarded as a commonplace has turned into an intricate point of textual action ripe for front research in order to show how ideological concepts become taken for granted, and how the taken for granted may lose this taken for grantedness again.

This – in my opinion – is exactly where the vital research front of Nordic mass communication research is situated right now: We must practice conceptual hygiene reassessing basic concepts taken for granted in our specific field of study. I only have
time and space to point to one such reassessment, and have chosen the social construction of “the media citizen” – the very nucleus of communication research in the years to come. In doing so, I move beyond the frontier homesteaded by Ekcrantz and his coworkers, but I do so in line with the mind maps they have so convincingly produced.

If we put the concept “media citizen of the media society” into the clinical bench of agency-structure, individual-collective, I will argue that the front line in Nordic media research has moved several times over the last decades. In the 1960s the audience was primarily studied as “mass” – a passive and lonely crowd. In the 1970s many of us changed focus from mass to “class”, but in the 1980s and the decline of neo-marxism “class” became individual “users”. Finally, the trend of the 1990s have been to regard the public of segmented users as independent “choosers”, i.e. turning the powerless members of the lonely crowd into all powerful zappers of marked driven media. During these front line maneuvers what happened to the central concept of “citizen” in the classical sense of liberal democracy and critical theory of the public sphere once so popular as frame of reference for Nordic mass communication research?

Today, at the threshold of the new millennium, research based puns are made upon the word “citizen”, e.g. netizen (for world wide web users) and euphemism for “reflexive man” – a theoretically ill defined inhibitor of the so called “global village”. In spite of the impressive efforts by communication research we tend to forget that “citizen” is fundamentally a concept related to local community and national space. While citizenship and civil society become increasingly artificial and virtual in mass mediated texts, we tend to forget the genealogical context reminding us that to be a citizen requires naturalization and recognition by an authority. This affiliation of citizens to society, however, is usually taken for granted, rather than regarded as an integrated part of public service in the BBC-sense of the word: Citizenship should be regarded as an ongoing interpellation of individuals involved in public discourse – placing mass media center stage in the conflicting tendencies of the contemporary modernity.

I shall conclude my sightseeing at the cutting edge of media research by asking for more efforts of this kind aiming at better understanding of “the media citizen” as the key to better knowledge on the community of fragmented audiences, public service media, and changes in the functions of the public sphere. Other taken for granted concept should in a similar fashion be critically cut on the edge of media research, e.g. “public service” and “market-driven journalism”, “the global”, “the national”, and “the local”, i.e. implicit and taken for granted contexts of current research in media and mass communication.
This important task of basic research is ignored by most of our learned colleagues around the world preoccupied with ever more specialized detail studies. Hopefully, scholars of the Nordic countries shall continue to do tedious conceptual hygiene along these lines crossing borders in terms of nationality, discipline, and frame of reference. In other words, let’s go back to the trenches – and may your grand theory be with you!

Note

References
The Future of Nordic Media and Communication Studies
The End of Splendid Isolation?

TERHI RANTANEN

My first reaction, after accepting the invitation to attend the panel on the future of Nordic media and communication studies in Kungälv, was sheer panic: how could I possibly present Finland there? Although I am a Finn and have been a member of the Finnish community of media and communication researchers for two decades, I have done little research on Finnish national media, but on foreign media instead, including post-communist countries. Even further, I am about to become an expatriot who has voluntarily decided to become the Other by not living in her home country, but in the UK instead.

My second reaction was a little less panic, because I thought that this in-between status I am now living would actually give me an opportunity to look at the situation not only as an insider but as an outsider as well. What is happening in Finnish media and communication research bears a great resemblance to that in the UK. We are talking here not only about the globalization of media, but about the globalization of media and communication research.

There are some rewards in becoming global, but also losses. One of them is that I have already personally lost one of the languages of my home country that would enabled me to present my paper in a Scandinavian language – once considered the most important asset in Nordic co-operation. Instead, I am using English, the language I was taught at school, but which did not have much presence in my country before the arrival of mass media and culture. But this is the language I increasingly use with my “new” Nordic colleagues who do not speak Scandinavian languages as their first or second language. My new colleagues are, of course, from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and I am very much for including their countries under the appellation “Nordic”.

As media and communication scholars, we often refer to the role of the media in globalization, but we seem to forget that media and communications scholarship and its scholars are also a part of it. Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, we are agents of globalization. Curiously when Appadurai (1990, 297) talks about “ethnoscape, the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live”, he mentions tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers and other moving groups, but not scholars. We are not a significant group, but do our part by filling up economy class when
there is a conference somewhere in the world. And there always are: international and regional conferences around the world in which media and communication scholars, like other professional travellers, meet each other. We also do research and live in other countries for shorter or longer periods of time, although often but not always do come back to our home countries.

But we contribute to ideoscapes as well. We read books in foreign languages, absorb ideas and use them in our own countries. Media and communication studies, partly because it is so young, is very much influenced first by the US and then by the UK. In many ways, it has been a one-way street in which most of it has been imported without much reciprocity. I shall shortly outline the development of media and communication studies and give examples from Finland, which I know best; I believe that these developments also have relevance to the situation in other Nordic countries.

Four Periods of Finnish Media and Communication Studies

In my earlier work (Rantanen 1997, 127) I have divided the development of Finnish media and communication studies into four different periods according to the main sources of influence. They are: (1) The German influenced journalism studies from the 1920s until 1950s; (2) The US influenced communication studies from the 1960s until 1970s; (3) The Eastern European influenced marxist wave in the 1970s; and (4) The Anglo-American influenced media and communication studies from the 1980s onwards. I shall shortly describe each of these periods and the ethno- and ideoscapes in them.

As we all well know, communication studies as a discipline was founded in the US after World War II. Before that time, for example, journalism was taught outside universities in Finland, since 1925 at medborgarehögskola (kansalaiskorkeakoulu). Journalism studies consisted mainly of professional training and of the history of the press and was very much influenced by German Zeitungswissenschaft and such scholars as Groth, Löbl, Dofivat and Diez, to mention a couple of names. The period of the German influence lasted until the early 1960s when US communication research, invented almost twenty years earlier, was imported to Finland.

In 1963 a paradigm shift took place when a newly appointed professor, Raimo Vehmas, declared that the German Zeitungswissenschaft was old-fashioned and unfruitful, and wanted to change it into communication studies to follow the example of Wilbur Schramm. Importing US communication research to Finland was greatly assisted by Fulbright and other scholarships that enabled researchers from different fields to get acquainted with communication studies in the US. Osmo Wiio, Kaarle Nordenstreng and Ulla Majja Kivikuru all went to the US to learn more about communication research there. They all played a part in the ethno- and ideoscapes of Finnish mass communication research.

The US period lasted until the 1970s when it was partly taken over by the Marxist wave. In Finland, in contrast to many Western European countries, this was mainly imported from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Marxism was a counterreaction to the mainstream communication research made in the US, but it simultaneously relied heavily on US scholars such as Herbert Schiller. This time very few scholars actually went to Communist countries to study, but books by Lenin and Kuusinen appeared in the study requirements of Helsinki and Tampere universities.

Again, this wave broke when British cultural studies landed in Finland in the early 1980s. A Finnish researcher, Leena Paldan, was the first Finnish media scholar who went to the UK instead of the US in the early 1980s. Finnish media scholars have in-
creasingly turned to seek inspiration in the UK not only in cultural studies, but in media studies as well. Here we can refer to the influence from the centres of communication studies in Leicester and Westminster, from feminist media studies, as well as the Glasgow media group, Giddens, Fairclough, Tomlinson etc.

**Research Assessment Exercise. New Standards for Research?**

This is not the full story of the import of ideas. It seems to me that at least the University of Helsinki is also going to absorb the academic standards found in the UK. Research Assessment Exercise, RAE, that dominates the life of British universities has now been introduced to the University of Helsinki for the first time. Research is being evaluated and compared. Curiously, this happens at the same time when it is questioned in the UK whether the Research Assessment Exercise is the most efficient way to create a dynamic, innovation-oriented research culture. (Thompson 1999).

According to the guidelines for evaluation at the University of Helsinki (Research Assessment Exercise 1999), the highest rate (7) is given when “the majority of the submitted work are at a high international level and virtually all others at a good international level”, while the lowest rate (1) is given when “none, or virtually none, of the submitted works are at a fair international level”. A high international level means “work which is apt to arouse serious interest within international academic communities and which in principle could, if offered, be published by the leading international publishers or in the leading international journals with the most rigorous editorial standard”. A fair international level means “work which is of possible relevance for international academic communities and which has been published abroad or by well-known national publishers or in well-known national journals”. The best departments, with the most publications either published by prestigious publishers or journals, win “seven stars”, and more research money and fame until the next RAE.

What are these well-known journals? They are, of course, journals that use a referee system. The journals that do so in media and communications studies are mainly international journals, either European or American such as the European Journal of Communication, Media Culture & Society, the Journal of Communication and Critical Studies in Mass Communications Research. With the introduction of RAE it is not enough to publish in your national language in your own country, but it has become more and more important to publish in English elsewhere. Farrell Corcoran, an Irish media scholar and former president of the public broadcaster RTE, raised the question of the functions and disfunctions of introducing RAE into non-British countries at the IACMR panel on the future of European communication and media research in Leipzig in July 1999. He asked whether it is absolutely important to publish in international journals. If this is the case, what happens to our self-confidence in languages? All of us in the audience who had received the letters “thanking for considering one of these journals an outlet for your scholarship and regretting the outcome of the review process”, remained silent. It was our personal failure, and language did not play any role. Media and communication research seems to have accepted the market economy and competition almost unanimously.

We are not yet as far as in the UK, but on the basis of previous development we soon will be. Paula Saukko (1999, 71), a Finnish media and communication scholar, recently wrote about her experience when she was trying to get information about an academic job in the UK. The question of “What’s your four” (meaning the four publications she needed to present for the next RAE) was asked before she could even start a telephone
conversation inquiring about a new job. Obviously, some foreign academics like Saukko (who is now a lecturer in the Centre for Mass Communications Research at Leicester University) have been successful: foreign academics employed by British universities have doubled to 11,314 between 1994 and 1997. According to a recent study, competitive exercises such as the Research Assessment Exercise, may also encourage universities to employ staff from abroad. The new vacancies are partly a result of hundreds of British scholars leaving the UK because of the disastrous academic policy of the Thatcher government, a government that also introduced RAE (‘Looking for a slice of the American pie,’ 1999; Swain 1999). Will this be the future in the Nordic countries as well?

The End of Splendid Isolation?

So here we are, after almost four decades of mainly absorbing Anglo-American communication, media and cultural studies. It seems to me that we have not only taken theories, concepts and research methods, but have even adopted the standards of academic life from abroad. There are several tendencies that are already visible in Nordic media and communication research. They are contradictory by nature, but so is globalization.

First, there is considerable influence from Anglo-American media and communication studies. It has mainly taken place by borrowing “research tools” and using them on national data. It has also meant that English has become an obligatory second language for scholars in our field: a media and communication scholar without a knowledge of English is as impossible as a computer without a screen. Recently, there have also been signs that the standards for research have been adopted from the UK. This does not only concern media and communication studies, but academia in general.

Second, there is also considerable exchange of ideas inside Nordic media and communication studies through shared language, culture and traditions that has lasted much longer than Anglo-American influence, and still has some traits of early German influence. Increasingly, it is in competition with Anglo-American media and communication studies. Also, the enlargement of the Nordic community to include the Baltic countries and European Russia brings inevitable, and I would say, welcome changes into it: it has to redefine itself and rethink the questions of shared language, culture and traditions. The former Other is now one of us. And, as Epp Lauk and Tom Möring both observed in Kungälv, the opening up does not only mean of including the Other, but learning from the Other as well. We who have been so eager to adopt Anglo-American media and communication research now face a new challenge: to learn from the countries that were once isolated by the Iron Curtain, that prevented us from seeing what was behind it. As Ricoeur (1965, 278), quoted by Morley and Robins (1995, 25) puts it:

When we discover that there are several cultures, instead of just one, and consequently, at the time we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be illusory or real, we are threatened...[by] our own discovery. Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just Others, that we ourselves are an ‘other’ among Others.

Third, there are some signs that Nordic media and communications scholars do not only leave their home countries for a short study leave, but the long period of Anglo-American influence has actually provided them with skills that make it possible to compete in job markets outside their home countries. The EU, of course, makes working in Europe much easier than before. On the other hand, non-Nordic scholars are like wise now able
to seek jobs in the Nordic countries. This is the occasion in which the Research Assessment Exercise can actually bring a change with its standardized requirements. As Saukko (1999, 70) writes about the UK: “Unlike in Finland, internal and national prearrangements can be badly disturbed when, for example, an Australian black horse [with her/his four or even more prestigious publications] appears in the job interview.” In a country like Finland, in which departments of media and communication studies mainly hire their own people, the RAE could have a positive outcome.

Fourth, traditionally Nordic scholars did research on their own countries, but they cannot monopolize them anymore. Researchers outside the “Norden” will now have a chance to become experts on its mass media. Recently, for example, Elena Vartanova, a Russian media and communication scholar from the Faculty of Journalism at Moscow University, has published two books on Nordic media (Vartanova 1997, 1999). She describes the current phase of the Nordic mass media system, when the Nordic media need to adjust to global developments, as “the end of splendid isolation” (Vartanova 1997, 183).

If Nordic media and communication research ever experienced a period of splendid isolation, then it is definitely coming to an end. This is the globalization of media and communication research in practice. What are the advantages and what are the disadvantages? And how well are we prepared for it? As agents of globalization it is up to us to think about these issues.

References
I believe that cognitive psychology provides one of the main sources of insight for explaining culture,” writes anthropologist Dan Sperber (1996:3). “A culture is best conceived as a very large and heterogeneous collection of models or what psychologists sometimes call schema,” writes fellow anthropologist, Bradd Shore (1996:44). Nor are Sperber and Shore the only among anthropologists to have adopted cognitive perspectives in their analyses of and theories about people and culture and who have taken cognitive theories, ideas and concepts as their starting point. The ideas may be about the nature of society and everyday life, about religious beliefs, norms, myths and symbols.

Cognitive perspectives have influenced other disciplines, as well. Psychology, of course – where the perspectives originate – but also Education, Linguistics and Political Science, where they have been fruitfully applied in analyses of decision-making and policy formation (Stern 1999; Sundelius, in press).

Some writers speak of a “cognitive revolution”, referring to the fact that cognitive theories have taken the place of behaviouristic stimulus-response models within Psychology, but also that cognitive theories have influenced other disciplines, as well. Media research, however, has been influenced very little as yet. Perhaps because Psychology connotes – to an unwarranted extent, I would say – individualism, mentalism, psychologism. None of these things conform to the orthodoxy of the day, which tends to emphasize the collective, the social, the cultural, the contextual and situational.

There are, however, signs of a newly awakened interest in cognitive perspectives, even in our field and perhaps not least in the Nordic research community. Consider, for example the Nordicom anthology, Cultural Cognition: New Perspectives in Audience Theory (Höijer & Werner, eds. 1998) which presents articles that discuss media effects in relation to adults (Hagen, Höijer, Waldahl), youth (Erstad) and children (Rydin, Seip Tønnessen). Other Nordic media researchers, too, have argued for cognitive perspectives – for example, within empirical audience research (Findahl 1977) and the branch of film theory that focuses on viewers’ interpretations of film (Grodal 1997). Cognitive perspectives have been called for in other contexts, as well, without having been developed to any significant extent. According to Langer (1999), the need is recognized in
German media and communication theory, as well. All these signs may be taken as an indication that a growing number of researchers perceive a need of a cognitive paradigm.

Swedish public opinion research presents yet another example. In a recent article, Strömbäck (1999) presents new data on public mistrust of politicians and reviews earlier research on the subject. In study after study, traditional demographic variables like sex, age, education have proven to have very limited explanatory value, which leads Strömbäck to inquire after the “cognitive roots of [popular] mistrust... Cognitive variables have considerably greater explanatory value than demographic, economic and media-related ones” (40-41), he concludes. Now, I am somewhat at odds with Strömbäck’s definition of cognitive variables as more or less congenital cognitive structures (page 23), and I find his attempts to measure these variables empirically in the form of interest or active disinterest in politics misleading. But his basic idea, that we need to pay more attention to the cognitive level, is important, I think.

What kind of cognitive perspective do we media scholars need? We have to ask, because there is no one cognitive theory or theoretician whom we can refer to, like a Bourdieu or a Habermas. Cognitive theory is a broad and varied field that offers a menu of many different theories to choose from. It is easy to find books entitled “Cognitive Theory”, but that is no guarantee that the theories in it will lend themselves to the study of mass communication, nor even that the book offers a decent account of the spectrum of theories.

Some cognitive theories really are too individualistic, too a-social and a-cultural. Take, for example, the research on artificial intelligence, where computers are used to simulate human thought, or neurophysiological brain research. The terms, “cognitive science” and “cognitive neuropsychology” often signal this kind of study. Within the so-called “information processing paradigm” researchers study human attention, memory and problem-solving in psychological laboratories. Many have – with good reason – questioned the validity of such studies.

The work being done in these areas is not totally irrelevant to our areas of interest, but their focus on general cognitive processes and their neglect of cultural content is problematic. Other social- and cultural-cognitive theories are more relevant for those of us who are interested in the overall processes of cultural creation of meaning, in which mass media play a part. I will give a couple of examples of the kind of theories I have in mind, but first, I should like to say a few words about what “cognition” and “cognitive perspectives” are, and why we should take them into account.

“*The Mind*” – Verbal, Visual and Emotional

“The Cognitive Revolution” – was intended to bring “mind” back into the human sciences after a long cold winter of objectivism,” psychologist Jerome Bruner writes (1990:1). Cognition is about the workings of the mind, that inner mental plane where our thoughts, ideas, concepts and opinions, our inner metaphors, fantasies and dreams, interpretations and perceptions are generated. It represents our memories, our outlook, our perspectives, our conceptions of self, others and the world around us – in short, everything in the realm of human experience and thinking. It is a realm that is at once verbal, visual and bodily. Unlike the purely discourse theoretical perspectives that focus on verbal expression, cognitive perspectives include visual communication, as well (cf., Eysenck & Keane 1995, inter alia).
At times, there has been a tendency to make a distinction between cognitions and emotions, whereby cognition belongs to a system of rational concepts, whereas emotions are regarded as irrational, physiological conditions. One reason for this may be that computer simulations of the human mind have predominated from time to time – and computers don’t have feelings. Today, however, most psychologists consider cognition and emotion as belonging together (see, for example, Power & Dalgleish 1997). Every conception has an emotional component – a memory, association, interpretation or cognition that may be irrational; and some emotions can be extremely rational. Our feelings help us recognize what is important, give us good judgement. Research on emergencies and catastrophes show, for example, that people generally react and behave adequately, despite acute anxiety and fear: they seek out relevant information (via the media, for example) and follow recommendations as to what they should do (Nohrstedt & Nordlund 1993).

It is possible to distinguish between cognitive and emotional dimensions analytically, but in practice they are two sides of the same coin, and if our aim is to be able to say something about everyday interpretations and reactions, we need to include feelings in our cognitive interpretation perspective. They also form a unit in the sense that feelings are directed and have cognitive content. Pleasure and pain arise in situations, and if we are asked to think of a feeling like “happiness”, we think of situations or things that elicit that feeling. Asked to think about pain, we think of other situations entirely.

**Outer and Inner - The Two Faces of Experience**

Now, why should we be interested in mental processes? Isn’t it enough to see the creation of meaning as the result of our social and cultural experiences, of the context surrounding the creation of meaning and of conversations? I say, No, it’s not. I see several reasons to pay attention to cognitive perspectives – and, for that matter, even other psychological perspectives – the psychodynamic, for example.

All human experience has two sides: an outer, facing our social and cultural life and activities, and an inner, facing in toward our mental and psychic life. The outer and the inner are closely related, of course, but they cannot be reduced to one and the same. Our mental activity not only reflects social reality, it also interprets and reconstructs it. Cognitive theory enables us to grasp these interpretive and reconstructive processes, to understand how external experience is converted into internal perceptions and ideas, which in turn form frames of reference for future interpretations and so on, in an unending process.

Our behaviour is also determined to a high degree by cognitively internalized patterns of behaviour and how we interpret the world around us – situations, events, the people. Consider, for example, the recent Swedish elections to the European Parliament. That so few people bothered to vote – only 38 per cent of those eligible – is not just because of laziness or indifference; it is also a question of the interpretation and meaning people assign to the European Union and to the MEPs, the Members of the European Parliament – judgements which in this case are made primarily on the basis of media reports.

If we only consider people’s material, social and cultural circumstances, our efforts to understand meaning creation will tend to end up in a kind of social or technological determinism. By recognizing how outer experiences act via inner, cognitive processes we create a dynamic space in and around the individual. This may be particularly important in our postmodern era, when collective patterns of life are breaking down and
identities are becoming more variable and unpredictable. To take another example, this one having to with opinion formation: Young people’s political views are no longer determined by their parents’ views, and opinions are no longer as stable over time as they used to be. Election analysts note that “opinion formation takes place less and less within a collective frame, where socio-economic class, residence, leisure, etc., etc., reinforce one another as determinants” (Karvonen 1999:16).

A complex world, where we meet an ever greater variety of cultural expressions, where the flows of information are overwhelming and experiential discourses numerous, means a greater potential for variation in our interpretations. In order to understand what interpretations are being made, we need more psychological insight into how meanings are created.

Observing how external experience acts via inner cognitive processes, we also create space for change and development. If the individual is no more than a mirror of his or her external circumstances, then what we have is closed, constant systems which can only reproduce themselves, in which individuals lack all manner of intentionality and creativity. Who will there be to think new thoughts, to come up with new ideas?

This is not to say that I argue for replacing social and cultural explanations of meaning creation with psychological ones. Human beings and the cultures they create are products of both outer and inner forces, of historical, social and psychological circumstance. It is the interplay of these circumstances that is important. Culture forms our consciousness, but we form our culture and its consciousness. The reciprocity is important; nonetheless, psychological perspectives have remained underdeveloped in terms of theory in a good share of contemporary media research.

In this connection it might be interesting to look back at early media research, which was more in touch with the psychological aspects. For example, if we go back to Walter Lippmann’s classical Public Opinion from 1922, we find that Lippmann has entitled the introductory chapter, “The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads”. His proposition is that we human beings form impressions of reality and that these images in our heads affect our behaviour. The prime task of the opinion researcher, Lippmann (1922/1950) writes, is to observe “the triangular relationship between the scene of action, the human picture of the scene, and the human response to that picture working itself out upon the scene of action” (16f). Psychological theory came to play a central role in audience-oriented media research, but in time, the focus of attention came to rest on human needs rather than cognitive aspects – “the pictures in our heads”.

**Cultural Studies**

Unlike early media research, the field of inquiry known as cultural studies – surprisingly – has felt no need of psychological theory when dealing with the phenomenon of meaning creation. Yet Stuart Hall defines “ideology” in these words:

> By ideology I mean the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works (Hall 1986:29).

But, although Hall speaks of “mental frameworks”, he does not infer from that, that we need a theory of ‘the mind’. Indeed, the cultural studies tradition has made no efforts whatsoever to study mental frameworks. One who has made such an effort is discourse

Within the cultural studies tradition, however, interest in interpretation has been superseded by a focus on the practices and routines of everyday life, particularly collective ones such as those that take place within the family circle. Under the influence of neo-behaviouristic social constructivism, the question of meaning creation has been reduced to conversations about media texts, in which situational variables are decisive for the content of the conversation. Of course it can be very interesting to listen to and analyze what people have to say about the media, but is it reasonable to presume that it is the only, or even the most important site of meaning creation?

There is quite a lot of evidence to the contrary. Empirical findings show, for example, differences in TV-related talk, both between different families and between men and women. Upper middle-class families say that they seldom discuss TV programmes (Andersson & Jansson 1998), and other studies reveal significant individual differences between families (Holter 1998). The men in Morley’s (1986) frequently cited study of “family television” say they want quiet when they watch television and that, sports excepted, they seldom talk about things they have seen on television with workmates or friends. A British observation study found very little talking while viewing television (Gunter et al. 1997), and we note other indications that collective patterns are growing weaker. A growing share of households are ‘parties of one’; more and more households own several television sets so that each member is free to watch the programmes of his or her choice; the proliferation of television channels and radio stations imply that fewer people have watched the same programme.

Most likely, only a very small share of all the media texts that people partake of are ever discussed, i.e., verbalized in conversations. Although it is interesting to study what elements people do ‘pick out’ and talk about, most mediated experience is processed and converted into what Michael Polanyi (1976) calls tacit knowledge. We carry this knowledge with us, and it forms the frames of reference – sometimes stereotyped, sometimes more dynamic – we use to interpret the real and symbolic world around us.

**Cognitive Theories on Different Levels**

Cognitive theory treats many different levels of mental activity, ranging from lower neurophysiological levels (e.g., the identification of simple sounds and visual sensations) to levels of categorization and conceptualization, and further, to even more holistic levels that have to do with our comprehension of complex cultural phenomena like social institutions and various discourses. It is, I think, these more complex cultural levels that probably most interest us as students of mass media.

Some theorists speak of our inner “pictures” of cultural phenomena as mental models (Johndon-Laird 1983; Shore 1996); others speak of mental schemas, or social schemas when wishing to stress their social origin (Cf. Fiske & Taylor 1991, inter alia). There are those who rather speak of mental or social representations (Moscovici 1984) or frames (Minsky 1975) or scripts (Schank & Abelson 1977). We might also talk about cognitions, categories/structures of thought or inner discourses (Harré & Gillett 1994).

Let me mention a few psychologists whose work I find particularly interesting. Jerome Bruner (1986; 1990) posits that human beings cognitively structure their everyday experience by means of narratives, stories. We create inner stories about ourselves, others, about the world, and we use a narrative form to comprehend the world around us. An interesting aspect of the narrative form that Bruner discusses is its spe-
cialized capacity to form links between exceptional and ordinary phenomena. Its base is our cultural conventions or norms – all the repetitive things that conform to norms and are generally accepted – but it helps us grasp and find meaning in unusual phenomena, in breaks with convention, as well. One of our main motives for sharing something with someone else is that it is something unusual, and the same applies in the media’s news values and fictional narrative.

“My story defines who I am,” writes Dan McAdams (1993:5). He has interviewed people about their lives and how they see themselves and has made a detailed analysis of the material. He, too, speaks of “the narrating mind” – in connection with how we construct our identities as inner stories about ourselves. Our identities can comprise several stories, sometimes even quite contradictory ones. I think there is a need for McAdams’ concept of identity as a counterweight to those who only consider outer, social factors as components in the construction of identity. Theorists like Goffman (1959/1990), for example, who sees human beings as mainly forming their identity through playing various (outer) social roles. On this point Giddens (1991:53) is more discriminating when he points out that one’s identity “includes the cognitive component of personhood”.

To return to Jerome Bruner: He also posits a reasoning pattern of thought, which he sometimes refers to as “argumentative” and other times as “paradigmatic”. It is a more logical, conceptual kind of thinking, where argumentation and factual propositions are central. We learn this later in life; school and education are a major influence.

As students of the media it can be interesting to ask ourselves, first, what stories about our cultures, societies and our own identities do we construct with the help of mass media, and secondly, what lines of reasoning do we consider important and absorb in various forms into our conceptual universe.

Serge Moscovici (1984; 1988) is a French psychologist who uses the term “social representations” for the kinds of thoughts and conceptions that people in given social groups share, a kind of common sense conceptions about society and ‘the way things are’. This sounds like Durkheim’s collective representations, but Moscovici stresses that his ‘social representations’ are more dynamic and flexible; they develop and change in various ways. Old conceptions fade away and new ones arise. This takes place via two kinds of cognitive processes: “anchoring” and “objectification”. ‘Anchoring’ is when we classify and identify new phenomena by comparing them with things we already know or are familiar with: Is it like or different? If it is fairly similar we add the phenomenon to our previous conceptions; if it is different we will have to introduce a new one. Objectification means that we take something that is abstract and difficult to grasp and turn it into something more concrete and easy to understand. Moscovici has studied how psychoanalytical concepts have become part of people’s everyday thinking and acquired a more concrete meaning. “He’s depressed,” we may say about someone who doesn’t seem to take pleasure in anything. This is the kind of cognitive simplification ‘objectification’ refers to. Metaphors are another way to simplify, a kind of mental shorthand that helps us to comprehend a complex social phenomenon.

Moscovici’s theory of social representations has been used in a number of studies of how expert knowledge is converted into everyday common sense. (For an overview see Augoustinos & Walker 1995, Chapter 7). The media play an important part in these processes, and it can be interesting to examine the relationship between expert knowledge and common sense in terms of three ‘cognitive’ links: the experts’ conception of his or her area of competence, journalists’ idea of the area and, of course, the journalis-
tic products that people partake of. The third link is the audience’s interpretations and ideas. Such a study would be a kind of diffusion study that would explore the depths of the respective worlds of ideas.

There are many more cognitive theories that might be of interest to us as media researchers and that have received some attention. We have, for example, the Vygotsky-inspired school that sees consciousness in a socio-cultural developmental perspective (Cole 1996; Wertsch 1991). Theories of attribution, which deal with how we assign causes to events and social phenomena, is another interesting body of theory (cf. Augoutinos & Walker 1995, Chapter 4.)

**Freedom of Thought**

The cultural studies tradition abandoned decoding or interpretive theory when audience reception turned out to be too complex to be explained by demographic and sociological variables, and researchers in that tradition have put increasingly heavy emphasis on situational contexts in their efforts to explain the interaction between media and audiences. Everyday life has become equivalent to routine practices, with consciousness left out of the picture. There is an undeniably behaviourist element in this; the difficult concept of ‘the mind’ has once again been rendered invisible.

What counts is who has his hands on the remote control and what people say to each other in dialogues and conversations. Not to discount verbal interaction in relation to television programmes, but our inner world of thoughts and reflections is so much more.

Our inner world, too, is a product of our culture in the sense that even our fantasies are based on and nourished by our culture. But the degree of freedom that prevails in our inner world is much greater. Our thinking is not as easily steered by rules and cultural patterns as our behaviour is. Our thoughts need not be polite or friendly, nor even sensible; they can even be ‘forbidden’. Our thoughts can wander here and there whereas we behave and communicate much more in conformity with social and cultural convention.

In my view, a very important part of the media experience is its impact on our inner world, which can be far freer than our outer expression.

**The Links Between Outer and Inner**

When it comes to the media and their audiences I find it extremely valuable to consider the dynamic between the outer and the inner plane, between social reality and our inner thoughts and sensations. Valuable for even other reasons than the level of discursive conceptualization and interpretation. I should like to conclude with a few words about these linkages.

We all wrestle with the problem of being an individual in a culture, with the problem of reconciling what we experience as demands made by our environment with our inner thoughts, hopes and needs. Experiencing mass media can be a link between our outer and inner worlds, mediating the dilemma or bridging the gap between external demands and our fantasies and dreams.

In the spirit of Habermas media researchers have studied and written a lot about how the media provide a link between Öffentlichkeit, the public sphere, and the individual. Cultural studies have focused on the media as links between people in, for example, a family or social group.
All this is important, but we also need to take a closer look at a third link - that between the outer and inner worlds inside the individual, the link between social conformism and personal dreams. I suspect that people would be far less prepared to spend as much time as they do with the media if there were not something in the media that plucked on these inner strings.

Translation: Charly Hultén

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Notes on Text Production as a Field of Inquiry in Media Studies

Espen Ytreberg

‘Text production’ denotes an area of media research which studies the production process and the resulting texts with a degree of theoretical, methodological and empirical integration. Text production research has a somewhat equivocal status within the field of mass communication and media research. On the one hand, the number of studies that focus on text production and the text are rather few, at least relative to the number of studies that combine a focus on the text with studies of reception processes. At the same time, studies of text production and the text are central to the idea of integrating, of unifying media research as a discipline. Meanwhile, the very notion of ‘integration’ is contested. Even within the research community it is common to regard mass media research as a loosely knit assembly of disciplines around certain common objects of study. Nonetheless, it is a fact that the development of media studies as a discipline is intimately bound up with the idea of an integrated perspective on the processes of mass communication. To the extent media studies can claim to have a common foundation, the notion of a continuum that links production, text and reception is quite central. This notion also represents much of the basis for media research as an interdisciplinary project, as well. Like reception studies, studies of text production are the setting for meetings between humanities approaches to the text and social science analyses of contexts and institutions. The integration project has been institutionalized – not least in the Nordic countries – through the creation of numerous research centres and departments that apply interdisciplinary approaches to the media and mass communication.

In this article I shall discuss studies of text production in the light of these larger research agendas: the desire to see mass communication as a continuous process, and the idea of integrating studies of the text in the humanities tradition with social science approaches to context. Most of the examples I use here will be borrowed from studies of television. If there is a narrowness of focus in terms of the media considered, it will be counterbalanced by the inclusion of television studies undertaken in a broad range of disciplines and research traditions. For, whereas studies of text production have been few to date, they are scattered within several sub-disciplines. We find them in journalism research, in production studies, and in research on media institutions.
In many of the ‘classical’ television studies that focus both on production and text, the relationship between the two foci is somewhat loose. Herbert Gans’ Deciding What’s News (1980) and the very broad analysis of the series, Coronation Street (Dyer et al. 1981) are prime examples. Both works include analyses of both the production and the text stages. But in neither case do the authors relate concrete production processes directly to the specific texts they resulted in. Instead, they conduct interviews and make observations that characterize the production process in more general terms, whereas the analysis of texts, which is qualitative, stands off to its own. As a consequence, the findings presented in Deciding What’s News and Coronation Street fall into two parts. The two parts work to produce an overall account, and several methodologies are made to co-exist without too much conflict within an overall research design. The empirical results are presented in a highly fruitful and thought-provoking manner. But when all is said and done, the specific relationships between production and text are no more than lightly touched on in terms of theory, nor are they followed up on the methodological and empirical levels.

Thus, even though the studies are interdisciplinary, they also reflect a tendency toward specialization, a division of labour in media studies which has worked against the ambition to integrate. The persistence of a fundamental divide between the humanities and the social sciences is still apparent, not least in our methodology and analytical praxis. The structure of media organizations, the relationships between media organizations, and the production processes within the structures have become three distinctly separate areas of social scientific inquiry (with journalism as a composite fourth area). On the humanities side we find a whole spectrum of approaches to the text: genre studies, narrative analysis, semiotics, text linguistics, to name but a few. Methodological development and empirical research design largely take place within these sub-disciplines. Clearly, studies of text production will tend to be a loose mixture of two or more of these traditions. But if it is true that methodological and empirical approaches that integrate production and text are few, one may wonder why this is so.

The Critique of the Concept of Intentionality

One possible explanation may be that the theoretical implications of such an integration of production and text have not been discussed quite enough. Such a discussion will have to start from the critique of intentionality. The critique of individually oriented, elite-cultural notions of auteurism and intentionality features in a sizeable collection of works: Alvarado 1982, Bruun Andersen 1988, Murdock 1993, Newcomb/Alley 1983 inter alia. These authors argue convincingly that theories about the creation of television texts must be framed in the context of the cultural industries. That is to say, hierarchies, management and collective aspects of text production are of focal importance. But beyond the critique of intentionality, rather little theoretical work seems to have been done on the production phase in relation to broader processes of mass communication. That, at least, is the conclusion Manuel Alvarado came to in his review of the British literature – at a juncture, I might add, when most of the seminal British media research had been done. His judgment is harsh: “As far as theoretical work on film and television is concerned I would venture to suggest that nothing has been published on production” (Alvarado 1982:2, original emphasis). Among American studies of production one notes, if anything, a slight tendency toward the rehabilitation of notions of individual intention and creativity within the framework of television organizations (Newcomb/Hirsch 1994; Thompson/Burns 1990). As for empirical studies of produc-
tion, most of them focus only on the production process itself, sometimes with some textual perspectives tacked on for good measure. Finally, there is a pronounced tendency to concentrate the focus on individual productions and the creative core of the production teams. Neither programme policy discussions undertaken at the top levels of management nor programme scheduling decisions, also taken at the top, have received very much attention (notable exceptions being Caldwell 1995 and Gitlin 1983).

What has hindered those who study production from developing concepts, models and concrete analyses of the interplay between production and text? One possible explanation is that the dominant critique of intentionality within literary criticism – which is widely accepted within media research, as well – does not encourage efforts toward integration. Since Wimsatt and Beardsley’s (1989) critique of historical-biographical approaches to literary criticism, a dominant view has been that the meaning of a text neither can nor should be traced back to any intention on the part of the sender. Wimsatt and Beardsley look upon such derivation as untenable psychologizing projection, an “intentional fallacy”. The anti-auteur position has predominated within both neocritical and structuralist textual analysis, and within post-structuralist analysis thereafter, as well. If anything, it has become more pronounced, as in the later work of Roland Barthes, who writes provocatively of “the death of the author” (Barthes 1977; see also Foucault 1977). Post-structuralism has been criticized by media researchers for neglecting the issue of socially situated agency (Gripsrud 1995, Tulloch 1990, inter alia). Graham Murdock (1993) comments that Barthes’ contention regarding the death of the author should be seen as part of an historically specific polemics, aimed at certain traditional points of view within literary criticism. In Murdock’s view, it is entirely possible to maintain the concept of a relationship between text and production, provided you keep individualistic and romantic ideas about intention at an arm’s length. Such a broader conception is both possible and desirable, he argues. But Murdock does not tell us how to get from what is theoretically possible and desirable to what is theoretically founded. Nor does he indicate how to get from the theoretically founded to what is methodically and analytically practicable.

The Problem of Relative Autonomy

Stuart Hall’s article, “Encoding/Decoding” (1992) is a seminal attempt to construct a theoretical and conceptual framework for studies of the relationship between text and context, both in television and in communication processes more generally. It has given rise to decidedly more discussion of the relation between text and reception than between text and production. Yet Hall’s article, with its concept of ‘encoding’, is very much concerned with text production. With the concepts of encoding and decoding Hall attempts to take account of both transmission (from sender to receiver) and how meaning enters into the process. Borrowing a phrase from Marx, Hall characterizes the process as “a passage of forms” (Hall 1992:128). Hall formulated his theory in opposition to linear conceptions of the communication process and their tendency to ignore the discourse aspects of communication. In the article, Hall sets out to formulate a theory that incorporates semiological insights, conceiving of texts as sign structures. Hall’s encoding and decoding are characterized both by “determination” and “relative autonomy”, as he puts it. An element of autonomy arises in the transition between production and text, at the point where the text attains the status of “meaningful discourse”.

The element of ‘relative autonomy’ introduces a measure of fundamental uncertainty into the relationships between the three components of mass communication. But at the
same time, Hall’s encoding/decoding model forms a continuum; production, distribution and reception are conceived of as a closed system. This is because Hall’s ulterior aim is to account for the self-sustaining logic of capitalist market economics. One can therefore look upon his now classic triad of possible decodings, “dominant”, “negotiated” and “oppositional”, as a way to contain the element of relative autonomy. The triad both allows for uncertainty in the relationship between text and interpretation and seeks to limit it so as to secure the predominance of determination. Hall does not go on to discuss how one might go about conceptualizing the relationships between production and text. On the whole, this side of the model is less developed. Hall tends to underemphasize the discursiveness of the sender side and overemphasize it on the text side, where he speaks of “programme[s] as meaningful discourse” and not of their material aspects. It is problematic that Hall apparently sees the establishment of “meaning structures” as occurring in the transition from production to text, i.e., after the production process itself. Although Hall notes that production, too, has a discursive aspect (Ibid.:129), the observation is not reflected in the encoding/decoding model. Thus, Hall comes close to conceiving of the production-text linkage as a passage from a material level of production to a level of immanent meaning in the text. Consequently, even though the model was formulated in explicit opposition to linear communication models, it nonetheless tends toward a conception of text production that is linear in the sense that first comes production, then the text.

In other words, the discourses on the sender side, and the ways in which they contribute to the text production process, are underrepresented in Hall’s model. There is room for further development of the discussion here, and various studies, particularly in later years, have sought to explore whether and in what ways text production presumes some measure of text interpretation on the sender side (Cottle 1995; Dornfeld 1998; Ekström 1998; Helland 1992; Jacobs 1996; Schudson 1995 inter alia). Already at the start of the text production process those involved in a given production need to have a measure of common understanding of the goal, of the kinds of texts they are setting about to produce. Thus, text production involves a recursive connection; the production of texts presumes a set of previous text interpretations that are negotiated and subjected to compromises in a social and professional context. As Allan Bell (1991:99) has pointed out, the actors are “both audience and producer”. The alternation between production and interpretation is, quite simply, prerequisite to text production. Only through the production process can a text emerge, and only through experience of texts can the production process take place.

Viewed in this way, the reception and production processes seem much more akin than they do in, for example, Hall’s model. As Ronald N Jacobs (1996) points out, the notion of an interaction between the productive and interpretive elements is just as important for the study of text production as it is in studies of text reception. Both text production and text reception involve subjects who develop a set of expectations regarding future text interpretations – expectations which in turn are based on previous interpretations. It is a question of basic hermeneutic mechanisms. Every instance of textual interpretation must be based in some way or another on pre-understandings of the text in question, and of the categories of texts to which it belongs. Thus, the text interpretation itself serves both to consolidate and to revise the subject’s fore-judgements. Therefore, it is neither necessary nor accurate to posit that the text ‘precedes’ the interpretation. It is obviously not the case in the production of texts, nor it is true of receptions of texts inasmuch as text interpretation requires fore-judgements. In production, as in reception, the element of productivity is dependent on an element of interpretation. In his thinking
about hermeneutic processes Hans-Georg Gadamer reflects that “interpretation is probably, in a certain sense, re-creation” (as cited in Wilson 1995:46). For example: Before a newscast can be produced the journalists and other programme staff have to have developed a more or less shared understanding of the news genre in general, and of the particular aspects of the text which they are to work on. Professional training and work experience guide the actors in acquiring suitable interpretive repertoires.

Conceiving of text production and text interpretation as mutually constitutive elements means that one emphasizes not only the constructive nature of interpretation, but its continuity, as well. The production of news programmes is, for example, planned as a continuous, non-finite activity that transcends the individual newscast. Thus, it has no definite beginning and end, but consists of continuous and organized alternations between confirmation and revision, between repetition and novelty. This continuous interaction between texts and interpretations is described by Charles Sanders Peirce as an “unlimited semiosis”. Peirce describes the process as a “series of successive interpretants” that in principle is endless (as cited in Nøth 1995:43).

Production in the framework of cultural industries may be seen as a kind of disciplining of this social semiosis in order to ensure a regular and continuous stream of texts. In such industrial production conflicts and power struggles inevitably arise when individual interpretations are to be bridled and coordinated in order to meet deadlines, to fit budget frames, and to serve policy and strategy goals. This is where the semiosis of production parts ways with the semiosis of reception. Whereas mass media reception involves the construction of meaning out of texts over which the interpreter has little or no influence, the interpreters on the sender side have the power to turn their interpretations, first into a coordinated set of text expectations, and from there into new texts. Another crucial difference, of course, lies in the organizational framing of power and roles in text production.

**Meaning in Context**

Recent years’ research on text production has increasingly included studies which link production and the text by focusing on the ways in which production involves interpretation, negotiations and compromises regarding the text. Thus, insights regarding the production of symbolic meaning and textual structures are integrated with insights about decisions and priorities made by individuals in social and institutional contexts. Discussions about the discipline in recent years have called for more of this kind of research. One such discussion concerned the relationship between Political Economy and so-called Cultural Studies. Among the points of debate is the tendency toward a division of labour whereby researchers in the former tradition study the economic, political and institutional structures that shape decision-making processes in mass communications, whereas researchers in the cultural studies tradition take care of the structures of potential meaning in the text and their interpretations. As a consequence of this division of labour, the political economists have concentrated on the production side of mass communication and the determinant factors that are at play there. Researchers in cultural studies, for their part, have explored the relationship between text and interpreter in a manner that seems to imply a greater element of negotiation and resistance toward determining elements (for a review and reflection on this aspect, see Ferguson/Golding 1997). Several researchers, finding this division of labour unfortunate, have urged that discussions of determinant factors in production include cultural and interpretive processes (Born 1993; Curran 1996; Murdock 1997).
Because these initiatives have come in the wake of a strong focus on reception in the 1980s and early 1990s, the call for an integrated approach has sometimes been raised in polemic opposition to reception studies’ alleged “revisionism” and “populism.” More recently, however, text production researchers have emphasized the similarities between studies of text production and studies of reception and have not hesitated to draw on reception studies (Dornfeld 1998; Jacobs 1996). They also stress that such inquiry requires some measure of alignment of approaches to text and approaches to (institutional) context. One who has stressed the value of such alignment is Jan Ekecrantz. Taking his point of departure in modern sociological theory, Ekecrantz (1998a, 1998b) calls for media research that explores the forms of interaction between structures and actors, material and symbolic levels, and between voluntarism and determinism. A ‘middle way’ between these poles, Ekecrantz suggests, may best be found through research approaches that integrate textual and contextual aspects and which also bridge the gaps between established humanities and social science approaches. Ekecrantz emphasizes that this integration should not be left a theoretical postulate, while text and context remain separate in actual investigations. He goes on to point out certain concepts in recent research that suggest a movement toward the integration of text and context: ‘meso-level’, ‘discourse’, ‘genre’ and ‘institution’. He joins in the call for studies that show how text and context interact in concrete instances: at specific times and places, and in specific institutional and social settings (cf. Corner 1997; Fairclough 1995; Schudson 1991).

In terms of theory, this position is not particularly controversial within contemporary media research. As noted earlier, the problems become acute when principles are to be operationalized in concrete inquiry inasmuch as the research on text production has certain epistemological problems that will recur in methodological and empirical phases. The recent Nordic scientific work Ekecrantz (1998b) cites as examples of research that integrates textual and contextual perspectives is work in which the empirical and methodological emphasis rests on texts. “Context” in these studies is primarily understood as the discourses, broader institutional structures and/or genres to which the texts belong. But, ‘context’ can also be taken to refer to the concrete production and reception processes of which the texts form a part. How, then, can we respond to the methodological and empirical challenges of this latter kind of research?

**Three Strategies for Research on Text Production**

Text production researchers’ methodological and empirical priorities will largely depend on the time-frame they choose for their study. As the industrial production of culture (and particularly television) is a serial, continuous activity, the processes to be studied stretch over long periods of time. The development of genres, formats, organizational structures and professional cultures takes months and years. If one wishes to study such complex and gradual processes, a likely focus of study will be the interaction of production and text in the media institution over time. In the case of decidedly extended processes like television news production one may, for example, choose to follow the planning and implementation of a given newscast with particular attention to the negotiations and compromises that take place in the process regarding the text. Then, one might consider an initiative to change the format of the programme and study the process of change in relation to the staff members’ perceptions of past productions. These changed perceptions will feed into the negotiations of the production process and result in a new collective compromise on how future texts should look and sound. The
task of the researcher is to analyze how these negotiations link changes in textual interpretation to changes in professional culture, in programme policy, in the structure of the organization and in its resource allocations. The new collective compromise, then, is implemented as a new text.

Such an approach allows the researcher to examine the relationship between production and text over extended periods, which makes it possible to see how things like genres and professional cultures are established, maintained and/or changed. One might call this an exchange strategy. (Examples of works that follow such a strategy, wholly or in part, are Anderson 1990; Djerf-Pierre 1996; Tulloch/Alvarado 1983; Ytreberg 1999). The advantage of the exchange strategy is that it fits new insights about text production into a research design that makes it possible to relate negotiations and conflicts in the production process to characteristics of the text in such a way that the relationships between priorities and their outcomes are clearly apparent. Thus, the exchange strategy brings empirical study of long-term processes of change in cultural industries within reach. One can, for example, proceed from the processual character of genre as a theoretical postulate (Neale 1980) to a study of the process empirically.

The principal drawback with the exchange strategy is that the empirical task has a tendency to grow to unwieldy proportions. It is indeed a demanding task to capture the interplay between the various levels and stages of text production over an extended period of time. In addition, it will often prove necessary to say something about the interplay between the media institution and society and between concrete texts and the broader currents of genre and format development. The exchange strategy brings the promise of research with the kind of attention to detail and nuance that picks up both the continuities and conflicts of text production. But it is a bit risky to take on the type of “thick description” that anthropological methods often prescribe – due to one’s limited capacity, but also to the constraints on one’s choice of methods. The exchange strategy tends to require analysis of a number of production processes that have occurred in the past. In that case observation is of limited use, as it can only be used to find out about processes of today that more or less resemble the processes one is interested in. The researcher has to reconstruct the concrete chain of events in text production through interviews and documentary analysis. Those who choose the exchange strategy will have to strike a balance between the need to be concrete about the interplay of production and text and the need to formulate an overall analysis of many processes over a long period of time. That means that the analysis will have to be built up around important turning points in the text production process – e.g., a reorganization that alters the position of the profession or a change of policy that requires a major adjustment of textual interpretations. Those who follow the exchange strategy must therefore take care not to overrepresent change and underrepresent repetition/stability.

Traditionally, the alternative to the exchange strategy has been the separation strategy. As mentioned earlier, it means that production and text are treated separately in the use of methodology and in the analysis, whereas the findings of the separate parts are reported together. The problem here is the lack of any real analysis of the interplay between production and text. A third strategy might be called the generative strategy. Here, the researcher follows a single text, programme or series from the first stages of concept development, through the production process, to the final result, the text. The main drawback here is the linearity that is more or less built into the approach. The generative strategy would appear to be better suited to works of elite culture than to the cultural industries, yet there are good reasons why this approach is still used. First of all, it is empirically manageable; secondly, it lends itself to observational methods. It
produces a richer, more detailed material than documentary analysis or interviews do, and it can also be combined with these methods. Also, this kind of empirical analysis is quite compatible with a focus on the interpretations, negotiations and compromises regarding the text. (This aspect is particularly in focus in Dornfeld 1998; Ekström 1998; Helland 1995; Saferstein 1992, inter alia.)

**Between a Set of Common Research Objects and a Unified Science**

The underlying thesis in this article is that a greater degree of integration is desirable in studies of text production. But what level of integration is it meaningful to strive for? Quite a lot suggests that it is futile to operate with ideals of a unified science, a kind of ‘core’ that other disciplines might appear to have and that media research might strive to achieve. As pointed out in connection with Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model, the ‘relative autonomy’ between the instances of communication constitutes a theoretical hindrance which is not likely to disappear.

In many respects, the theoretical development has followed a contrary course. The tradition that hails back to Shannon & Weaver’s information theory-based model has a strong linear bent, and conceives of communication as direct transmission of information from a sender via the message to a receiver. More recent models qualify the proposition of linear and direct transmission in mass communication. In his encoding/decoding model Hall does this by introducing a semiotic dimension of meaning. The result is that a fundamental uncertainty surrounds the respective points at which meaning is encoded and decoded, suspended as they are between ‘determination’ and ‘relative autonomy’. If one accepts this uncertainty as a permanent and constant element in mass communication, one necessarily imposes a limit on the integration project. The discussion here, for example, can be no more than an attempt to translate between production and text. It cannot reconcile the two as the attainment of a unified discipline presupposes. Perhaps this means that media researchers will always have to alternate or ‘commute’ between the instances of the mass communication process. But it does not mean that media studies’ attempts to institutionalize interdisciplinary has been pointless. The ‘state of the art’ within text production studies suggests that there is room for fruitful development in theory, methodology and research design across established boundaries - even if the dream of a unified science may best be left behind.

Interdisciplinary research is sometimes criticized for its shallowness. There is also the worry that media researchers will lose contact with developments in the ‘parent disciplines’. In his lecture at the 13th Conference of Nordic Mass Communication researchers in 1997 Jostein Gripsrud argued - under the motto, “Ad fontes!” - that media researchers should turn more to what the research traditions in, for example, History, Aesthetics and Philosophy have to offer (Gripsrud 1998). There is no denying that interdisciplinary approaches do have drawbacks or that reading Kant can yield insights. But the question is whether a return “to the sources” will advance interdisciplinary or, rather, put it on ice. The institutionalization of interdisciplinary inquiry in media research has not occurred simply because the ‘hype’ surrounding the objects of research in our field. The interdisciplinary approach is part of a scientific agenda for the investigation of the links between production, text and reception. Acquiescing to the idea that media research should be no more than a collection of researchers having different academic training around a common object of inquiry means a retreat from that agenda. It also means turning one’s back on the consequences of institutionalization, which have long been in effect. Among these consequences are a generation of ‘orphans’, of re-
searchers who have no ‘parent discipline’; for them, the agenda of interdisciplinary exploration is perhaps the closest to a scientific platform they are likely to get.

Translation: Charly Hultén

References


The concept of proximity, which subsequently became very modern in all news reporting, was something we were born with. (Jens Gaardbo, Editor in Chief, TV 2’s News Department)¹

In 1988, nationwide television service on a second channel was introduced in Denmark. Danmarks Radio’s (DR) monopoly was broken. The newcomer, TV 2, was given public service obligations, but services were to be financed primarily by the sale of air time to advertisers.

News services were the channel’s ‘flagship’, and a good deal of energy and resources were put into news production. Those efforts were successful. In the space of only a few years TV 2’s evening news, Nyhederne, had attracted more viewers than the programme that once assembled the entire nation, DR’s TV-Avisen. It was more than novelty effect; TV 2 has continued to hold the lead throughout the 1990s. The key to the programme’s success is undoubtedly a consistent and conscious emphasis on proximity, a principle that guides both TV 2’s news selection and style of presentation. This emphasis represented a marked contrast to television news of the monopoly era. The policy also had a palpable effect on all other Danish television news services, DR’s TV-Avisen included.

The following analysis of TV 2’s Nyhederne and its evolution through the 1990s casts light on how and why the criterion of proximity has affected broadcast news journalism with respect to news selection, narrative structure and choice of sources. TV 2’s emphasis on proximity is also discussed in the context of populism. Finally, the success of Nyhederne is viewed in relation to an overall shift in the relationship between the capital and the provinces in Denmark, including the ways in which the two are thematized in discourses on modernity.

The End of Monopoly

“Fiasco!” “Chaotic and amateurish.”² Judgements were harsh when, ten years after the fact, TV 2 staff looked back on the channel’s premiere newscast on 1st October 1988. It was indeed an unusual news programme: 40 minutes of items, big and small, some of which having no apparent news value. There were recipes, profiles of miscellaneous eccentrics and happenings here and there.

Whatever one may think in retrospect, the programme got essentially positive reviews – from the start. Under the headline, “Roses to Samuel Rachlin” [anchor], Berlingske Tidende’s (Copenhagen) critic wrote 2nd October, on the basis of a quick survey.
of viewer reactions: “Off to a good start!” The positive reviews of the decidedly chaotic programme may be attributed to a general enthusiasm about TV2 and positive anticipations that Nyhederne would be something new and different. Being different was an aim in itself. Managing Director Jørgen Schleimann’s optimistic decision to slot the programme directly opposite DR’s main evening newscast at 7:30 may be seen as an expression of the general fervour surrounding TV2. Not least the political Right hailed the channel as the challenger that would break what in their eyes was Social-Democratic dominance in DR’s services.

Whereas hopes were high and sympathies strong, TV2’s supporters had only rather vague ideas about what the channel should offer in the way of content. The same was true within TV2 itself. The company began assembling its news staff in the latter part of 1987. Up to then, the dominant role-model with respect to producing television news in Denmark was TV-Avisen. Efforts on the part of local television stations in the mid-1980s did not offer much in that respect (Hjarvard & Søndergaard 1988). Consequently, DR and selected foreign channels’ news services formed TV2’s frame of reference during the run-up. Given TV2’s aspirations to be different, DR’s TV-Avisen was more a negative example than a role-model.

Ulla Terkelsen, Nyhederne’s first news chief, characterizes the initial programme concept:

We hoped to differ from Danmarks Radio by being closer to the people, that is, by offering more popular, less officious material [...]. Stories were to vary in length, we planned to shift tempo frequently in the course of the transmission, and we wanted to make it clear that the programme originated not in Copenhagen, but outside the metropole. The programme would be longer, but it would start at 7:30, exactly opposite TV-Avisen.³

The initial concept lasted only three months. The most urgent problem was the time slot, which kept TV2 from reaching a sizeable audience. This was not only the news department’s headache; it was a ticking bomb under the entire channel, a direct threat to its survival. The evening news, Nyhederne, was the motor behind the channel’s ratings. Nyhederne was expected to generate the audience for the blocks of advertising that preceded and followed it. After a few months of fair-to-middling ratings, Jørgen Schleimann abandoned the tactic of direct confrontation.

January 1989, Nyhederne was moved to 7:00 PM, the transmission was shortened and the format revamped. Although the time-slot had been the main stumbling block, there was also some dissatisfaction with a certain unevenness in the original form and content. In its original form, Nyhederne was a bit too radical a departure from the conventions of the genre and thus from viewers’ expectations of a television newscast. Jens Gaardbo, a journalist on the original Nyhederne’s staff, describes the problem:

There are limits to how much you can change a loaf of rye, and still have it be a loaf of rye. Similarly, there are limits to how much you can change a newscast and still have it be perceived as a newscast. Viewers have a very subtle, but definite intuitive notion of what news is, and what it isn’t, of when they are watching something of significance and when they are being entertained. So, one could say that it didn’t take long before it was clear to us that the product was a loser.⁴

The initial response to Nyhederne was confirmation of the conventional wisdom that news is a conservative genre; changes have to be introduced subtly, gradually. In its succeeding concept the newscast assumed a stricter form: the programme was shorter, and
the content more in accordance with conventional news values. But a number of elements from the original concept remained: the popular, vernacular tone and perspective, a more dynamic tempo, and the antipathy toward the metropole all continued to be significant features of Nyhederne’s identitet. They were also decisive for the programme’s success – which was not long in the coming.

Once the initial ailments were overcome, Nyhederne became Denmark’s number one television newscast in the space of only a few years, with TV-Avisen being consigned, apparently once and for all, to the status of second fiddle. It is no exaggeration to say that TV2’s Nyhederne is the biggest success story in Danish electronic media of the 1990s. From cheeky newcomer to market leader, and not only that: Nyhederne also blazed the path that all Danish television news services would follow throughout the 1990s. A closer analysis of the form and content of Nyhederne therefore casts light on the keys to the programme’s success, but also, more generally, on developments in Danish television news in the competitive market of the 1990s.

**Journalism as Voice of the Common People**

The kind of news reporting that Nyhederne introduced in the 1990s was imbued with an emphasis on ‘proximity’. ‘Proximity’ is one of the classic criteria of newsworthiness (Mejlby 1996), and emphasizing ‘proximity’ was by no means new. What was new about Nyhederne was the degree of importance assigned to the concept. ‘Proximity’ was a criterion in news selection, but it also guided story development, i.e., the choice of angle and narrative style. ‘Proximity’ was achieved in both content (the subject matter should be within viewers’ frame of reference) and narration (the anchor and reporters should address viewers in a familiar way and involve them in the story).

The priority assigned to ‘proximity’ is an outgrowth of a particular conception of the relation between the channel and its viewers. TV2 made a conscious effort to form a contrast to the kind of ‘top-down’ news reporting that brought messages to the people from on high - from the central institutions of Danish society down to the people. TV2 chose instead to cultivate the perspective of the common man, conceiving of itself as a voice of the people vis-à-vis the Establishment: a channel of communication from the people to the corridors of power and influence.

This ‘voice of the people’ perspective would prove to be a significant competitive advantage. It also allowed TV2 to cultivate a contrast to DR, whereby DR was cast in the role of ‘voice of the Establishment’.

Within the ranks of TV2 the model was called “the inverted OBS”, which Jens Gaardbo considers his channel’s principal point of contrast to DR, even though DR has to some extent followed suit:

> I still find that TV-Avisen has trouble freeing itself from the Establishment, Kongens Nytorv [a prominent address in central Copenhagen], the Royal Theatre, and all the institutional expressions of the national identity we have in this country. They do what we call ‘OBS television’ or ‘Information to the People about Society’ [Oplysning til Borgerne om Samfundet]. Our approach is the other way around: we provide Information to Society about the People. [...] That’s still the main difference, I think.5

TV2 hardly invented the concept of proximity or even this particular interpretation of the concept. It goes back to earlier tendencies in both print media (in particular tabloid journalism) and broadcasting in the monopoly era. In the mid-1980s the idea of conse-
quence journalism was in vogue at TV-Avisen. Journalists should, more than was the practice, show the consequences of political decision-making rather than concentrating on the policy process and the political in-fighting that led up to the decision. Showing the consequences of policy might make politics more comprehensible and relevant to viewers and allow journalists to take the experience of the man on the street as a starting point. A characteristic element in consequence journalism was the use of ‘consequence experts’, i.e., ordinary people who are involved in the issue at hand, as sources. In contrast to traditional experts, who tend to generalize and to perceive relationships on the basis of a systemic perspective, consequence experts can explain their situation and views rather plainly and from an individual, ordinary citizen’s perspective. Consequence journalism was the dominant feature of editorial policy at TV-Avisen in the mid-1980s under then Editor-in-Chief Lasse Jensen. In a newsdesk handbook from 1987, which launched the project, “New Face 87”, as part of DR’s preparations for coming competition, Lasse Jensen formulated the fundamental values of TV-Avisen, as follows:

Our chief guiding principle is to try to describe people’s conditions, to describe the actions, processes and events which influence people’s lives, either directly or indirectly.

Thus, TVA [TV-Avisen] strives to describe actions, decisions, decision-making processes and decision-makers and, above all, we want to focus on the people who bear the consequences of the decisions, what you might call “experts on the consequences”.

Consequence journalism – and particularly the use of consequence experts – was not put into practice to any greater extent during the monopoly era, however. Only in the mid-1990s did it gain full acceptance, and then in response to keener competition. A lack of consensus within DR management and problems at the top of the news department were two factors that stood in the way of consequence journalism (Hjarvard 1999a).

As a result, the TV2 news department was free to create an identity for itself from the start by applying the principle of ‘proximity’. The proximity dimension was not only a feature of the newcomer’s initial rebelliousness vis-à-vis the old, official monopoly channel. Even after Nyhederne had become the market leader in Danish television news, the editors remained true to the proximity perspective and continued to develop the programme’s identity on that theme. In 1997, in a publication distributed within TV2, Jens Gaardbo, who had just assumed his post as Editor-in-Chief, characterized the values that guided Nyhederne’s staff:

- Significance and proximity
- We focus on the individual
- We turn OBS-television upside-down [see above]
- We look for a different and surprising angle
- We are the news medium of the Danish people (rather than authorities)

Two observations: Significance and proximity are mentioned on a par with one another. Secondly, four of the five points are about values that stress Nyhederne’s oppositional role vis-à-vis official systems thinking: a focus on the individual, the Dane, the opposite of OBS, and a surprising angle - these are pivotal in TV2’s journalism.
‘Human Interest Politics’ and Entertainment

When we examine the content of TV2’s news reporting more closely, we find that the emphasis on the principle of proximity has left its imprint on both the form and content of news items, and we find clear differences between TV2’s Nyhederne and DR’s TV-Avisen with respect to both news selection and story treatment throughout the 1990s. Figure 1 indicates the relative frequency of seven categories of news content – Power and justice (police, crime, justice, the armed forces), the Social reproduction of the welfare state (education, health and social security, administration, taxes, etc.), Dependence on Nature (natural resources, conservation, ecology), Representation of the state (diplomacy, negotiations, armed conflict, etc.), Business (industry, agriculture, the labour market, etc.), Politics (elections, politicians, civil rights issues, etc.), and Cultural life (the Arts, mass culture, religion, daily life, etc.) in DR1 and TV2 news services in 1990 and 1997.

We find that TV2 shows greater interest in “Power and justice” in 1997 than in 1990. DR also emphasizes these subjects more, but not to the same extent. Both channels have increased their attention to the “Social reproduction of the welfare state” and “Cultural life”, whereas subjects relating to the political public sphere have been toned down. DR1 has increased its coverage of “Business”, but TV2 carried fewer such items in 1997 than in 1990.

On the whole, the analysis indicates that both channels have come to give ‘soft news’ (e.g., social welfare and health issues) and entertainment (crime news and mass culture) higher priority. The change is particularly apparent when we compare DR1’s and TV2’s news reporting of the 1990s with DR’s news reporting in the 1970s and 1980s. We also find that TV3, a commercial channel having no public service obligations, has gone even farther in these same directions (see further Hjarvard 1999a).

Figure 1. Subject Content of News Items. TV-Avisen (DR) and Nyhederne (TV2)
These trends may also be seen to reflect an emphasis on material that, either in subject matter or in form of presentation, is closer to the viewer than traditional political news. The same tendency is apparent when we consider the relative emphasis on foreign and domestic news over the period. As shown in Table 1, both channels both give markedly higher priority to domestic news in 1997 than they did in 1990. One should bear in mind, however, that the changes in Eastern Europe, escalating in 1989, most probably inflated the channels’ attention to foreign news in 1990. But even in relation to DR’s news reporting in 1974 and 1984, TV2’s trend in the 1990s represents a definite decline in the priority accorded foreign news.

Table 1 also shows that in 1997 DR2 shows the smallest share of purely domestic news, whereas TV3 notes the greatest share. It would seem that the more commercial a channel is, the less it is inclined to emphasize foreign news.

**Table 1.** Domestic and Foreign News as a Percentage of Total News Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
<th>Domestic and Foreign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DR1 - 1974</td>
<td>54,0</td>
<td>32,8</td>
<td>13,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR1 - 1984</td>
<td>55,1</td>
<td>35,9</td>
<td>9,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR1 - 1990</td>
<td>47,4</td>
<td>40,0</td>
<td>12,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR1 - 1997</td>
<td>55,7</td>
<td>32,3</td>
<td>12,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV2 - 1990</td>
<td>49,4</td>
<td>35,2</td>
<td>15,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV2 - 1997</td>
<td>59,1</td>
<td>29,1</td>
<td>11,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV3 - 1997</td>
<td>60,0</td>
<td>31,8</td>
<td>8,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR2 - 1997</td>
<td>51,0</td>
<td>38,8</td>
<td>10,1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: News in morning transmissions has been excluded. The category to the right represents items that have both a domestic and a foreign dimension.

The decline in interest in foreign news becomes even more apparent when we consider item length (air time) and their position in the newscast. Between 1990 and 1997 the average length of domestic news items in Nyhederne increased from 88.6 seconds in 1990 to 125.8 seconds in 1997. This is not the case regarding foreign news. Item length for foreign news remains more or less constant at 99.3 and 98.3 seconds in 1990 and 1997, respectively.

Table 2 shows the position of domestic and foreign news items in terms of three categories: the ‘top’ (first three items), ‘middle’ (items 4-9) and ‘bottom’ (item 10+) of the news. The table clearly shows that foreign news items are less frequently among the top items on both DR1 and TV2 than was the case in the monopoly era. In 1984, by contrast, items having a foreign element (‘Foreign’ + ‘Domestic and Foreign’) were more frequently among the lead stories that purely domestic news. All in all, we may conclude that foreign news material has a harder time making it into a newscast when the criterion of ‘proximity’ is accorded importance.
Table 2. The Position of Domestic and Foreign News Items in the Evening News on DR1 1984 and 1997, and on TV2 in 1997. Percent of Total Items; Vertical Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DR1 1984 Top (1-3)</th>
<th>Middle (4-9)</th>
<th>Bottom (10-)</th>
<th>DR1 1997 Top (1-3)</th>
<th>Middle (4-9)</th>
<th>Bottom (10-)</th>
<th>TV2 1997 Top (1-3)</th>
<th>Middle (4-9)</th>
<th>Bottom (10-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic/Foreign</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
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Made for Television

From the start, TV-Avisen was criticized for producing news that did not take advantage of the medium. The premiere transmission was decried as “against the very nature of the screen” (Prehn 1980). That TV-Avisen had a decided weakness for “talking suits” had to do with a conscious editorial policy that gave priority to the significance of the story over whether or not it lent itself to visualization. Hans-Jørgen Jensen, TV-Avisen’s first news chief, formulates the guiding editorial principle, as follows:

> From the start, the staff and management of the news department saw it as our duty to give viewers an orientation on the political process – both national and international – and on the vagaries of the economy. We have found that our coverage of these issues live up to the criterion of significance. […] We have striven to live up to this orientation without succumbing to the tyranny of the need for moving pictures. From the start, it has been a principle that journalistic coverage and relevance should prevail over visualization (Jensen 1973).

Although DR’s TV journalism did evolve considerably, even during the monopoly era, and learned to make better use of the medium’s potential, a central feature of TV2’s and Nyhederne’s efforts to establish an identity was to exploit that potential even more. This ambition was interpreted in the light of the principle of ‘proximity’ to the viewing audience: Television was better suited to rendering exciting sensations than to explaining complicated social conditions. In an interview in 1991, Ulla Terkelsen formulated Nyhederne’s editorial priorities, as follows:

> Some events are better suited to being documented in television news than others. We chose to focus on visually rich events and experiences rather than accountant-TV with a lot of statistics and heavy material from government at local and regional levels, which can’t be explained on television, anyway. […] In all its years as a monopoly, DR has felt a hallowed obligation to carry political and economic material. We don’t. News from those sectors has to be really important to be included in our programme.ª

It is not reasonable to argue that the ‘essence’ of television is entertainment rather than information. But TV2’s journalistic self-conception presumed that what was most suited to the medium was close to the viewer and rich in sensations and surprises. In short: entertaining. In this way the seemingly neutral and obviously valid argument that better use should be made of the medium became the lever whereby entertaining ‘human interest’ material gained precedence over the criterion of significance. Not only did the
criterion of visualization influence how stories were told, it also influenced news selection. As a consequence, events and subjects that did not lend themselves to lively visualization did not pass easily through the editorial needle’s eye. As the quantitative analysis revealed, the policy resulted in a change in the subject-matter composition of the programme. And, as the following qualitative analysis will show, TV 2’s priority on ‘visual’ news also expanded the bounds of legitimacy regarding how news stories are presented on television.

TV 2 gave higher priority to crime news throughout the 1990s, both in the channel’s newscasts and in reality shows like Station 2 (“Precinct 2”). TV-Avisen, too, gave greater priority to crime news in the era of competition, albeit the news department remained somewhat ambivalent to the subject area. On the one hand, they carried such news because it was popular and entertaining; on the other hand, it was treated without embellishment in more or less strictly factual terms. TV 2, for its part, made full use of the entertaining potential in crime stories. A story carried in Nyhederne’s principal newscast, 4th November 1997, serves as an illustration. (See box.)


**Anchor:** Three men were arrested in Aarhus today. They were charged with attempted manslaughter in connection with streetfighting and shooting after the sentencing of the man convicted of murdering boxer Racheed Lawal.

[Wild sound from the tumult: shouting and gunfire.]

Only three weeks after the tumult in Aarhus police say they have captured the man behind the violence 17th October. He is 27 years old. Police say he fired a shotgun at the group of Palestinians. He is to be charged with attempted manslaughter. A 28-year-old male has been charged as an accomplice. Three others now in custody were charged for their participation in the violence outside Vestre Landsret [the courthouse].

Several of the men in custody are members of the so-called ACAP gang, police say. It is a group held together by their common hatred of ... police.

**Journalist Jesper Nilausen:** This video, showing two men leaving the scene of the tumult is the only visual document of the ACAP gang that has been shown to date.

ACAP is known here in the nightclub district for their violent behaviour and rowdiness. TV 2 is here tonight to try to find the gang.

The name, “ACAP” is an abbreviation taken from a British rock song. The lyrics explain what keeps the gang together.

**Recorded music** (The 4-skins, “ACAB”, 1982): “ACAB, All Cops Are Bastards, ACAB, ACAB, ACAB. All Cops Are Bastards.”

**Richard Madsen, police inspector:** At least several members of the gang have criminal records; some of them have committed serious crimes.

**Anchor with superimposed headline:** “Gang violence”

**Archive footage of tumult in Aarhus from Nyhederne 17th October**

**Anchor with super: “Gang violence”**

**Archive footage from TV 2:** Two men hurrying away. Tumult in the foreground.

**Pictures of the nightlife on the street, dark: discos, police car, gatherings on sidewalk**

A CAP’s clubhouse in close-up and skew angle. Shot from inside rapidly accelerating car.

**Police officer in uniform in station.**
Journalist:

ACAP members are persona non grata in most places, but tonight at 3 AM, we found the hard core of the gang at this discothèque. - We ask if we may have a word, but they just tell us to go away – or else. Later, they leave the club. Here we see a 26-year-old member of the gang, two 27-year-olds and a 23-year-old.

Kristian Skovhus, detective inspector:

We know them as a group; they are convicted criminals. We know that many of them are out of work; they basically live on welfare payments; they are heavy drinkers. And so on and so forth.

Journalist:

Are they violent?

Kristian Skovhus:

Yes, I'd say so.

Journalist:

ACAP used to have fortress-like clubhouses, like this one at Vesterbro Torv, but for some reason they don't any more.

The special police detail say that the gang comprises some thirty men, Danes and immigrants of diverse nationalities. It is a loosely knit group with no known political agenda.

Sources close to the gang say that some members have records of violence: breaking and entering, pushing, bank robbery, and odd jobs for the Hell's Angels.

ACAP knew Lawal from his boxing club, whose fights they follow closely, but also from his job as a bouncer [nightclub doorman].

[Wild sound from a sparring match]

Journalist:

Why do you think they back Lawal?

Anders Vester, manager Aarhus Athlet Klub:

Well, I figure they just like boxing. I know it for a fact. Racheed Lawal may have been their idol, a role model. And so maybe they just want to try to avenge his death, you know?

Journalist:

But the real link between the dead boxer and ACAP is a close relative of Lawal's who is now serving time for miscellaneous violent crimes and narcotics dealing.

Kristian Skovhus, detective inspector:

There are blood ties between the Lawal family and ACAP, some of the members there. That is correct.

Journalist:

Time will tell whether the police will succeed in tying ACAP to the shooting and tumult in Aarhus.

Anchor:

Preliminary hearings for four of the five men will be held tomorrow. Whether the fifth will be heard, the police have yet to decide.

Sound

Journalist: A CAP members are persona non grata in most places, but tonight at 3 AM, we found the hard core of the gang at this discothèque. - We ask if we may have a word, but they just tell us to go away – or else. Later, they leave the club. Here we see a 26-year-old member of the gang, two 27-year-olds and a 23-year-old.

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Picture

Night pictures of the city, neon lights. A disco is pointed out. "Hidden camera"-style images of gang members, whose identities are masked (digitally). Animated rings identify the individuals mentioned.

Detective inspector in plain clothes outside Aarhus police station.

Manager interviewed in sparring gym. Sparring in background.

Boxing scenes (continued).

Detective inspector in plain clothes outside Aarhus police station.

Repeat of archive footage of tumult with two men leaving the scene.

Anchor (no superimposed text).

Under the headline, “Gang violence” the story is about the arrest of five men in Aarhus (Jutland). They were charged with crimes (assault with the intent to kill, unprovoked assault) that took place outside the trial of the accused murderer of Racheed Lawal, a boxer. The item is quite long, over three-and-a-half minutes; it is composed of two parts: a brief factual part presented by the anchor, followed by a longer story presented by a journalist. In the former part the anchor describes the arrest and the reasons for it
against pictures of the tumult some weeks earlier. The pictures serve, thematically and emotionally, as a kind of overture to the following characterization of the men, who are said to be known for “violence and rowdiness”. The second part profiles the so-called ACAP gang, of which the arrested men are members. The account is accomplished through interviews with law enforcement personnel, a manager of the boxing club where the victim frequently sparred, and through a supposed ‘hunt’ for the ACAP gang on the part of the journalist in Aarhus’ nightclub district.

The journalist’s nocturnal search for the ACAP gang offers considerable opportunity for pictures suggestive of the city’s shadowy underworld, affording opportunities for improvisation and prolonged suspense. The pictures connote an atmosphere where many people are enjoying themselves, but where danger – personified by ACAP – may be lurking in the shadows. In the course of the hunt, the journalist is accosted and menaced by members of the group at a discothèque, and an interview proves impossible. Consequently, the only substance in the segment is a video recording of a few members of the gang as they leave a discothèque in the middle of the night. The pictures have the character of ‘hidden camera’, which heightens the impression of furtive investigative reporting.

This impression is also underlined by the use of a dramatic present tense in recounting the encounter with the gang members: “We ask if we may have a word, but they just tell us to go away – or else. Later,...”. We also try to visit the gang in the daytime at their palisaded clubhouse, which, however, turns out to be deserted. In both instances we are given the impression that the journalist’s investigation has disclosed something of significance, but in fact, all his inquiries amount to are some silhouettes of unidentified young men leaving a nightclub and a picture of a locked door. The sequence of ‘investigative’ reporting provides no new information about the ACAP gang. What it does do is to dramatize the item so as to enhance its entertainment value.

The interviews in the item are mainly used to underline the violent and criminal character of the group. That is the principal theme of both the police officers’ statements and the journalist’s own copy. The statement by the manager of Lawal’s boxing club lays the ground for a broader social portrait of ACAP’s members: their connections with boxing. But this aspect is not followed up. Instead, the journalist concludes his report with some notes about some family relations within the Aarhus underworld. All in all, very little is said about the social background of the ACAP gang besides a rundown on their criminal record to date: the kinds of crimes they have committed, their relations with other crime syndicates, and so forth. In this respect the news reporting adopts a police perspective on the gang and focuses on the efforts to bring them to justice, a perspective which is congruent with the journalist’s self-assumed role of private investigator in Aarhus’ demi-monde.

The item also makes use of production techniques previously seldom used in TV news reporting. It is, for example, accompanied by music by the British group, The 4-Skins, after whose song, “All Cops Are Bastards” the ACAP gang took its name. The visuals feature ultra close-ups and odd angles (upside-down and from below); subjective camera is used a couple of times (from the inside of a rapidly accelerating car, and from a car with ‘hidden camera’). The picture is also manipulated digitally to mask the faces of members of the gang, and superimposed circles are used to point out certain individuals. These loans from other genres allow the reportage to create new layers of meaning, with greater powers to involve and entertain the viewer.

The item illustrates how an ambition to dramatize takes priority over the significance of the content. Sophisticated production values make the story come alive and
excite the viewer, but the item offers little in the way of information. A comparison of TV2’s coverage with DR’s coverage of the same event that evening shows that the same amount of information can be conveyed in fewer minutes using much less in the way of research and production resources. But the coverage in TV-Avisen is nowhere nearly as exciting. Where TV-Avisen, especially earlier, treated crime news soberly and factually, Nyhederne has spared no effort to make use of the stories’ inherent drama. This tendency is also reflected in the collaboration between Nyhederne and the crime magazine Station 2, which are both produced by the same department.

The purpose of the dramatization is to entertain, but the dramatization also has consequences regarding the choice of angle. Not only does the item have very low information value, but the journalist has also largely adopted the police force’s perspective on the gang. The journalist, assuming the role of ‘private eye’, ‘helps’ the police and adopts a ‘law enforcement’ discourse on crime. Other discourses, such as one that considers criminality in a social context or that might be critical of the work of the police, are thereby excluded. It is a tendency which has become quite common in various television channels’ treatment of crime news; the tendency is reinforced by the close collaboration between the police and journalists in the production of reality crime magazines.

TV2’s enthusiastic use of crime news to entertain has not, however, led to common use of scenes of extreme violence or emotion. It is rather a matter of more common and deliberate use of the various dramaturgic tools of the medium to bring out the thrill that is inherent in most crime stories. The staff of TV2 are not unaware that making use of crime news does not always conform with the criterion of significance. Or, as news chief Jens Gaardbo puts it:

One may, on the basis of classical criteria of significance, question whether it is justifiable to carry so much crime news. Crime is something that happens all the time, like rainy weather. And, as a journalist, you cannot deny that it is a question of a fascination in the drama of the material […]. But it can, when at its best, depict reality in important ways – beyond momentary sensation.10

The intention to make fuller use of the potential of the television medium has two aspects. On the one hand, reference to the ‘nature of the medium’ – with television seen primarily as a medium of sensations and entertainment – has, in the post-monopoly era, been used to legitimize a weakening of the criterion of significance. This has been done by TV2 and other channels, as well. Secondly, the argument has in practice led – especially on TV2 – to active exploration of the expressive potential of the medium in order to find ways to tell stories in a more interesting and closer manner, in which case the material - whether significant or trivial – appears more relevant to viewers.

**Dynamization and Sound Bite Journalism**

That TV2 put an emphasis on being popular and close to the viewer did not mean that Nyhederne was in any way provincial in outlook or old-fashioned in style. Characteristic of TV2 was that it strove to be at once more popular and more modern than rival DR. Against DR’s myopic ‘copenhageny’ TV2 mounted its provincial base; against DR’s traditional forms of expression it put up a more dynamic and modern image. Ulla Terkelsen herself has commented that the faster tempo, use of a permanent anchor in an open, working editorial landscape, use of “coming up”-teasers in the middle of the programme – all this was “very American” (Terkelsen 1989:42). By borrowing forms of
expression from American and similar commercial broadcasting contexts, the channel could appear more youthful and contemporary than the ‘old monopoly TV’.

The dynamic form of expression is especially apparent when we consider the length of news items and the intervals between ‘cuts’ (changes of picture, albeit electronic) in the main programmes of evening news. Whereas TV-Avisen in 1984 devoted about 3 minutes of air time to each item on average, Nyhederne used only 2 minutes (in 1990 and 1997). TV-Avisen gradually shortened its items and by 1997 had the same length as Nyhederne, or roughly 2 minutes on average. Whereas TV-Avisen made less than 5 cuts a minute in 1984, Nyhederne cut 8 an average times a minute in 1990. In 1997, Nyhederne had heightened the tempo to about 9 cuts a minute; TV-Avisen had by this time followed suit and had roughly the same frequency of cuts.

The shorter item lengths and more frequent cuts also reflect technological changes that made it easier to produce transmission-quality images. Technology played in, but it was the competition between the two channels that led them to use the technology to heighten the tempo.

The higher tempo affected TV journalism in several respects. Shorter item length made it harder to provide background, i.e., to put the news event in context. Journalists did become increasingly proficient at telling their stories, but all else equal, shorter time means that less can be told. For the most part, Nyhederne did not utilize technological improvements to develop narrative strategies for background and in-depth material.

The quicker tempo was also a consequence of the greater number of newscasts transmitted during the day. In the monopoly era there was a single programme of evening news, subsequently supplemented by a late-night summary of the day’s news. Competition has given rise to numerous newscasts each day. TV2 has been the motor force in this development, not least through the morning programme, “Good morning, Denmark”, which (since December 1996) features news briefs every half hour. Frequent newscasts have created a considerably greater flow of news material from early morning to late evening, and the many transmissions have given each one more the character of an update of ongoing events. Consequently, the evening news no longer has the element of finality it once had; in general, there is less emphasis on summarizing and contextualizing the news stories.

Another important consequence of the speedier tempo is a change in the relationship between journalist and sources. Persons interviewed have less air time and are more harshly edited. The journalist’s role vis-à-vis sources has also changed. Again, TV2 led the way. In 1984, the average length of an interviewee’s statements on TV-Avisen was nearly a minute, 54.2 seconds. The time shrank to 48.5 seconds in 1990, and 36.5 seconds in 1997. On Nyhederne the corresponding lengths for 1990 and 1997 were 28.7 and 25.7 seconds, respectively.

Meanwhile, the number of people interviewed in each news item increased. Whereas previously items carried 1-2 people’s statements, the average gradually climbed to 2-3. As indicated in Figure 2, the increasing brevity of news items led to the elimination of the journalist from the interview. – Earlier, TV-Avisen often had the interrogating journalist in both sound and picture; journalists were more seldom present in either sound or picture in the interviews on Nyhederne. Instead, the interviewee’s statement formed part of several statements in a montage. As Figure 2 also shows, the journalist’s critical question on camera, which suggests an active interrogation, generally with the purpose of examining or rebutting the source’s views, has become successively less common in TV journalism.
Figure 2. The Role of the Journalist Vis-à-Vis Sources. TV-Avisen and Nyhederne

The practice of tight editing of a source’s statement (Figure 3), which TV2 also encouraged, has arrogated control over the context in which the statement is presented from the interviewee. Even if a cut is not necessarily synonymous with an interruption, inasmuch as the picture can be cut, but the sound continues, the rising frequency of cuts means that to an increasing degree it is the journalist who combines the various statements, “sound bites”, into a meaningful whole. What points are included and the order in which they are presented are more and more the result of the journalist’s intervention.

Typically, the journalist strives to dynamize and condense the statements of the source; what the source tries to say is subordinate to the overall meaning of the news item. Whereas journalists in the era of monopoly primarily perceived their role as that of communicating the information and views of other institutions and representatives of those institutions, nowadays the statements of interviewees are used as building blocks

Figure 3. Frequency of Cuts in Interviewees’ Statements. TV-Avisen and Nyhederne
in a construction of the journalist’s making, viz., the news story. The critical role of the journalist has in a sense gradually moved from the interview situation (interrogation) into the editing room (critical selection and composition). Put simply, the role of the journalist has changed from communicating others’ views to being an autonomous editor of sound bites. In response to this, professional sources such as politicians have increasingly come to formulate their views so as to offer strings of cogent, quotable sound bites (Hjarvard 1999b).

The Discourse of Populism

Nyhederne’s ambition to be the people’s news medium was an outgrowth of the channel’s geographical structure and location. The many regional TV 2 stations and the location of channel headquarters in Odense on the island of Fyn was symbolic of a revolt against ‘copenhagenery’, the narrow meaning of which was DR’s orientation toward the capital and the broader meaning, the social, political and cultural dominance of the social Establishment.

Establishing the channel’s main office on the island of Fyn was more than symbolic; de facto it dictated a shift in the channel’s editorial priorities. Thus, Ilse Olsen, sub-editor on the Nyhederne staff and with TV 2 from the start, characterizes the importance of geography for the channel’s news policy:

The first difference was that we broke with the talking suit, that we gave ordinary folks a platform in our newscasts, which was both an ideal and a necessity, since the politicians had decided that we should be here in Odense, which is pretty far from the corridors of power. That forced us to some extent to cover the consequences [of policy] rather than overall political decision-making.11

Opposition to “the System”, to the ‘talking suits’ in the capital, became a part of Nyhederne’s mission, and the programme saw itself – and acted – as one who stood much closer to the pulse of the people. As documented elsewhere (Hjarvard 1999a), this self-conception in time led to the emergence of a kind of populism in Danish political journalism. The notion of being “the voice of the people” was not confined to the news desk, but was adopted by the entire channel. Lasse Jensen, who was in the top ranks of TV 2 management and second-in-command at Nyhederne, points out that populist tendencies imbued the entire organizational culture of TV 2:

It is, I would say, inherent in the whole idea of TV 2. I mean: here we are, and there they are. We are in Odense; they are in Copenhagen. We do other kinds of news than they do at 2860 Søborg [DR/TV’s address]. We have a virtual monopoly, or patent, on knowing what the people, the real people, are thinking and doing.12

The term, ‘populism’ should be understood in its political sense and not as simply meaning that the channel adopted a plain and simple style of expression. Here it denotes a polarized conception of society: “Us” vs. “Them”: “Us”, the people, conceived in a popular light as representing practical common sense vs. “Them”, the System, seen to be steered by bureaucratic rationality, which is often not only far removed from reality, but antagonistic to common sense. Where the people have the community and moral justice on their side, the System has power. Where the people are real, live individuals and families, the System is abstract institutions. In geographical terms, the System is ‘there’, in the metropole, whereas the people are ‘here’, in the provinces. Seen through the lenses of populism, the logic of the System leads to abuses of power, absurdities,
waste, etc., which might have been avoided if only they had listened to the people and used common sense.

Populistic tendencies in TV 2's news services turn up, for example, in the frequent use of stereotypes of "the people versus the System". These are used in stories about laws with unexpected effects that make life miserable for unsuspecting citizens in areas like health care, the labour market and housing. Or, stories about politicians who squander resources on 'pie-in-the-sky' projects or who are caught stealing out of the Treasury. Often, stories focus on individual cases, citizens with complaints that point up the unreasonableness or moral injustice of measures 'the System' has come up with. As a consequence, political measures tend not to be discussed as political issues, but rather as issues of morality, eliciting not opposition on political/ideological grounds, but indignation. A tax reform may, for example, be treated in terms of the individuals who 'lose out' as a result of it rather than as a matter of economic redistribution in society as a whole. Political choices and issues of the distribution of power are treated in terms of common-sense morality, as questions of Good and Evil. Negative consequences for the victims of unfeeling wielders of power are played up; that it is a question of a difficult political choice is played down.

Of course, there are occasions when politicians do make blunders, are incompetent or dishonest. A healthy scepticism vis-à-vis politicians and wielders of power is an important element in all journalism. Criticism of how those in power use that power is not the problem, but rather the stereotyped treatment of social issues. The stereotype of 'the people' masks the existence of fundamental differences and conflicts between different groups in society. These differences are such that one may question whether it is meaningful to speak of 'the people' as a uniform phenomenon. That the stereotype has gained such influence over the practice of journalism at TV 2 may be seen as the product of at least two factors: the channel's self-conception as the voice of the provinces and, secondly, the need for Nyhederne to appeal to a broad range of viewers. Populistic stereotypes are not only well-suited to telling a good story about heroes and villains; they are also a means by which a channel can assume the role of champion of the people vis-à-vis 'the System' – which represents an obvious competitive advantage.

TV 2's populist discourse bears similarities to, and has links to the Neo-Liberal trend in Danish politics. Neo-Liberals, too, criticize public policy that offers 'systemic' solutions that allow little room for consideration of the individual. Neo-Liberal ideology is pivoted on the need to reduce the public sector in order to allow a freer play of private initiatives. The link between TV 2's populist 'mission' and Neo-Liberal politics is not only ideological; there are personal links, as well. For example, politicians in the Liberal Party (Venstre) were avid advocates of TV 2 as an alternative, not least in news reporting, to Danmarks Radio. Several appointments to the staff of TV 2's news department had ties to the Liberals, which raised public doubts as to the channel's political neutrality (Poder & Østergaard-Nielsen 1997).

While the similarities are obvious, the populistic perspective also differs from the Neo-Liberal discourse in several respects. For one thing, populism is sceptical of the entire political establishment, Neo-Liberals included. TV 2's 'folksy' grassroots or 'contra' perspective has little sympathy for politicians as an 'estate' or profession and makes little distinction regarding the nature of individual politicians' or parties' ideas.

TV 2's orientation toward the provinces and populistic discourse have had results. Ratings show that Nyhederne has a somewhat stronger appeal among the common people, that is to say, a socially broader range of viewers which includes disadvantaged groups in Danish society. After only a few years, TV-Avisen and Nyhederne were found
to appeal to audiences having different profiles. TV-Avisen had a stronger appeal among middle-aged viewers, the better educated, and viewers in the capital, whereas Nyhederne had a stronger appeal among those living west of The Great Belt (Jutland and the western islands), among working class Danes and young people. Some of these differences were still apparent in 1998. Table 3 shows the ratings for TV-Avisen and Nyhederne among selected groups. Nyhederne has a more or less equal appeal in all parts of the country, whereas TV-Avisen still has a stronger appeal to viewers in the East.¹³ TV 2 attracts a good share of viewers in all social classes, with especially high ratings among elder viewers and those with fewer years of formal education. DR 1 has its best ratings among middle-aged, elder and white-collar viewers. In terms of lifestyle-orientations, Nyhederne has particularly high ratings among tradition-oriented and individualistic people, whereas TV-Avisen has greater appeal among collectively oriented people. It should be noted, however, that both channels attract good numbers of viewers in all sectors of society, so that the distinctions noted here have the character of nuances rather than major differences. All in all, it is fair to say that Nyhederne’s orientation to the people shows in the composition of its audience. The programme has enjoyed broad and solid popular support throughout the 1990s.

<table>
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<th>Subgroup</th>
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<th>DR1: TV-Avisen 9:00 PM</th>
<th>TV2: Nyheterne 7:00 PM</th>
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<td>Elementary educ. 8-9 yrs</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secondary educ. 10 yrs+</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>University educ.</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>K: modern</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>K: modern-individualist</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>K: individualist</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>K: traditional-individualist</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>K: traditional</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>K: traditional-collectivist</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>K: collectivist</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>K: modern-collectivist</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>K: center</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
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Source: Gallup’s TV-Meter.
**The Modern Province**

From the end of the 1980s and through the 1990s there were two notable success stories among Danish media: the morning daily (7 days/week) Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten and TV2's Nyhederne. The former increased its circulation from 118,298 in 1985 to 139,844 in 1990 and continued on up to 183,864 in 1998. In the latter part of the 1990s the paper began to market itself on Sjælland and in the capital, thereby attaining the status of a truly nationally distributed newspaper. As noted in the foregoing, Nyhederne became the market leader in television news in the span of only a few years. It has retained and consolidated that position throughout the 1990s. Both media are based in the provinces, Jyllands-Posten in Viby (Jutland) and Nyhederne in Odense (Fyn).

Whereas the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s witnessed radical concentration in the newspaper industry, particularly in the provinces where many papers were forced to shut down, the last decade or so has seen a renaissance for print and electronic media in the provinces. Although both Jyllands-Posten and TV2 experienced some economic difficulties in 1999, this hardly changes the fact that the media scored tremendous successes during the 1990s. Meanwhile, the Copenhagen newspapers and Danmarks Radio have experienced stagnation or decline.

This ‘revival’ among provincial media should be viewed against the backdrop of certain factors: the content the media offer, certain media policy measures, and economic conditions in the sector, some of which were noted in the foregoing with respect to Nyhederne. Finally, we should note another factor, outside the media sector, which has affected the two media. It is a question of much broader – and more or less intangible – developments in Danish society, whereby both the relationship between tradition and modernity and that between the provinces and the capital have changed. In headline form: provincial has become modern.

Copenhagen has always been identified with things modern. When people moved to the capital from the countryside, i.e., the provinces, they generally experienced cultural shock. In contrast to the easily comprehensible and stable social structure in the countryside, life in Copenhagen was synonymous with a hectic pulse, many and fleeting, more or less anonymous, social contacts, and constant exposure to new and different forms of cultural expression. During the construction of the welfare state starting in the 1930s, the capital was also the seat from which the blueprints for modern Danish society were drafted and the natural location for new social and national institutions. The capital was the hub and starting point for the expansive welfare state.

The crisis in the Social-Democratic welfare state project, which started in the mid-1970s - in an ideological-symbolic sense, in any case - meant a crisis for the status of Copenhagen as the fulcrum of modernity in Danish society, as well. With successive decentralization and ‘Europeanisation’ in the 1980s and 1990s the Danish Government and Parliament lost a good share of their power to local government as well as to European institutions. At the same time, Neo-Liberal ideology gained a foothold and posed a laissez-faire alternative to the social engineering philosophy of the welfare state, which undermined the legitimacy of central and public sector solutions. Instead, private, market-based forms of steering in local and transnational hands were put forward as models for the revitalization of Danish society.

This ideological shift meant that Denmark no longer perceived Copenhagen as the centre of modernity. Instead, the capital gradually came to be perceived as the centre of tradition in the sense that it was the site of traditional national and public institutions: Parliament, the Government, the ministries, the Supreme Court, the National Museum,
the National Gallery, Danmarks Radio, the Royal Archives, and so forth. The capital came to be seen as the site of administration and archiving of the national heritage. In contrast, the provinces were rediscovered as economic and cultural motors in modern-day Danish society, where individual and private initiatives were in the high seat. One relationship was not inverted, however: the provinces were still associated with a popular and informal lifestyle, whereas the capital continued to be associated with sophistication and cultural refinement. What was new was that the popular was now positively linked with innovation and individual initiative.

Table 4. The Discursive Characteristics of the Relationship Between Province and Capital in Denmark of the 1990s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of the modern province</th>
<th>Characteristics of the capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private (enterprise)</td>
<td>Public (sector)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local, transnational</td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual, group</td>
<td>Collective, state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Social-Democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular, vernacular</td>
<td>Urbane, sophisticated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>Formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production, commerce</td>
<td>Legislation, administration</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

With the help of a few catchwords, Table 4 summarizes the discourse of the 1990s regarding changes in the relationship between Copenhagen and the provinces. – The characterizations are gross and only indicate the themes that have been current over the past decade. Of course, no discourse is totally dominant; other competing discourses have been carried on, as well.

As for the success of Nyhederne and Jyllands-Posten, one might venture the hypothesis that their success is due in part to an association with the new status of the provinces as locomotives of modernity – a status they have capitalized on and a discourse they have contributed to. In both their marketing and their editorial content they have latched on to discourses that provided them with a central position in a society in which individuals, ‘the people’, open national frontiers, innovation and private initiatives have been central values and in which their rivals, the Copenhagen press and Danmarks Radio, have seemed slightly antiquated champions of yesterday’s causes: too much government, bureaucracy, tradition and public, collective solutions. Thus, Nyhederne’s editorial philosophy – the concept of the ‘inverted OBS’ – and TV 2’s identity as a voice of the provinces and of the people in contrast to the ‘copenhagenry’ of its archival dovetailed into an ongoing discourse, which TV 2 also helped to develop and consolidate as the dominant discourse in Danish society.

When DR’s and TV-Avisen’s monopoly was to be broken, the challenger, TV 2 and Nyhederne, was localized to the provincial city of Odense, far from the power centre of the nation and far from the political institutions which television news was expected to cover. At first, it seemed like an exile to the periphery of the polity, but in ideological terms, the location brought the channel closer to the people and gave it a unique opportunity to cast itself in the role of entrepreneur in the new centre of the 1990s: the provinces.

Translation: Charly Hultén
Notes
1. Interview with Jens Gaardbo, 11th November 1998.
2. TV2 10 år, p. 31.
5. Interview with Jens Gaardbo, 11th November 1998.
8. The following segment is based on findings from Hjarvard (1999a). The empirical basis for the quantitative analysis is the following: For 1997, a randomized sample comprising 30 days of newscasts in DR1, TV2, TV3 and DR2 in the interval, 1st May – 31st December; for 1990, all newscasts on DR1 and TV2 in the interval 26th February – 25th March; for 1984, all newscasts on DR1 in the interval 1st October – 4th November; and for 1974, DR’s written record of newscast content in the period 1st – 31st October. Finally, a small number of TV-Avisen transmissions from each of the years 1965, 1967 and 1969 constitute the basis of what is referred to as “the 1960s”. The nature of the material from 1974 and the 1960s is due to the sparsity of video recordings of entire transmissions of TV-Avisen from the early days of television news.
13. Copenhagen, with a population of one million, 20 per cent of the total population, is situated on the northeastern corner of the eastern island, Sjælland.
15. Dansk Oplagskontrol as cited in Media Scandinavia. The figures indicate net paid circulation in the first six months of each year.

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Prehn, O (1980) Idag er det TV-Avisens Føds’dag [Today is TV-Avisen’s birthday]. In Levende Billeder, October.
How to Make
Thin Journalism Strong?
Experiences of a Public Journalism Project in Finland

HEIKKI HEIKKI LÄ

The concepts of audience and public create an interesting division within media studies. On the one hand, the empirical research on readers and viewers talk primarily about ‘the audience’; if any mention is made of ‘the public’, it will usually be used interchangeably with ‘the audience’. Thus, if the distinction between the audience and the public should be analytically meaningful, as some scholars insist (see Dahlgren 1995, 19), then audience studies seem to have refused to take it seriously. On the other hand, for scholars who take an interest in the media and democracy, this distinction is of great importance. Even if they seem to have an analytical advantage over audience researchers, it is not quite clear what this distinction means empirically. Is the public anything else but a slogan?

This article explores the empirical meanings of the public through a case study. It is inspired, firstly, by the theory and practices of public journalism (see Rosen 1999; Glasser ed. 1999). Secondly, it echoes a more general interest that has been re-emerging in Finland (among other places) in the concept of the public. Some scholars have gone so far as coining a brand new word (julkiso) into Finnish language to denote the public in contrast to the audience (yleisö), because hitherto the word yleisö has covered in addition to the meaning of the audience also that of the public (Pietilä & Ridell 1997, 95). Later this initiative has been elaborated both theoretically and empirically.

Thin and Strong Journalism

One of the foremost proponents for conceiving ‘the public’ is James Carey, whose recurring strategy is to draw useful parallels between ‘journalism as we know it’ and its often unparallel past (Carey 1997, 331). In this vein he suggests that in the advent of the United States, there existed an almost organic relationship between the newspaper and its readers (Carey 1987, 10). The primary subjects of the news in those days were the readers - a highly exclusive group of males with property - who had a vested interest in the news. They also gathered to discuss the news critically and rationally. The readers of the news were critical in the sense that nothing in the public sphere was taken for granted. They were rational in the sense that each speaker was expected to state his reasons for believing in any given assertion; there was no intrinsic appeal to status or tradition for authority (ibid. 10).
Since the late 18th century and the early 19th century the volume and the scope of public communication as well as the contexts of reception have dramatically changed and expanded and at the same time been democratised. While Carey’s description obviously does not speak of today’s circumstances, its critical strengths have in fact increased. News journalism today is not grounded in the public in the meaning illustrated above, but in the representative logic of society. The readers are now only distantly the subjects or stakeholders in the news. It is far more common for ordinary people to be spoken about in the news than for ordinary people to speak for themselves in the news (Murdock 1992, 31; see also Ekecrantz & Olsson 1990). Furthermore, as many reception analysts suggest, the news barely generate rational and critical discussion among readers or viewers (Jensen 1990; Ridell 1998). From this perspective news practices that commonsensically appear so functional for democracy, begin to seem disturbingly unfunctional, if not dysfunctional.

If we take it that the unrepresentativeness of news actors and the absence of discussion about the news are interrelated problems, the following argument becomes justified: News journalism that takes action only once topics have been identified, agendas set, and options delineated, is ‘thin’ in terms of its democratic performance (see Barber 1984, 157). There is much to be said for ‘thin journalism’. It is congruent with our constitutions and liberal convictions. It is in line with the logic of modern societies in general. And in spite of occasional criticisms, its legitimacy has never been seriously threatened. Ultimately thin journalism seems to provide journalists, newsrooms, and media corporations with what they need so that they can go about their daily work efficiently and economically (see Gans 1980; McManus 1994). If newspeople were to give up their routines based on the representative logic, this would place them at serious risk.

The problem with thin journalism is that it claims no active role for journalism in the quality of public discussion. It does little to improve the conditions for citizens’ active participation in its own realm. In order to become ‘strong’ – following Barber’s distinction – journalism needs to develop practices that are more closely aligned with the features of the public. It should address readers and viewers as stakeholders with vested interests, and promote their rational and critical discussion about the subjects of news as well as the performance of news journalism.

The idea of strong journalism is first of all a way of criticising contemporary news practices. On the other hand, the best way to transform critique into constructive suggestions is to set out alternative practices and to see where they might lead. Perhaps the most impressive attempts to experiment with more participatory practices have been made by journalists in the United States under the banner of public or civic journalism.

The debate about public journalism is rich with eloquent or witty descriptions that either endorse or deride its ideas. In the absence of fixed definitions, the best description I have come across argues that public journalism sets itself the task of promoting and improving the quality of public life, rather than just reporting on or complaining about it (Glasser & Craft 1996, 153). In doing so public journalists pay particular attention to citizens’ everyday lives and treat their experiences as a source of valid information or knowledge. This information is often derived from discussion groups that are seen as resources for the newsroom. In exchange, journalists set themselves to public resources for citizens by making those in power accountable to their questions, by seeking social groups or individuals who have a stake in a perceived issue, and by providing them with a public role in the news. Instead of antagonism, public journalism attempts to enhance dialogue between citizens and institutions; dialogue that takes social prob-
lems seriously and does not escape conflicts of interests but aims at resolving the common problems.

By 1997 the ideas of public journalism had inspired more than 300 projects in the US (Friedland et al. 1998, 191). Two years later, the number in Finland was no more than two. Aamulehti, one of the biggest dailies in the country, launched some small-scale experiments in 1997 that included a project called ‘budget jury’, in which 12 residents of the city of Tampere (where the newspaper is published) were recruited to a series of discussions on the forthcoming city budget. The impact of the budget jury and other experiments have been latent, but by no means insignificant (see Kunelius 1999a, 1999b).

In what follows I shall examine the projects and new practices developed at Savon Sanomat (a daily published in Kuopio in eastern Finland) since autumn 1998 by applying the analytical tools derived from Carey. Analytically, the public is assumed to consist of persons with vested interests, who are capable of discussing the news rationally and critically. The analysis describes the project in some detail, for three reasons. Firstly, it follows from the experimental framework that the insights are deeply absorbed in practical situations, which means that the inquiry has to proceed accordingly. Secondly, I assume that the contemporary practical problems relating to citizens’ discussions in Finland at the turn of millennium should be relevant or at least intelligible to contexts that resemble our circumstances. Thirdly, whether I like it or not, this article will be read as a public journalism project. For those who wish to evaluate the idea respective to this case, it is only fair to be as specific as possible. For all these reasons the analysis has to start with a description of the local immediate context that made the experiments possible.

Setting the Scene

In a way, the foundations for the public journalism projects at Savon Sanomat were laid as early as spring 1997. At that time 16 journalists at the paper (about one-fifth of the staff) were interviewed to find out about their ideas on news journalism, the paper’s performance, and the current ideological and economic challenges to what they regarded as ‘good journalism’. The main tone in the interviews was critical. A part from the normal frictions that you will see in any institution or workplace, everyone (bar one veteran interviewee) seemed to be confused about the state of journalism and themselves practising it. The following two passages capture some critical and self-reflexive moments from the interviews:

Suppose we decide [in the newsroom] that let’s write a story on unemployment. Unemployment, of course, should concern an awful lot of families. So, [the question is asked at a news meeting,] “does anyone here know someone who is unemployed?” “Oh, yeah! I guess there’s one who lives in my block of flats.” (sarcastically). This is what it’s like, you know! (female journalist no. 6).

I’ve been giving a lot of thought to these long-term trends. How are we supposed to cover them, bearing in mind that they’re not “news” in a conventional sense? Lots of things that happen in people’s lives remains obscure to us. [This explains] why it’s so difficult to cover unemployment. If people are out of work for years it’s no longer news to us. Still, it would be good to keep writing about it, even if these
people don’t fit into the readership profile (makes “air quotes” in an ironic fashion) that the marketing section talks about. (female journalist no. 10).

This line of criticism finds serious flaws in contemporary journalistic practices. It suggests that news journalism has lost its touch with the reality of everyday life and that journalists are deprived of contacts with people presumably below their social rank. Whereas the first passage above points to journalists as persons, the latter locates the problem in news practices, news values, and also in marketing values. These critiques are also central to the tenets of public journalism (see Rosen 1996; Merritt 1995). Even though this criticism stems directly from journalists’ own experiences, it was enough to convince some newsroom executives that it might be worthwhile for them to experiment with public journalism. However, it took more than one year for the projects to get started.

Finally, between autumn 1998 and spring 1999, the paper conducted three small-scale projects involving six journalists, a researcher, and an informal support group within the newsroom. Overall responsibility, however, rested with one single reporter, who took care of most practical arrangements and briefings, who wrote most of the stories, and coordinated the efforts to develop subsequent work at the newsroom. Given the scarcity of resources, it is clear that these projects are entirely different from those carried out in the U.S.

All projects were based on a similar method and assignment. The reporters gathered six groups of ordinary citizens who were invited to discuss their concerns, to frame problems, raise questions, and find solutions. The idea was to have these groups contributing to the newswork, while the reporters would commit themselves to developing public discussion on the basis of these contributions. In a way, this relationship is not entirely different from the symbiosis that journalists usually create with institutions. The discussion groups were assumed to have information that news journalism needs, while journalists controlled the means of publicness that the participants were allowed to use. The fact that the journalists’ partners in this symbiotic relationship were ‘ordinary citizens’ and not politicians or experts, changed the meanings of this symbiosis in many ways. It did not mean, however, that journalists would give up their judgement about the forms and content of the stories.

The participants were selected using the ‘snowball technique’, a common method in qualitative research (Schröder 1999, 46). First, a group of reporters sat down to set up an advisors’ list consisting of persons who were neither journalists’ friends nor established news sources. Once the advisors had been informed of the projects by phone, they were asked to suggest two or three names they would like to see in a group. This round of phone calls produced a list of more than 150 candidates, of which about 50 were invited. Eventually 46 of them took part in the discussions.

The first project, (which was called ‘Citizens!’), focused on generational differences in Kuopio, the paper’s home town. The participants were divided into three groups, i.e. senior citizens born in the 1930s, those born in the 1950s, and younger adults born in the 1970s. Each group met twice to collect a total of 7-8 hours of intensive talk. In the first session the groups focused on problems, in the second they tried to find solutions to the problems they had detected. During the project the groups became so interested in each other’s viewpoints that a third meeting was held in which some members of all groups were present. This extra session was more informal, but it was also covered in the paper.
The second project was launched a couple of months later in two small municipalities, where ‘community groups’ met on three occasions. In the first two sessions the groups reflected upon their concerns and the extent to which residents could influence local decision-making. In the third meeting the groups had the opportunity to present their questions and suggestions directly to the local authorities. The third project (called ‘Voters’) was an ad hoc experiment in which a group of citizens spent an evening discussing topics they thought would be relevant in the parliamentary elections; the following evening they were allowed to ‘interrogate’ local political candidates. Since this project the paper has decided to convene the group once a year to meet the MPs elected from their constituency.

All these group meetings and discussions took place in the presence of two reporters and the researcher, who also acted as a moderator. The discussions resulted in a dozen stories, which were expected to lead to ‘spin-off stories’ and transform into public processes or even ‘beats’ that would be under constant supervision in the newsroom. The projects were open-ended, but as it turned out they remained rather short-lived. Spin-off stories that were supposed to develop public discussion further and cater it with journalistic tools available remained quite sporadic, and after May 1999 they ceased altogether. In autumn 1999, however, the paper took a step towards institutionalising a similar approach by establishing a weekly section to cover local issues from the residents’ perspective. The reporter responsible for the projects is also in charge of this new section. As far as I am aware this section is the first attempt to practise public journalism on a regular basis in Scandinavia.

Vested Interests: Pleasure and Relevance

The assignment in the projects sounds plain and simple: the reporters were supposed to write stories about situations in which ordinary citizens meet to talk about contemporary problems. However, this task was heavily loaded with theoretical presumptions: why problems, why ordinary citizens, why discussions?

Firstly, the inspiration was drawn from Dewey’s (1991, 12 [1927]) idea about the public: for Dewey, the public begins to emerge when indirect consequences of human actions – i.e. problems – are recognised and there appears an effort to regulate them. Thus, the projects aimed at detecting problems that would deserve public attention. Secondly, still following Dewey, average citizens were treated as experts of everyday life whose insights and perspectives would likely differ from the way how institutions see the world. No-one had prior knowledge about what these perspectives would be like. Thirdly, a lot of time and expectations was placed on discussion because it was assumed that lengthy deliberation would serve as a method ‘to know good in common that we cannot know alone’ (Sandel 1998, 183). Or, in Dewey’s (1991, 219) rather obscure words: “There is no limit to the liberal expansion and confirmation of limited personal intellectual endowment, which may proceed from the flow of social intelligence when that circulates by word of mouth from one to another in the communications of local community.”

One way to start with our analysis is to look at whether the participants became involved in the discussions and how they began to see their stakes or vested interests in the topics they talked about. This analysis is based on the dynamics of the discussions on the one hand, and on the participants’ written evaluations about the projects, on the other. We can then move on to see what happened when the discussions were trans-
formed into news stories and what problems this process caused for the news organisation.

The first thing that comes out of the participants’ evaluations is pleasure: they clearly appreciated the opportunity to ‘get serious’ and learn from one another’s experiences and their sometimes very different viewpoints. Most of the participants would probably agree with a female participant of Citizens!, who wrote that she had not enjoyed anything as much as this for ages.\(^9\) In contrast to what vulgar elite theorists might assume, the participants found the lengthy and sometimes ‘untidy’ discussions about local decision-making or values in society highly entertaining, even though these subjects hardly match the standard definition of fun. What is even more significant is that a major source of enjoyment was the public character of these discussions. Some participants said quite frankly that they were happy to see themselves in the paper, while others underlined that the projects gave them an exceptional opportunity to influence public opinion or decision-making. Without the presence of journalists and the prestige of the paper, the discussions would have had a minor significance for the participants.

The pleasure of public talk reveals a somewhat republican undertone, which is at odds with conventional wisdom about how citizens are supposed to relate to the news and politics. However, this participatory impulse would be short-lived unless the participants perceived the discussions as relevant. Two aspects became indispensable for the groups in maintaining their public happiness. Firstly, the issues raised had to be familiar and recognised at the level of everyday life: unless the problems ‘rang true’, their relevance would be questionable. Secondly, the problems should entail at least a vague possibility of action. If the problems related to circumstances that were beyond human powers, they would probably have less relevance. On the other hand, even a certain amount of existentialist anxiety shared with others was found liberating and thus relevant by the participants.

In their search for relevance the groups took different routes. Some of them were able quite easily to name the problems at the top of their agenda and weave the participants’ concerns together. The clearest example of this was the identification in the senior citizens’ group of common ground in problems related to insecurity. Having shared their testimonies, the participants were convinced that insecurity restricts their lives in a very concrete way, and that cannot be explained away by statistics or probability calculations. It was much harder to define the causes of insecurity and to find solutions. Some participants were more inclined to see this as a question of law and order, while others preferred to discuss the problems in a broader social context. These different approaches complicated the discussion, but this seemed to motivate the group to try even harder to make sense of the problem.

In other groups, too, the relevance seemed to increase, when the problems became redefined or altered. As a consequence even practical problems like housing or transportation, keenly discussed among the young adults, were framed as questions of power. This would seem to suggest that relevance stems from questions that are not normally asked. This was also true in Voters, who insisted that abstract values have relevance in society because in their view politicians tend to avoid expressing them in explicit terms.

Two community groups had more difficulties in their search for relevance. Quite surprisingly, participants in the peripheral and declining small town of Suonenjoki found it hard to identify local problems that would directly affect their lives. Instead, the group chose to envision new practices for local democracy and decision-making. In the young, heterogeneous, and prosperous Siilinjärvi, relevance became an openly contested issue. Half of the group wanted to direct public attention to the life situations of
mental care patients, many of whom had been de-institutionalised in the municipality during the 1990s. The other half failed to see the relevance of this topic, because they claimed they had not personally witnessed the problem. What made the discussion even more difficult was the fact that the problem stemmed from government policy leading to a sharp reduction in the number of mental hospitals throughout the country. Therefore, some participants felt the chances of tackling the problem here and now were quite limited or even non-existent.

For the newspaper the discussions introduced a difficult challenge. While the participants were keenly involved and enthusiastic, it is a different matter altogether to convey that atmosphere to the readers and hopefully to get them to see their stake in the topics. In practical terms, only a fraction of a lengthy discussions would fit in a page or a story. In order not to lose anything essential the stories were usually arranged in the space of one page composed of three types of stories (see Image 1). First, all topics, problems, and solutions mentioned within a discussion were presented in a left sidebar. The list would give names to participants’ concerns and provide a short description of their causes and effects as the groups defined them. Secondly, in order to introduce the participants to the readers, the reporter selected one quotation from each member; these were placed in a right sidebar. Thirdly, the reporter wrote 1-3 stories describing and condensing the substance and atmosphere of conversations from the perspective of a sympathetic observer.

In most cases the publication of the stories strengthened the participants’ commitment to the subjects and viewpoints they had addressed. At the same time, however, they complained that the stories did not have the effect they had anticipated. The participants had been caught in face-to-face discussions about the stories in the streets and shops, but mass mediated reactions were very restrained. The number of spin-off stories produced by reporters and often the quality of these stories were also a disappointment for the participants. These experiences point at problems within the news organisation, but also at problems related to news genres.

Studies on public journalism projects in the US underline the longevity and patience that is required in attempts to address readers as stakeholders (Friedland et al. 1998, 203). While newspeople often lose their interest in a particular topic after giving it exhaustive coverage, it may take citizens months or even years to realise their stakes or vested interests. The main responsibility of keeping the discussion alive often falls to journalists, who are supposed to repeat relevant questions even if they would not result in answers and comments, and to frame old issues from new perspectives.

The fact that stories were usually appreciated by the participants, but there were not many signs that they had encouraged readers to act publicly, partly comes down to everyday reading practices. Even though the stories on the brainstorming sessions were edited and condensed, they were never going to capture the undivided attention of readers leafing through their papers over breakfast. In retrospect, it might have been wiser to split up the material into smaller stories and publish them sequentially. In addition, in the layout we should have paid more attention to patterns for feedback and comments. These lessons have been taken on board in the design of the latest local coverage section that includes direct question boxes, phone-in facilities, e-mail and URL addresses etc. (see image 2).

Question boxes and phone-in facilities are, of course, only partial solutions. The main challenge remains the same: how to write engaging and dialogical news stories. Although there may be no absolute solutions to this problem, this should not be allowed to invalidate the efforts, but rather push them forward.
Everyday Rationality: The Art of Connections

The hermeneutic tradition, theories of participatory democracy, and communitarian philosophy all regard conversation as a value in itself. It is argued that in conversation, we learn to know something we could not know individually. For Barber (1984, 119), deliberation – a special form of discussion – leads to transformations that change the way participants conceive the world. Empirical work with citizens’ deliberative discus-
sion groups has shown that these deliberations are likely to produce something new. It is said that instead of slicing ‘things’ analytically into pieces as experts tend to do, deliberative groups tend to link issues together and seek for connections and coherence, which leads them to question things we would otherwise take for granted (see Harwood Group 1993; Huxman & Iorio 1996). In this sense discussion groups may entail a specific form of rationality, which is the second aspect in Carey’s description of the public.

In terms of their productivity alone, the project groups confirmed these assumptions. For instance, three Citizens! groups identified 15–20 major problems in their first sessions and were able to conceive even more solutions at their second meeting. Many of these initiatives questioned taken-for-granted truths without sounding unrealistic. For instance, the senior citizens suggested that one way of alleviating their sense of insecurity would be to bring back the janitor system in blocks of flats. They were well aware that janitors had been made redundant for reasons of saving costs. However, the group called into question the common assumption that janitors always cost more than the services of ‘faceless companies’. And even if this were the case, the participants doubted whether residents really considered low service costs as more important and valuable than a sense of security. This is one of many examples of how the groups produced reasonable questions for public scrutiny that are unlikely to emerge from institutional sources.

Another ‘new’ question raised by Citizens! was in fact so old that it had disappeared from the public agenda at least ten years ago. The group of young adults even surprised themselves in taking such strong views about the architecture in the town centre. Kuopio is widely known in Finland for its market square, which is surrounded by a disturbing mixture of different architectural styles. On the one hand there are old historic buildings such as the Town Hall and the famous Market Hall, while the two other sides of the square are flanked by massive concrete department stores built in the 1970s and 1980s. One of these department stores is known, for instance, by the nickname ‘Finnjet’, once the biggest cruiser in the Baltic Sea – a clear statement about what people think of its aesthetic qualities.

Having shared their resentment at the townscape the group drew up a long list of ideas as to how the situation could be improved. It was suggested, for instance, that the owners of the buildings would be obliged to erect new facades to hide the grey concrete elements. In anticipation of the obvious counterargument that this was too expensive, they reminded that department stores regularly have facelifts indoors; so why couldn’t they have this one facelift on the outside?

The middle-aged group in the Citizens! project provided an even more impressive example of conceiving new perspectives on contemporary problems. The issue at the top of their agenda was elder care. Their concerns reflected personal experiences among some participants of how their own parents had failed to receive adequate care and attention in health care institutions. The problem stemmed from the austerity budgets in the public sector. The group anticipated that the situation will be much worse by the time they themselves are old. They concluded that even if the problems were essentially about money, immediate action was needed at the local level.

The participants pinned their hopes on voluntary work and civic organisations in the third sector (see Rifkin 1995). The group saw in this a positive ideological change that would shift responsibilities from the welfare state to groups and individuals. Even those participants who worked in the public sector were in favour of this change.

The group dwelled for quite a long while on another problem that initially had nothing to do with elder care, the welfare state, or the third sector. The participants claimed
that their generation took their work too seriously. They admitted that their attitude to work was almost passionate, but at the same time they had noticed that working conditions and the atmosphere in the workplace had changed for the worse during the economic recovery in the late 1990s. The group began to look for safe havens from the distress of work, and quite surprisingly turned to the option of voluntary action.

The art of connections entered the picture when the participants imposed the promises of the third sector on themselves. It appeared that the solutions of elder care could not be separated from the problems of the workplace. Ordinary citizens cannot assume responsibility for elder care unless actions are taken at the same time to relieve their pressures at work. Curiously enough, the group concluded that the effort to improve elder care should start from the job market. This question would effectively challenge the often hollow political or academic rhetoric that attack the welfare state either from a neoliberalist or communitarian framework.

The Voters project and the two community groups were somewhat less creative in their deliberations. In Voters the problems boiled down largely to lack of time. The participants complained that in their first discussion they only just got started, whereas in the second session the discussion was dominated quite self-righteously by the political candidates. In the community projects the groups had more time for deliberation than any other groups. Even so, their contributions remained less impressive than those of the Citizens! groups. This has probably nothing to do with the participants’ competencies, but is due to local circumstances that seem to impose various restrictions on their imagination.

In both community groups local affairs – and especially those relating to local politics – seemed to be too distant from the participants’ everyday lives. At first glance this may seem paradoxical, but upon closer inspection we can find quite obvious explanations. Firstly, there is nothing surprising about the assumption that citizens feel alienated from local administration. Research has shown that local participation tends to be rather passive and people think that local political power is excessively centralised (see Pekola-Sjöblom 1997; Borg 1998, 91). From this it follows that when the residents are allowed (or even compelled) to participate, they feel inadequately informed. Local politicians and civil servants, often make the situation worse by setting high informational standards for lay people who wish to participate. This was clearly evident in our projects when the groups were given the opportunity to meet local authorities. Independent of the discussions themselves, civil servants did not give very high marks for residents’ knowledge or rate of interest. Nor did they think that the lack of active participation was a serious problem for local democracy (Heikkilä & Kunelius 2000).

Secondly, the lack of creativity within the groups points at a lack of representativity within the projects. The assumption in the projects was that the groups cannot and need not be strictly representative. It appeared that all groups were slightly biased in one way or another, but it was only in the community groups that this caused real problems. It turned out, for instance, that among the participants there were no regular customers of health care services, social welfare services, or even children’s day care. In both groups there was a strong overrepresentation of rather well-to-do, middle-aged residents. In addition, the group in Siilinjärvi turned out be rather polarised with regard to place of residence, which resulted in radically different experiences and perspectives to their municipality. As the participants became aware of these biases (for which they were in no way responsible), this clearly undermined their motivation and creativity.
Thirdly, and most directly connected to ideas about the public, the community groups only considered it necessary to address local issues and perspectives. Unlike the community groups, the Citizens! and Voters refused to respect such categorisations of reality and moved with competence from local to global, and from practical to existential. What makes this comparison important is that the issues that concerned the participants in the community groups were not by definition local, quite the contrary. As noted above, the problems with mental health care in Siilinjärvi were essentially due to government policy. Some participants in the group and particularly the local authorities argued that the discussion was unnecessary and irrelevant because the local municipality is neither responsible for the policy, nor can it be changed through local action. Curiously enough, similar questions about mental health care have been raised in other parts of the country as well, but it remains unclear whether the problem should be addressed at the national level, where the decisions were made, or at the local level, where the problems are faced. It seems obvious that either level alone is inadequate.

In sum, these examples provide a vivid illustration of how the rationality created in the discussions served as a resource for the newsroom. This resource was developed by the reporters, but it could have been put into practice far more effectively. The project team had no problems composing a list of more than 60 suggestions for spin-off stories after the Citizens! discussions. These suggestions were roughly divided into three categories: (i) participants’ direct questions to authorities, institutions, or other stakeholders; (ii) reports on the scene: listening to people afflicted by the problems concerned; and (iii) inquiries into the causes of the problems.

Only few items on the list were utilised, which was a disappointment to reporters and participants alike. Due to this disappointment reporters did not bother to compose similar lists about the community projects and the Voters, which meant that resource was utilised even more poorly. Later, the journalists have recognised, however, that the rationality of the groups has not expired. Most of these assignments would be still relevant, and some of them have been tackled more than one year after the discussions.

Critical Voices

The third feature in Carey’s hopeful, albeit not perhaps historically adequate description of the public, is its criticalness. The critical competence of our groups was probably made apparent in the previous chapters that dealt with vested interests and rationality. However, criticism had a different role to play in each group. Its outcomes also differed to some extent.

For some groups criticism served as the foundation on the basis of which they gradually began to see their stakes and develop definitions for their problems and to contrive solutions. For others, the critique was the outcome of lengthy deliberation. Two extreme groups on this dimension were the community group in Suonenjoki and the young adults of Citizens! project. In spite of taking different routes, both groups arrived at quite similar results.

In Suonenjoki it was not difficult for the group to conclude that their municipality was in the middle of an economic and spiritual crisis. The immediate context for this crisis was the severe economic recession that swept across Finland in the 1990s, but beyond these general circumstances the group also detected local incompetence and apathy. As noted above, the group did not, however, want to go on lamenting their fate. Instead, they preferred to envision a better future based on active local participation. While the deliberation strengthened the argument in the group, it also developed their
critical abilities. To put it metaphorically, the group vaccinated itself against the most obvious counterarguments that would attempt to dismiss their initiatives.

When the group met the newly appointed mayor, the participants suggested that the local administration should set up discussion groups to assist decision-makers and civil servants in their work. The mayor and a civil servant responsible of town planning both accepted the idea, but they maintained that citizens’ juries should not be allowed to upset local democratic practices. The group responded by asking whether it really is viable to assume that residents’ discussions could undermine representative democracy; surely that is an untenable position?

This question manages to be critical and constructive at the same time in its own right. Still, it is hardly a satisfactory response to the local authorities’ concerns about the rules of democracy. It seem plausible that without such rules the discussion groups may have either too little or too much power respective to representative institutions. The problem may be solved simply by making the groups’ work public. On the one hand, this would give the groups the opportunity to achieve power they need in order to have any influence at all. On the other hand, by submitting their contributions to public scrutiny and evaluation would make the groups accountable. This point is all the more significant, because new participatory practices for local planning – such as Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Local Agenda 21 in Finland – pay no particular attention to the publicness of these practices (Heikkilä & Kunelius 2000).

For young adults, criticism was not a point of departure but rather an end-point. In the same vein as in the case of ugly department stores, the issue of high housing costs became framed as a question of power. One quite successful event during the project took place some three months after the discussions, when the newsroom took an assignment from the group and investigated the explanations for high housing costs. The authorities explained in the leading story that there was quite simply a shortage of apartments, which in turn was due to the recession in the building industry in the mid-1990s. Even though the industry had pulled through the worst and was now picking up, construction firms were not yet able to produce new flats fast enough, the experts claimed.

One participant, who was allowed to comment on this response, said that while the argument makes sense, the experts were curiously silent about how the markets work. Building contractors are, of course, in the business to make profit. Therefore, he continued, the key question is not how many apartments there are, but whom they are built for. Who are the building industry’s most favoured clients? The following quote included in the story pushes this critique forward rather succinctly:

I can see cranes out in the dock area, but hardly anywhere else. It’s a nice spot out there with a beautiful view, so these apartments are going to be really expensive.

(Savon Sanomat, February 16, 1999).

These two examples illustrate how the discussion groups concluded their work with challenging questions – often phrased as ‘how come?’ – that should demand immediate responses. Clearly, not all arguments made by laypeople are correct, but this does not mean that their criticism and sometimes unorthodox questions are not publicly relevant. Their exposure to public scrutiny is not merely a way of holding actors in the public and private sector accountable for their deeds, but also a good way of rectifying misconceptions that ordinary citizens and institutions both have. This differs radically from common news practices according to which a reporter is expected to eliminate misconceptions and errors before a piece of news is even printed. It is not unreasonable to argue that this practice erases not only errors, but also important and critical arguments.
Therefore, journalists might do better by submitting the evaluation of their relevance and 'factuality' to public scrutiny.\textsuperscript{10}

The groups were not merely critical towards politicians and those in power. They also addressed questions about news journalism and the projects they had attended. While in most cases the participants were pleased with the projects and the stories covering their discussions, they also questioned whether the paper would be able to maintain this approach. The fact that spin-off stories remained rare and that even in those that were published the participants could not always find their arguments, raised doubts as to whether the experiments were completely sincere. For some of them, the projects proved to be just projects rather than something that could make a lasting difference in newswork. In Siilinjärvi some participants went even further in their criticism. Those who did not see the relevance of discussing the mental care situation felt that the discussion was motivated more by the researcher than by the participants.

The criticism towards the paper and the project team is indeed a healthy sign because in a way it proves that the participants have vested interests in news journalism. Even if the experiments did not lead to major changes, they did at least make themselves and the performance of the paper more accountable to the participants. Most participants said they assessed the paper and how news journalism works more carefully than they used to before. Now it matters to them who has written the story, who have been interviewed, and what questions have been asked. Here interest equals criticism.

Having said that, it has to be added that even if the project managed to enhance the participants' critical competencies with respect to journalism, this is hardly enough. The emergence of publics remained rather superficial in all three aspects: few stakeholders chose to stand up in public, stories were inadequately transformed into public processes (even though some promising signs seem to be emerging), and the budding criticism failed to bring about any major upheavals either in the newsroom or among the readers. On the other hand, the objective was not to change everything, but rather to gain experience from which new questions and initiatives might spring. That much was certainly achieved.

**Discussion**

Experimental research is more concerned with the assumptions underlying our routines than with 'reality in itself'. In this vein the projects analysed above serve as an hypothesis which clearly questions some taken-for-granted truths about citizens' capacities and motivation to act publicly.

In contrast to what vulgar elite theorists would assume, the 46 participants in our discussion groups appeared to be quite happy to participate in public affairs when they were given the opportunity to do so. A discussion - or rather a series of deliberative sessions - seemed like an appropriate method for developing their participatory motivation into relevant arguments, questions, and insights. The participants were also quite competent to evaluate critically and constructively issues in which they had previously shown a vested interest. This would seem to convince that citizens respective to news journalism are qualified for more than merely being silent observers and loyal subscribers. Even if these conclusions only cover the experiences of the participants, and not the readership in general, the outcome is significant an encouraging both conceptually and practically.

Conceptually, the experiments underscore the need to distinguish the public from the audience. They also give some clues as to what the public might mean empirically and
contribute to further discussion on how it differs from other conceptions of the public, such as those advocated by cultural audience studies, or the discourses of communication policies. In addition, the analysis shows that Carey’s description of the public has not only historical or nostalgic value, but it may provide inspiration for conceiving journalistic practices that attempt to address readers and viewers as citizens with vested interests rather than mute observers, self-absorbing consumers, or uninterested masses.

The big question that relates the projects to two configurations of journalism described in the beginning has to do with vested interests and their place in news journalism. According to ideas of thin journalism the news should be safeguarded from vested interests, particularly from those who appear to be unrepresentative. This idea seems to restrict or even preclude news journalism for taking advantage of citizens’ public potentials. From the idea of strong journalism the argument could be quite the opposite: vested interests could safeguard the relevance of news journalism in the eyes of publics whoever and wherever they might be and even in those of self-critical journalists. These formulations, I think, refer quite aptly to two fundamental assumptions about news journalism and its democratic performance. It is not clear, what the consequences would be like, if we systematically chose one instead of the other. It is likely, though, that the practical consequences would be different from each other.

If journalists were to take the ideas of strong journalism and the experiences of the projects presented here seriously, the question that follows is: How is news journalism supposed to take advantage of citizens’ competencies, and are journalists actually comfortable doing this? Surely, taking citizens and their vested interests seriously and create public occasions for their deliberations entails risks. One of them is to admit the shortcomings of newswork. At least our projects proved that the contributions of discussion groups were a hard nut to crack with the tools available. The story formats did not work satisfactorily, the team was unable to produce enough spin-off stories, and engaging public processes remained virtually non-existent.

All this suggests that a reorientation of journalistic practices should not be confused with religious experiences, as is often suggested by critics of public journalism (see Shepard 1994). Instead, a strengthening of the citizens-orientation requires several things at the same time. It is not enough simply to organise citizens’ discussion groups and see what journalists can make of them. It is not enough to write engaging stories about citizens’ concerns, unless the newsroom is not prepared for maintaining its interest and capable of developing the public discussion. Finally, it is not enough for one or two journalists to commit themselves to this sort of work, if the rest of the newsroom does its best to ignore - or worse - to debilitate these efforts.

At Savon Sanomat the conclusion drawn upon completion of the projects was (self-) critical. For journalists, the projects appeared to be too technical and too difficult to cope with. The reporters pointed out that the resources made available were too limited for such a pioneering effort. This interpretation was not, however, their final word. Thanks to the insistence of one reporter involved in the projects, the paper is currently experimenting again. During its first months, the news section for local coverage has shown some early and moderate signs of progress both in terms of the quality of stories and in terms of their consequences outside the paper. However, the steps are still very small, and there are no firm indications of any profound forthcoming changes in the newsroom.

Nonetheless the projects and their relative successes have cultivated a favourable spirit for further experiments. It is against this spirit to say anything conclusive about
what these experiments will bring about. The best way to dismiss new ideas is to jump conclusions and escape reflection. The fact that journalists at their daily work are often compelled to do so make these experiments and their analysis even more challenging and important.

Notes

1. This observation is based on Veikko Pietilä’s (2000) unpublished survey on contemporary audience studies. The analysis is based on a corpus mostly of cultural audience studies published between 1985 and 1999.
3. Carey’s reading of history differs radically from Schudson’s (1998) analysis of the same period. While Carey claims to be writing ‘more useable history’, Schudson quite explicitly wants to question nostalgic interpretations as obvious misconceptions of history (see also Schudson 1997a).
4. As political scientists are inclined to do, Barber does not even mention news journalism. Anderson et al. (1996, 161) would take this as evidence of how democracy theorists have bought the image that journalists have been selling. That image portrays journalists as conduits of information who do their job well when they are politically invisible.
5. For descriptions of public journalism projects in the US, see Charity 1995; Schaffer & Miller 1995; Ford & Schaffer 1998. The impact of these projects has been assessed by Lambeth et al. 1998 and Thorsen et al. 1997.
6. The interviews expose three discourses on journalism (Heikkilä 1998). The paternalistic discourse emphasises the values of independent reporting and pays no particular attention to recipients either as audience or as public. The market voluntarist discourse denies the right of paternalists to judge what is best for the readers and endorses news that cater for the audience with the richest possible sortiment of ‘truths’, perspectives, and lifestyles. The critical discourse pushes journalism towards a better understanding of everyday life, but it is unable to showing how it could be done. Two former discourses resemble Bech-Karlens’s (1995) dichotomy enlightenment journalism vs. service journalism, whereas the critical discourse is absent in Bech-Karlens.
7. An illuminating, albeit exceptional example is the Springfield News-Leader (Missouri), where the entire newsroom was assigned to detect forms of juvenile crime committed in the afternoons. The idea that at first sounded hazardous to reporter was as later interpreted as successful (see Ford & Schaffer 1998, 4-15).
8. All participants were asked to evaluate their experiences by responding to an open questionnaire. Thirty-six out of 46 participants returned the questionnaire.
9. These are almost the exact words with which Arendt (1990, 127 [1963]) describes “public happiness”. These views contradict Schudson’s (1997b, 304) argument that only sociable conversations can be enjoyable, but ‘serious democratic discussions’ are deeply uncomfortable.
10. This argument is developed further by Renvall & Reunanen (1999). They ask whether news practices should not be aimed at representing ready-made truths, but become more adjusted to the idea that the news should contribute to a communal hunt of truth.

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The Economics of Sports Programming

TERJE GAUSTAD

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the first telecast of a sporting event. I’m not sure what it is we’re doing here, but I certainly hope it turns out well for you people who are watching.

Bill Stern, announcing a 1939 baseball game between Columbia and Princeton universities

Sports programming has become increasingly popular over the last few decades, and as television stations scramble for rights to the most popular sports, prices soar. About twenty years ago, in 1980, the Norwegian Football Association earned approximately NOK 1 million a year from all media rights to its soccer games. In 1998 the total media rights revenues reached NOK 40 million. From being a rather symbolic contribution to the association’s total revenues, the sports rights revenues now represent one of the most important revenue sources for Norwegian soccer. Other popular sports have experienced similar developments, and in many European countries the rise in demand and prices for sports rights was seen before the Norwegian developments (Baskerville, 1999).

Researchers and scholars have offered likely explanations for this development, including the liberalization of television markets with increased levels of competition between broadcasters and the general increase in transmission capacity (see for example Cowie and Williams, 1997; and Sloane, 1997). It is, however, not the primary aim of this article to explain the sharp rise in sports rights prices, but rather to take a step back and examine the economic characteristics of sports as television content. The aim is to sketch a conceptual framework for analyses of not only the soaring rights prices seen over the last decade or so, but also of the new and difficult problems arising within this field.

Based on theory developed for economic analysis of audiovisual media products in general (see Waterman, 1988; Wildman and Siwek, 1988; Hoskins and Mirus, 1988; Owen and Wildman, 1992; Waterman, 1993), I will attempt to place televised sports in this theoretical framework, and suggest changes and adjustments to these general theoretical models where this seems fruitful for a better economic understanding of sports programming.

I start by looking at the relationship between sports and television, which creates the basis for our object of study, TV sports. Next, I discuss the basic economic characteristics of television programming in general. Special attention is given to its public good...
element, the following implications for the products' cost structure, as well as the concept of cultural discount. I then move on to consider TV sports in particular and discuss areas where this product diverts from other programming categories. The time sensitivity of sports programming and its somewhat special cultural discount elements are discussed here. Finally, I address audiovisual media's special form for price discrimination, known as windowing, and discuss how it can be applied to time-sensitive content such as TV sports.

**Sports as An Entertainment Product - A New Paradigm**

The object of study, sports programming, is created in the meeting between sports and television. This is a relationship with long traditions, as sports have always been a part of television. The roots of sports, on the other hand, naturally go indefinitely much further back than the introduction of television. The sports we know today grew out of popular leisure activities, which gradually have been turned into more organized forms of competitive physical activity. From the very beginning, sport has embodied an element of participation and popularity.

The relationship between sports and media goes back to the mid-18th century when newspapers began reporting sporting event results. This was clearly a win-win situation for both parties. Newspapers secured new readers interested in the sports, while the sports organizations gained from the extra publicity that made their events more popular. When televised sports were first introduced, some observers in the sports community saw it as a threat to the traditional win-win relationship between the media and sports. The reason was that sports, to a certain extent, had been commercialized through the broad interest they had achieved from newspaper and radio coverage. Ticket sales from people who had been tempted by the media coverage to actually attend the events represented an important revenue source for the sports organizations. This was “pay-per-view” entertainment long before anything similar would be possible through television. The introduction of television broadcasts, however, made it possible for people to “attend” the events directly from their own living rooms, and sports organizers saw this as a serious challenge to their “pay-per-view” revenues from attendance. However, soon one would see that in the same manner as recorded music gave artists fuller concert halls rather than empty seats, the marketing effects of television transmissions overshadowed any lost attendance from people who chose to follow the sporting event through television (Rowe, 1996).

Even if the relationship between sports and television goes back to the very beginning of television and has gradually developed into the kind of TV sports offered today, televised sport has always been a spin-off product (Rowe, 1996). The broadcasters transmitted to their viewers events that were arranged with little thought for the television transmission, and the traditional “non-commercial” values of the sports dominated. The product was only to a minor – and necessary – degree affected by and adjusted to commercial interests.

This seems to have changed with the enormous growth in revenues from sales of television rights. With sports' increasing dependency on television revenues came a shift in paradigm from understanding sports as an ideal activity based on its non-commercial roots, toward increasingly viewing sports as entertainment products. This change followed the development of the television markets and came to the United States in the 1960s, and to most European countries in the 1980s and 1990s. While the value of sports previously rested on the quality and span of the sport activities in them-
selves, it is now under the new paradigm based on how well the sport is suited for television transmission. This is not a change in paradigm in the strict sense that the new paradigm replaces and excludes the old. Rather, the “sports-as-entertainment-products” paradigm has been squeezed in and exists side by side – and in constant conflict – with the traditional sports paradigm.

Media-Adjustment and Media Created Sport
The entry of the “sports-as-entertainment-products” paradigm has resulted in two tendencies observed internationally in televised sports. First, there has been a trend toward adjusting the sports so that they best fit the needs of broadcasters and TV viewers. Among the most common adjustments are to modify the schedule of the events, change rules to avoid too much overtime, as well as weed out “boring” segments that may tempt viewers to change the channel. A good illustration of such television-driven modifications of traditional sports is described by Thomas (1997), who analyses a five-year deal media-giant Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation entered into with the British Rugby League in 1995. Based on this agreement – which had a financial framework of £87 million – it was decided to implement significant changes in the organizational structure of the sport. Among these were the decision to change the season from winter to summer to avoid competition from soccer; a new international top level league was set up; in some areas two or three smaller clubs were merged into a stronger club (even if one later had to reverse this process due to stronger than expected conflict with loyal fans); and as a part of a strategy to establish clubs in the larger metropolitan areas a new club was set up in Paris.

Established sports adjusting to new sports paradigms is, however, not a completely new phenomenon, and should be seen as an integrated part of a sport’s natural development. Similar changes occurred toward the end of the 19th century when the “sport-as-a-game” paradigm gradually gave in to the “sport-as-an-organized-competition” paradigm. Scully (1995) describes how sports such as baseball, where each game in the early days could last for days, was adjusted so that each game would fit into a one-day program. This was done to accommodate easier organization of tournaments, and it also made the sport more attractive for spectators to follow.

The other tendency seen in the wake of the “sports-as-entertainment-products” paradigm is that the idea of a sport as a television-based entertainment product also opens up the possibility to create new sports shaped primarily to satisfy the needs of broadcasters. One example of this is the forms of extreme sports organized by the X-Dream company. When this company launched a pan-European sports channel it needed the kinds of sports that attract younger audiences. The prices for such rights among the ordinary and established sports were prohibitively high, and the company thus created its own variation of extreme sports at relatively low production costs (Gosling, 1999). To what extent these new media-created sports will survive shifting demand among television audiences remains an open question.

Basic Economic Characteristics of Television Programming
Based on the “sports-as-entertainment-products” paradigm we may say that televised sport is an audiovisual media product in the same manner as TV news, game shows, TV drama, movies, etc. Each of these categories of television programming has certain traits and qualities that must be considered in economic analyses of these products, but
they still all share a set of basic economic characteristics setting them apart from “normal” goods such as pizza or soap.

The first step toward developing a better understanding of the economics of televised sports is thus to identify and discuss these shared characteristics.

The Public Good Elements

One of the most important economic characteristics of audiovisual media products is their strong public good element. A public good is defined as a good or a service where one consumer’s consumption does not reduce the amount of the good or service available for consumption by others. A lighthouse is a good example of a public good. One ship’s use of the lighthouse does not in any way reduce the amount of lighthouse available to other ships. We say that the product is non-rival. Furthermore, the owner of the lighthouse cannot select a group of ships that may use it and exclude others. We call this type of product non-excludable. A private good, on the other hand, can only be used by several consumers if it is split up in smaller pieces. If you eat a whole ice cream cone, nobody else can eat it. The product is rival and excludable.

Television programming has, like other media products, both public good and private good elements. The performance in itself, which is caught on video or film or transmitted directly, is a public good. The physical medium and transmission capacity, however, are private goods. One television viewer’s consumption of the evening news or The Godfather does not reduce the amount of news or movie available for other viewers. These products will thus always be non-rival. Whether the product is non-excludable depends on the specific situation in which it is consumed. If The Godfather is shown on a television channel that is not encrypted or coded, it is non-excludable, but if it is shown on an encrypted pay TV service it is excludable since not all viewers have access to this channel. The strength of the public good element will thus vary. However, when a television channel transmits the evening news, the same channel cannot transmit any other program at that exact time, so the transmission capacity is a private good that program suppliers must compete for. Similarly, when one TV station has a high-quality tape of The Godfather, no other TV station can use this copy of the tape. The physical medium – the tape – is thus a private good.

Televised sports, and television programming in general, are different from most other products in that they have a relatively strong public good element. The value of a television program for a viewer is determined almost exclusively by the product’s public good element: How good the story the program is based upon is, how talented the writers are, and the quality of the actors, anchors, camera-crew, etc. The value of this element to one viewer is not affected by the fact that other viewers also watch the program. For TV sports such as televised soccer matches, the value to the viewer is dependent on such elements as the quality of the players, the uncertainty of outcome, and the quality of the coverage (placement of cameras, good commentators, etc.). These are the factors that determine the value of televised sports’ public good element.

For a private good, its rival character will impose strict limitations on the price at which the producer is willing to sell it. In general, such goods will not be sold unless the price per unit covers at least its production and distribution costs. A television program producer, however, will at least in theory not refrain from selling his program to one extra viewer even if that viewer pays a lower price than the average production and distribution cost per viewer. Due to the product’s non-rival character, the revenues from
each new viewer represent a net addition to the overall profits as long as distribution costs are covered.

This phenomenon is probably most easily seen in the international trade in audio-visual products such as television programs. As an example, let us assume that the Italian series A soccer matches, which in Italy are broadcast live on the pay TV service Tele+ with highlights on the public broadcaster RAI (Baskerville 1999), are sold to the Norwegian public broadcaster NRK for transmission in the Norwegian market. In the home market these matches are sold for an average of x lire per television viewer. Even if NRK should only pay one tenth of that for each of its viewers, the total value of the NRK-contract would be a net gain for Italian soccer (if we assume that the satellite transmission costs to Norway are marginal compared to the value of the contract). Sales to mini-markets such as Iceland will also be interesting to the Italians as long as the value of the contracts exceeds satellite transmission costs. The strong variations found from market to market in the price for a television program show that price primarily reflects the value viewers and broadcasters in different markets place on the program, rather than the “production value”.

The Cost-Structure of Television Programs

A closely related and basic economic feature of most media products is their low marginal cost of distribution compared to the relatively high first-copy cost of production (Waterman, 1993). For audiovisual products this effect is particularly strong. The first-copy cost is related to the public good element of a media product, while the marginal distribution cost is related to its private good element. High first copy costs and low marginal distribution costs create substantial economies of scale that can be utilized by distributing the product to the largest possible audience.

The cost structure is illustrated in Figure 1 below. The relatively high first-copy cost gives high average costs at low volumes – when the program is consumed by a small number of viewers. Low marginal distribution costs ($c'$), however, create an average cost curve that falls quickly at small volumes and flattens out at higher volumes.

Given that the producer is able to sell the program for the same fixed price to all buyers, it is clear that the producer’s profit increases with the size of the audience. For each extra consumer, average cost goes down and the marginal profit will thus increase.

Figure 1.
The assumption of equal price for all buyers will, however, be neither realistic nor desirable in all situations. In the example from Italian soccer we saw that the producer does not always have to sell extra units at a constant price for sales to be profitable. In the discussion of windowing below, it is also shown that keeping a fixed price is not desirable.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the production costs, or the first copy cost itself, can be regarded as sunk costs as soon as the program, or in our case the sports program, is produced. Evaluations of the offers from potential buyers should therefore be considered in relationship to the distribution costs (marginal costs) related to the transaction itself rather than the combined production and distribution costs. From such evaluations any sale is desirable as long as the distribution costs related to the transaction are covered. If the producer is only able to obtain offers where the prices are equal to or only marginally above the distribution costs, the production will of course create a deficit for the producer, even if the sales contribute to reducing that loss.

Established sports will thus have an advantage compared to media-created sports, as the production costs of the established sporting event can be considered a sunk cost, allowing the organizer to consider offers from television broadcasters against the distribution costs only. Sports created especially for the media, however, exist primarily as a source for television coverage, and offers should thus be evaluated against the average costs based on both production and distribution costs. When such assessments show a deficit, the basis for the existence of the whole sport is lost.

Even if certain adjustments of this simple cost evaluation are necessary to achieve a level of realistic detail describing real situations in the media sector, it illustrates the fundamental cost situation that is the basis for such adjusted descriptions.

Cultural Discount and the Value Lost in Trade
A media product sold both within and outside its home market will, ceteris paribus, achieve a lower level of popularity and demand outside the home market than within, due to cultural differences. The loss created when a media product is exported outside its home market is known as cultural discount (Wildman and Siwek, 1988; Collins, 1990; Waterman, 1993). Returning to our example of Italian soccer: The average Norwegian viewer will put a lower value on the Italian Series A matches than will the average Italian. The Italian Series A matches thus suffer a cultural discount when exported from Italy to Norway.

Media economists have traditionally considered cultural discount in connection with trade in film and television programs between nations. However, cultural discount is not necessarily dependent on definitions of the home market tied to national borders. It can follow from a number of cultural phenomena such as language and religion. These cultural differences may, but do not necessarily, follow national borders. The degree of cultural discount depends on the cultural distance between the home market and the export market. Assessments of such cultural distances or differences should be made dependent on the nature of the product in question. A local television station in one part of a country may find that the programs it produces will suffer from a significant cultural discount if offered to local station in another part of the country. We might, however, assume that a soap series produced in Venezuela only will suffer a minor cultural discount if it is exported to Argentina.

The importance of this phenomenon for televised sports is discussed in chapter 4 below.
**Special Characteristics of Sports as Television Content**

Television sports differ from most other forms of television programming in certain key areas. Applying conclusions drawn from general economic analyses of television programming to sports programming without considering these special features may thus produce false results. Of these special economic features for TV sports, the two most important are discussed here: First, its special qualities with regard to time sensitivity and durability and, second, the factors which determine the degree of cultural discount for sports programming.

**Televised Sports: A Time-Sensitive Product**

While it is not crucial for a viewer's interest in such television programming as film, drama, documentary or entertainment that the program is shown a week or even a year after it is produced, this time aspect is essential for the valuation of most sports programming. Yesterday's soccer match will, for most, be a relatively unattractive program choice as the results have already been published in the newspapers. Even minor shifts in the transmission time from the time the event is actually taking place may result in a substantial loss of value. Let us say you are watching a soccer game between your home country and another nation, and that it is for some reason televised with a one-hour delay on the channel you are watching, while your neighbor is watching it live on a pay TV service. If you catch your neighbor singing "we are the champions" during the half time break on your channel, the second half of the game will definitely be of lesser value for you than it was to your neighbor.

On this basis some have drawn the conclusion that televised sports are products that only have significant value to the viewers in "real time"—while the actual event is taking place (Cowie and Williams, 1997). Such a conclusion may be somewhat too strong in certain cases, but there is no doubt that televised sports, along with news, are among the least durable forms of television content.

This time sensitivity has to do with the uncertainty of outcome element in sports. After the event has occurred and the results are known, the excitement is lost and with it much of the value of the program. However, we may assume that in most cases other elements than uncertainty of outcome also contribute to the overall valuation of the sports broadcast. Such elements may include the sporting performance itself, general interest in the athlete, etc. How dependent the valuation of a sports program is on time sensitivity varies with the relative weight each of these factors are given in the evaluation of any given program. The value of sprint final competition, for example, may rest heavily on the uncertainty-of-outcome element and the demand for this program will thus decline rapidly after the event has taken place. On the other hand, one may assume that other elements than the uncertainty of outcome are given relatively more weight in the evaluation of a freestyle snowboard competition or figure-skating, making these programs less time-sensitive.

**A “Unique” Product**

Most sports programs are difficult to copy or substitute, compared with other forms of television programming. The movie “Mission Impossible” may quite easily be substituted with a James Bond-movie, CNN’s international news service can be replaced with BBC’s service, and so on, but it would be considerably more difficult to find good alter-
natives for the Olympics or the Super Bowl. TV sports represent a content category where the products are more heterogeneous than what is found within most other categories. In the short run it is thus more difficult for the media to find good substitutes for attractive television sports rights, and each sports organization will encounter difficulties in trying to adjust supply to changes in the quantity demanded by the media. The result is a quite inelastic supply that produces significant price adjustments for sports rights when there is shifting demand. This uniqueness may also be reflected in competition policy. UK’s competition authorities have, for example, defined the relevant market for Premier League’s television rights as that of only this league’s rights since no other leagues or sports were considered real substitutes (Henriksen, 1999).

In the longer run, the availability of real substitutes will be better. Through active branding strategies, new sports may achieve higher popularity and the viewers may also be better acquainted with new sports that could serve as substitutes for established and popular television sports.

Televised Sports and Cultural Discount

In the media economic literature on international trade in films and television programs, language is the most commonly used variable to operationalize cultural discount (see for example Wildman and Siwek, 1993), and cultural discount is usually considered in those cases where products are exported from one linguistic market to another. There are, of course, good reasons why language has become such a prominent element in the cultural discount discussions. For most categories of television programming, language is the basis for creating meaning and understanding the content, and foreign language productions are thus either subtitled or dubbed, which, ceteris paribus, makes the programs less competitive against national productions. Furthermore, there is quite often strong correlation between language and other cultural differences. However, for televised sport language is not a good indicator for cultural discount. As Cowie and Williams (1997) argue, no other forms of television content are less dependent on language (except perhaps music videos and pornography). This does not mean that TV sports are exempt from cultural discount effects, as a number of other cultural factors play a part, but compared to other genres TV sport has a unique opportunity to cross linguistic barriers.

The local and traditional compositions of sport interest are probably among the strongest elements determining cultural discount for sports programming. These elements include viewers’ awareness and knowledge about different sports. British cricket would probably suffer from considerable cultural discount if sold in the Norwegian market, while the effect would be smaller for sales in the Indian market. Furthermore, the viewers’ knowledge of and interest in the athletes in each sport is important for cultural discount. One would for example expect that English soccer, which has been broadcast in the Norwegian market for years, suffers less from cultural discount in Norway than does Swedish soccer, even if Sweden is culturally and geographically much closer to Norway. But Swedish soccer has suffered from too small a presence on Norwegian television. Norwegian viewers know the English teams and players but lack such knowledge about the sport in their neighbor country. The fact that a number of Norwegian soccer players have been exported to English teams would probably further diminish the degree of cultural discount.
While language is a variable that should be considered fixed, awareness and knowledge of different sports and athletes represent much more flexible variables. We may thus conclude that TV sports, though they suffer some cultural discount effects in the short run, only suffer relatively minor effects in the longer run.

**Windowing**

In discussing the cost structure above, it was argued that Italian soccer organizations always should sell, even to mini-markets such as Iceland, as long as the contract price exceeds the distribution costs of the transaction. This is a particular case of a phenomenon known as windowing.

Windowing is common for most audiovisual products and follows naturally from these products’ strong public good element (Owen and Wildman, 1992). The producer’s average costs will, as shown above, decline for each new consumer, and for any given price it will thus be in the producer’s interest to sell to as many as possible. In the Italian soccer example it was demonstrated how this is done through exports, but through windowing the home market may also be expanded.

Windowing is best understood as – and is also a case of – price discrimination. The goal is to make each viewer, or each consumer, pay the highest price that viewer is willing to pay for the product, and at the same time, sell to as many viewers as possible. The problem with setting one price for all buyers within the home market, or any other geographically defined market, is that for almost any given price there will always be some willing to pay an even higher price. The difference between the maximum price the buyer would be willing to pay and that set by the producer represents a loss of potential revenues for the producer. At the same time, for almost any given price there will always be a number of potential buyers not willing to pay this price, but who would still be willing to pay a price above the producer’s average cost. The difference between the price these potential buyers would have been willing to pay and the average cost also represents a loss of potential revenues.

The theoretically optimal solution would be to ask each and every consumer to pay the maximum amount they are willing to pay. As this would be practically impossible, one may choose to settle for a system dividing the consumers into groups according to their willingness to pay. Figure 2 illustrates how the ability to segment consumers into such groups increases the producer’s profits. Let us first assume that the producer can only set one price and chooses price A. At this level he will be able to sell $X_A$ units, and his profits will equal the area marked a $((A-AC) * X_A)$. Let us now assume that the producer in addition can set a second price B, but that the original buyers still pay price A. At the price level B a new group of buyers $X_B - X_A$ will emerge, and the producer’s profit from these will equal the area marked b $((B-BC) * (X_B - X_A))$. This profit will be a net addition to the producer’s total profits, thanks to the producer’s ability to segment the buyers into two separate groups.

As seen in this example, it is a prerequisite for effective windowing that the producer be able to make the group with the highest willingness to pay stay at price A. If the product is freely offered for both price A and B, all buyers will naturally choose to buy at price B, which would not give an optimal solution for the producer since $(B-BC) * X_B$ is less than $\alpha + \beta$. 
For most television programming the audience is segmented along two dimensions, ensuring that those with the highest willingness to pay actually pay the highest price. These dimensions are time – the viewer’s willingness to wait – and quality – the viewer’s sensitivity for quality. To illustrate, let us assume that a television movie is first shown on pay TV (the first window) and one year later on advertising based free TV (the second window). Viewers willing to pay the highest price for this film will choose to see it on pay TV for two reasons: They do not want to wait for it to appear on free TV (time), and they want to see it without the interruption of advertising breaks (quality). It is not possible for viewers with one or both of these preferences to view the film for free. The segmentation is thus functional.

As pointed out in section 4 above, televised sport is a very time-sensitive form of programming. This is reflected in the generally low level of windowing applied to TV sports. To the extent that windowing is used at all, the time span between the live broadcast (first window) and the replay (second window) has been very short (Owen and Wildman, 1992). Soccer matches are, for example, rebroadcast late at night the same day they were broadcast live.

Note that in the television movie example above, the segmentation along the time and quality dimensions are dependent on each other. One cannot choose the combinations of early (premiere) and low quality (ad-breaks), or late (delayed) and high quality (no ad-breaks). For TV sports, which undeniably suffer restrictions in the form of significant value lost along the time dimension, it would be useful to find new ways of windowing allowing segmentation of viewers along the quality dimension for each point on the time axis. Increased possibilities for more useful and effective forms of windowing along these lines are expected to emerge with the implementation of digital television. Trials have already been conducted in the coverage of Formula 1 motor sport, where the viewer can choose between two forms of live coverage: Traditional coverage and a more expensive version where the viewer throughout the race is fed more camera angels, cameras placed in each driver’s car, etc. (Lyons, 1999). In this case, viewers are segmented along the quality dimension without compromising the value of live coverage on the time-axis. With such possibilities of independent segmenting along the two dimensions we could easily produce for windows:
The Economics of Sports Programming

Window 1: Live – Multi-Camera
Window 2: Live – Traditional Cameras
Window 3: Delayed – Multi-Camera
Window 4: Delayed – Traditional Cameras

This independent form of windowing along the time and quality axis is illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3.

As the availability of more windows generally generates higher revenues and profits (Owen and Wildman, 1992), a development toward more flexibility in windowing independent of the time dimension would be of a relatively higher value for televised sports than for other programming since TV sports have a disadvantage, compared to most other forms of programming, in its time sensitivity.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the basic economics of televised sports presented in this article contributes to creating a basis for empirical research. At the same time it may be helpful for analysts and practitioners in the market of sports rights in making more solid market analyses and forecasting further developments in this market.

By incorporating televised sports into existing media economic theory and adjusting for those factors that set it apart from other categories of television content, we see that the public good element and cost structure of TV sports create a strong incentive for expanding potential television audiences through attracting new groups of viewers and sales to new markets. As soon as a sports program is produced, all revenues from new groups of viewers and new markets will represent an almost net gain to the producer's overall profits. The development and introduction of digital television will result in a dramatic increase in transmission capacity (Owen, 1999), and this development, coupled with the scale economics of televised sports, is likely to create a substantial increase in the overall volume of sports programming available to viewers. There will be more products on the market for viewers to choose among, and thus stronger competition between the sports organizations for the attention of the most attractive media outlets and viewers.
The incentive for export embedded in the economic nature of the product is reinforced by the unique position held by TV sports as an entertainment product relatively independent of language. While linguistic barriers create efficient limits to exporting of other forms of television programming, particularly for non-English language content, the export of sports programming is only limited by less efficient cultural barriers such as knowledge of a sport and its athletes. These barriers are furthermore even less efficient in the longer run since the sports organizations and media can actively work to fill such knowledge gaps.

Sports programming is very time-sensitive compared to other categories of programming. The degree of time-sensitivity is, however, dependent on how strong the uncertainty-of-outcome is for each sport. Strong uncertainty-of-outcome makes the sport an attractive television product in “real time”, but it also makes it relatively uninteresting as delayed programming. Weaker uncertainty-of-outcome will contribute to prolonging the program’s life span.

The strong time sensitivity of sports programming has limited the opportunities for windowing and thus made it very difficult to segment viewers for price discrimination. In a digital television environment, the possibilities for product differentiation with regard to quality will be better, and this opens for windowing of sports programming less dependent of time. If sports organizations succeed in finding effective means of time-independent windowing they will be able to tap into a considerable, and so far almost untouched, source of revenue.

The theoretical framework presented in this article should be tested empirically. To develop testable hypotheses from the relatively concrete theoretical conclusions drawn here should not be problematic. Such empirical research would strengthen the theory and also create a basis to expand, adjust and improve the framework presented here.

Notes
2. Figures from the Norwegian Football Association’s annual reports.

References
According to Beck’s theory of risk society (for example, 1992), industrial modernization has created a range of risks that are unlimited in time and space and which have sources and consequences for which no one can be held to account. Since we have no means of identifying the objects of risk and safety (risks are ‘unknowable’), nothing can be trusted and every aspect of life becomes a potential source of danger and hence a potential source of anxiety. As a result of the proliferation of risks, people are more dependent on expert scientific knowledge (‘scientific rationality’) often conveyed through the media. But at the same time, people’s faith in science has diminished and scientific rationality is increasingly being challenged by ‘social rationality’ which is based on social evaluation. Risks are open to social definition and construction, and the mass media, together with the sciences, play key roles in these processes. The media are a central site for struggle between the different forms of rationality over the source and effects of risks and possible solutions.

In this article, I view the role of the media in the construction and contestation of risks in terms of discourse analysis. Translating Beck’s theory into discourse analytical terms, the struggle which Beck describes between different knowledge-claims – between claims deriving from social rationality and scientific rationality and between claims deriving from private everyday life and mediated experience – can be seen as a struggle between discourses which represent different ways of understanding the ‘environment’ and ‘risk’ and construct different identities for speakers (such as, for example, ‘expert’, ‘activist’, ‘citizen’ or ‘consumer’). Responsibility for risks and their solution is subject to discursive negotiation in the media and in consumption of the media by audiences. The media represent a main field of publicness in which discourses are not only reproduced but transformed and re-articulated through institutionalized production practices. Mediated publicness involves a radical restructuring of the public and private spheres partly through the joint articulation of public information discourses and discourses based on face-to-face interpersonal communication in everyday life (Bondebjerg 1996, Chouliaraki 1999, Fairclough 1995b, Phillips 1999a). The aim of this article is to explore the operation of the media as a site for the construction and contestation of expert knowledge about the environment through an empirical study of a particular case: a Danish news broadcast featuring a discussion between two “experts” who each present competing forms of expert knowledge and the reception of the news broadcast by audience members (based on 27 individual and group interviews). A central focus is the role of the contestation of expert knowledge in the media in key developments in late modernity involving new forms of politics and power configurations. In particular, the
article explores the implications of the mediatization of culture and politics for the question of democracy. The analytical framework applied is a form of social constructionist discourse analysis which attempts to integrate an analysis of broader questions of social practice, politics and power with analysis of specific communication practices – in this case, the production and consumption of a media text. In the following, I will elaborate on key theoretical themes relating to central social and political developments, then sketch out the discourse analytical framework and finally present the empirical analysis.

**Reflexivity and the Media**

The social and political consequences of contestation via the media can be understood in terms of Beck’s theory of reflexive modernization (for example, Beck 1994, 1997). Reflexive modernization involves two forms of reflexivity: the first is a form of self-confrontation of the modernization process itself – a “self-confrontation with the consequences of risk society which cannot (adequately) be addressed and overcome in the system of industrial society” (Beck 1996: 28); the second is a form of reflection about existing social arrangements by citizens who are alarmed by the multiple hazards that face individuals and societies in the risk society. This second form of reflexivity lies behind a new forms of politics, subpolitics, whereby agents outside the political or corporatist system engage in political deliberation and action on moral issues relating, for example, to ecology, the family, gender and ethnicity. While people have become disillusioned with, and disengaged from, traditional forms of politics, they have become increasingly involved in subpolitics. Beck argues that through engagement in subpolitics, citizens outside parliamentary politics have taken power politically, placing the above moral issues on the agenda in the face of the resistance of the established parties (see also Schröder and Phillips). The conflict between truth-claims in the media generated outside the orthodox political system is central to subpolitics: it both represents a form of critical, reflective debate in itself and may work to promote further subpolitical activity by providing viewers with the necessary knowledge for informed critique of experts’ arguments.

The value of Beck’s theory as an account of contemporary society is limited by its failure fully to take into account the cultural dimension of processes of risk definition and contestation (Alexander 1996, Cottie 1998, Wynne 1996). According to Beck, it is the nature of risks themselves which determine how they are socially defined and acted upon. This perspective stands in contrast to the culturalist perspective – including discourse analysis – which stresses that risk definition is a function of how risks are constructed in meaning rather than being just a reflection of how risks ‘really are’. However, while Beck’s approach is overly rationalistic and insufficiently culturalist, it can still, I think, be used as a starting point for empirical study focusing on the cultural dimension.

In the study presented in this article, the contestation of knowledge is viewed as a cultural activity involving the struggle over different discursive constructions of the environment. The focus is on how knowledge-claims are discursively constructed and contested in the media, how audiences deal with, and participate in, the contestation of knowledge and on the social and political implications of media and audience practices. The cultural field is viewed along the lines of discourse theory as a field of struggle for hegemony between competing discourses (including competing discourses on ecological risks) each constructing different understandings of the world (including the ‘environ-
ment’, ‘risk’ and ‘political action’) and different identities for the subject (for example, as citizen or consumer) (Anderson 1997, Hannigan 1995).

The emphasis on the role of the media in discursive conflict is based on the view, noted above, that the media have become the main form of publicness in contemporary western societies, radically restructuring the public and private spheres and creating a form of political life which is, to a large extent, mediated. We are dependent on mediated/non-local knowledge as we do not ourselves have access to distant events and abstract systems. By mixing public information discourses and discourses rooted in face-to-face interpersonal communication in everyday life, the media create confidence in expert knowledge (Hjarvard 1997). This discursive mix appeals to people both as citizens and as private consumers. Mediatized politics is based on a combination of mass mediated public information and participation in the consumption of images, objects and ideas (Silverstone 1994). This can be seen as a move towards democratization since the combination of public, institutional discourses and everyday discourses may involve a construction of risks partially in terms of social rationality rather than purely in terms of scientific rationality. Power relations between the different actors – journalists, politicians, scientific experts and the public – may be restructured as everyday experience may be recognised as an alternative source of knowledge or expertise and lay people may be positioned as types of expert (Hjarvard 1999). Conflict between different forms of ‘expert’ and ‘lay’ knowledge may represent an opening-up of the debate to different forms of rationality which may further critical reflection amongst the actors – scientific experts, activists, journalists and members of the viewing public. The presentation of competing knowledge-claims in different discourses leads to a relativizing of knowledge – including the acceptance of non-scientific knowledge – which may open up for discussion of change and different forms of social organisation.

On the other hand, the consumption of media images can be understood as an obstacle to the development of the media as a space for democratic politics. According to the perspective of Habermas, for example, the media do not live up to the ideal of a public sphere in which the state is called to account before the people and state policies are subjected to critique by an informed and rational public (for example, 1989, 1994). The public no longer participate as actors in critical debate but as mere consumers of the authorities’ public displays of prestige, as in feudal times. Critics of this position argue, however, that it is based on a flawed understanding of the nature of publicness. Whereas Habermas’ model builds on a conception of the public sphere as a space for direct, non-mediated communication between representatives of the state and the public, the alternative model proposed by critics (for example, Thompson 1995) posits a vision of democracy which is not dependent on face-to-face dialogue but on the mass mediated communication of knowledge which allows people to engage in informed, private deliberation. Habermas’s negative view that discursive argumentation between competing perspectives has decreased has also been challenged. Eder (1996) claims, for instance, that a second transformation of the public sphere has taken place, involving the increasing use of the media by conflicting collective actors and the corresponding rise of public debate. Environmental discourse, he argues, is, at present, the most productive cultural form for producing and mobilising political conflict and consensus. It brings issues of collective rationality onto the agenda which are then defended against individual rationality in a political struggle to attribute responsibility.

In this article, I explore the democratic potential of the contestation of knowledge in the media through empirical study of discursive practices in the media and in media reception. The focus is on how media and audience discourses construct different repre-
sentations of environmental risk and different identities for actors and on the social and political implications of these discursive constructions. My approach to analysing discourse is outlined in the next section.

Analytical Framework

The discourse analytical framework which I apply is based on two forms of text-oriented discourse analysis: discursive psychology and the critical discourse analysis of Norman Fairclough (Fairclough 1992, 1995a, 1995b). Both critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology draw on Foucauldian discourse theory in conceiving discourse as (at least partly) constitutive of knowledge, identities and social relations but diverge from them in key respects. Drawing on discourse theory, my research framework follows a Foucault-inspired definition of discourse as a limited range of possible statements promoting a limited range of meanings so that discourses dictate what it is possible to say. But, drawing on both discursive psychology and CDA, I diverge from Foucauldian discourse theory in focusing empirically on everyday discursive practices in specific social contexts rather than focusing on discursive practices in more abstract terms. My empirical focus is on how struggles between discourses take place and discourses are reproduced and changed through communicative practices in everyday social interaction.

For the overall model of discourse as social practice and for a methodology for detailed discourse analysis, I apply Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis. In critical discourse analysis, discourse is analysed in terms of three dimensions, discursive practice, text and social practice. The focus is on discursive practice – the ways in which discourses are articulated to produce and consume texts – text – the ways in which these discourses are realized linguistically in specific texts – and social practice – the wider social and cultural structures and processes which the discursive practices are shaped by and work to reproduce and change. Like Fairclough, I distinguish between discursive practices and the wider social practice, and I use social theory in order to cast light on the wider social practice in which discursive practice is a central force. But in contrast to Fairclough, I do not distinguish so sharply between the discursive and the non-discursive; my framework is not based on an ontological distinction between discourse and non-discourse but on an analytical distinction between the wider social practice – the background for analysis – and concrete discursive practice – the object of empirical analysis (Jørgensen og Phillips 1999). My position is that a sharp distinction between discourse and non-discourse entails an underestimation of the role of discourse in the social constitution of the world; it does not mean that I deny that there are material and other realities but rather that I stress that we give them meaning through discourse. I view social theory as providing understandings of the wider social practice, and, following from this, as cues for analysis of the discursive dimension of these social practices. By drawing on particular sociological perspectives on risk, reflexivity and democracy and by translating them into the terms of discourse analysis, the analytical framework constructs the research field in a particular way so that certain questions become relevant to ask (Jørgensen and Phillips, 1999; Phillips 2000).

While my analysis is structured according to Fairclough’s three dimensions, I supplement them with a discursive psychological approach which places rather more weight on how discourses are used as flexible resources in talk-in-interaction. Like critical discourse analysis, discursive psychology focuses on the discursive construction
of knowledge and identities and on language users as both products and active producers of discourse. But discursive psychologists place less weight on the linguistic construction of discourses and more weight on the rhetorical orientation of discourse – on how people orient discourse towards forms of social action in specific contexts. I follow the approach of discursive psychologists, Wetherell and Potter (1992), which combines a poststructuralist, discourse-theoretical focus on the ways in which specific discourses constitute subjects and objects and an interactionist focus on the ways in which people’s discourse is oriented towards social action in specific contexts of interaction. In viewing people as both the products of specific discourses and producers of talk in specific interactional contexts, the aim is to take account both of the constraints on action imposed by the use of specific discursive resources and of people’s role as agents in processes of discursive reproduction and change (Phillips 2000). Media audiences use media discourses (as well as other discourses) as resources in interpretation so that the discourses constrain interpretation; but audiences do not merely reproduce media discourses but articulate them actively and selectively together with other discourses which circulate in society and are accessible to them. The focus of analysis of media and audience discourse is partly on the ways in which the accounts of environmental risks are constructed in order to appear as if they are true (‘the epistemological orientation of accounts’ in Potter’s terms [1996]) and partly on the ways in which the accounts represent forms of social practice rather than just reflecting an external psychological or social reality (‘the action orientation of accounts’, Potter 1996).

In the following analysis, I explore a particular instance of struggle in the media between competing discourses about environmental risk in relation to wider questions of reflexivity and democracy. The texts analysed are a TV report and broadcast discussion on the 9 o’clock news on Danish public television on 4 February 1998 and reception of the news broadcast by audience members. The TV report announces the publication of a report by the environmentalist organisation World Watch Institute and introduces the discussion between Lester Brown, the leader of World Watch Institute and a supporter of radical environmental change, and Bjørn Lomborg who is a lecturer in the department of political science at Aarhus University in Denmark and has become a central figure in the Danish media as an opponent of radical change to the global environment. The discussion took place in English with Danish subtitles. The following analysis draws on earlier analysis which was carried out in Danish (Phillips 1999a, 1999b; Chouliaraki and Phillips 1999). Both in the Danish-language analysis and in the present analysis, I choose to concentrate on the subtitles and the interplay between the subtitles and the visuals on the basis of the assumption that they are the main source of meaning for the audiences. Thus, rather than analysing the English dialogue, I analyse an English translation of the Danish subtitles. At the same time, I take account of the links between the dialogue and the subtitles since it obviously plays a role that the dialogue was in English. I also focus on bodily forms of communication (for example, facial expressions and movements), as they contribute to constructing meaning.

**Media text: DR1 TV News, 21.00, 4 February 1998**

*Newsreader [in newsroom]:* Verdensmiljøet har det ikke godt. Det hævder miljøorganisationen World Watch Institute i en ny rapport. Men det har organisationen faktisk hævdet hvert år i en menneskelige og nogle forskere er ved at blive godt trætte af dommedagsprofetierne.
Lester Brown kom til Danmark i dag for at præsentere miljørapporten. Lester Brown har i årtier været miljøguruen over alle miljøguruer.

Hans rapport om verdens tilstand er et anerkendt standardværk.

Lester Brown har i årtier været miljøguruen over alle miljøguruer.

Hans rapport om verdens tilstand er et anerkendt standardværk.

Lester Brown: Målet er at fremlægge oplysninger, der er nyttige for beslutningstagere. Vi har ikke en politisk dagsorden i ideologisk forstand. Vores mål er at beskrive hvad der sker med verden.

Lester Brown: Vi skal beskrive det, som det er. Hvis du går til lægen pga. højt blodtryk eller hudkræft og lægen siger, at alt er i orden vil du vel blive vred?

Lester Brown: Vi skal beskrive det, som det er. Hvis du går til lægen pga. højt blodtryk eller hudkræft og lægen siger, at alt er i orden vil du vel blive vred?

Lester Brown: Vi skal beskrive det, som det er. Hvis du går til lægen pga. højt blodtryk eller hudkræft og lægen siger, at alt er i orden vil du vel blive vred?

Bjørn Lomborg: Min pointe er, at De ofte, når De omtaler de negative ting, der sker, fortæller andre ting. hele bogen igennem siger De verden er på randen af sammenbrud. Og den slags prognoser er ikke til at have med at gøre. Man kan ikke se hvilke data, der underbygger dem eller ej, og det gør bogen mere ideologisk end Deres data giver belæg for.

Lester Brown: FA Os oplysninger viser at verdens kornproduktion pr. person fra 1950 til 1984 er vokset med 38%, men siden er den faldet med 6%.

Bjørn Lomborg: Der er ikke relevant her for så ser man bort fra Lester Brown: Hvis korn er ens vigtigste næringsmiddel er det relevant.

[BL laughs and bends over to pick up a piece of paper]

Bjørn Lomborg: [looking at/reading the paper] M en hvis man ser på FA Os data for ulandene så stiger produktionen.

Bjørn Lomborg: Indien har faktisk øget sit skovareal i de seneste 10 år.
Lester Brown: Det er muligt, men i 1956 var der meget mere.

Bjørn Lomborg: De insisterer på at bruge oplysninger fra 50´erne. Men fra 1950 og fremefter har vi ifølge FAO fået mere skov globalt set.
Lester Brown: Ikke ud fra FAOs oplysninger. Vi må tjekke tallene i FAOs årbog.

BL laughs

Bjørn Lomborg: Det har jeg gjort.
Lester Brown: Det har vi også [nodding].

Bjørn Lomborg: Skal vi vække?

Newsreader [in newsroom]: Lester Brown ville dog ikke vække om statistikken, men han sagde efter debatten, at det har været en fornøjelse at diskutere med en så venlig og velinformeret modstander.

Translations of Danish Subtitles

Media text: DR1 TV News, 21. 00, 4 February 1998

Newsreader [in the newsroom]: The world environment is not well. That’s what the environmental organisation World Watch Institute claims in a new report. But the organisation has actually claimed this every year throughout a lifetime and some researchers are getting tired of these doomsday prophesies.

Reporter Jan Ewens’ voice-over [shot of Lester Brown talking to two men in a corridor]: Lester Brown came to Denmark today to present the environmental report. Lester Brown has for years been the environmental guru of all environmental gurus.

[close-up shot of report]. His report about the state of the world is a recognised reference work. [shot of Lester Brown talking to camera] Lester Brown: The goal is to put forward information which is useful for decision-makers. We do not have a political agenda in an ideological sense.

[shot of Lester Brown and Bjørn Lomborg on sofa but with Lester Brown still talking to camera] Our goal is to describe what is happening with the world. We must describe it as it is. If you go to the doctor because of high blood pressure or skin cancer and the doctor says that everything is ok, [Lester Brown turns away from camera to face Bjørn Lomborg] wouldn’t you get angry? [shot of Bjørn Lomborg smiling and nodding]

[shot of boy picking potatoes in a field] Voice-over: Lester Brown’s most important message is that the earth cannot produce enough food for a growing population.

[shot of corn being harvested] Voice-over: The production of corn is increasing but the growth of the population is greater.

[shot of boy picking potatoes] Voice-over: It is getting worse year after year says Lester Brown.
But this year Lester Brown is not going to deliver his report without a fight.

A Danish researcher has turned Lester Brown’s statistics inside out and thinks that they do not hold water.

Lester Brown: our report must not be pessimistic but realistic. When we say there were huge forestfires in Indonesia last year, that is a fact. We maybe do not like it, but it’s the reality.

Bjørn Lomborg: My point is that they often when you talk about the negative things that happen, you keep quiet about other things. Throughout the whole book you say that the earth is on the verge of collapse. And those kinds of prognosis can’t be worked with. One cannot see what kind of data they’re based on or not, and that makes the book more ideological than your data gives support for.

Lester Brown: FAO’s information shows that the world’s corn production per person has risen from 1950 til 1984 by 38%, but since then it has fallen by 6%.

Bjørn Lomborg: But that’s not relevant here because one ignores corn is one’s most important form of nutrition then it is relevant.

Bjørn Lomborg: [looking at the paper] But if you look at FAO’s data for the third world, production is rising.

Voice-over: The disagreement isn’t just about the production of corn. The two researchers cannot agree either on what is happening with the world’s forests.

Lester Brown: What I see backs up FAO’s data: that is, that the earth is losing forests at a steady rate. One sees it in Amazonas and in Southeast Asia and in India. I stayed in Indian villages in 1956. Then much of India was covered in forest, but to day the forest is gone.

Bjørn Lomborg: India has actually increased its forested area in the last 10 years.

Lester Brown: That’s possible, but in 1956, there was a lot more.

Bjørn Lomborg: You insist on using information from the 50’s. But from 1950 onwards we have according to FAO got more forests in global terms.

Lester Brown: Not according to FAO information. We must check the figures in FAO’s annual report.

BL laughs]

Bjørn Lomborg: I have done that.

Lester Brown: So have we [nodding]

Bjørn Lomborg: Shall we bet?

Newsreader[in newsroom]: Lester Brown did not want to bet about the statistics, but he said after the debate that it had been a pleasure to discuss with such a friendly and well-informed opponent.
Analysis

Following the framework of Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis, the analysis concentrates on three dimensions: discursive practice - the nature of the discourses and genres which the speakers articulate and the ways in which these discourses and genres construct knowledge, identities and social relations in ways that exclude and challenge alternatives; text - how discourses and genres are constructed through linguistic features such as grammar, transitivity, theme and modality and key words and phrases; and social practice - the ways in which discursive practices are part of, and work to reproduce and change, the wider social practice, by constituting representations of the world, social identities and social relations.

Throughout the TV broadcast, there is a struggle between two competing scientific discourses which struggle to fix meaning in their own ways: the environmentalist discourse of high risk (there is immediate danger as a result of the economic exploitation of nature) and an environmental discourse of low risk which questions the claim of high risk (there is no immediate danger as a result of economic activity). Each discourse has consequences for social action: according to the first discourse, it is crucial that one acts through intervention in industry; according to the second, such economic intervention is unnecessary. Both discursive constructions are introduced in the newsreader’s and reporter’s talk and drawn on further in the subsequent discussion between Lester Brown and Bjørn Lomborg. I will first analyse the newsreader’s and reporter’s introduction to the discussion before analysing the discussion itself.

Newsreader’s and Reporter’s Introduction

The newsreader and the reporter represent World Watch Institute’s perspective as an environmentalist discourse of high risk. This discourse sees the earth as a natural resource and warns that the earth’s productive capacities are insufficient given the rising world population. Environmental risk here is a question about the disparity in growth between natural resources and the world population. The discourse combines activist engagement (the agent is an important international grassroots organisation and encourages people to show concern) and critical pessimism (it is getting worse year after year). By being positioned as an agent in an existential process, the world environment is personified as suffering, a process usually attributed to humans (the world environment is not well). This situates the topic within an everyday life discourse rather than a scientific discourse. Throughout the newsreader’s text, this construction of risk is reinforced by statements such as the earth cannot produce enough food for a growing population, the production of corn is growing but the population growth is greater and it is getting worse year after year. These categorical statements sustain the introductory construction of risk in projecting the earth as an agent which lacks the capacity to provide for its population. The earth’s population are positioned not as agents but as mere receivers of the earth’s food or as an attribute of growth whereby growth is nominalized. There is a shift to a more scientific discourse here (partly through nominalization), mixing lay and expert discourses. The environmentalist discourse of high risk places emphasis on risk by making the earth into an agent as the producer of resources and by warning against the limitations of the earth’s productive capacities in the face of an ever-increasing world population.

Whereas the initial statement (the world environment is not well) is presented as a general statement rather than as reported speech, the second clause of the text (That’s what the environmental organisation World Watch Institute claims in a new report) at-
tributes the statement to a source, the World Watch Institute and its report. Thus the statement is first presented as a ‘fact’ and then identified as somebody’s viewpoint – a textual move which subverts the initial force of the statement (Chouliaraki and Phillips 1999).

In the second clause, the source of information is World Watch’s new report while, in the rest of the broadcast, the source of information is described in other terms: (Lester Brown’s report, Lester Brown’s most important message, Lester Brown, Lester Brown says, his environmental report, Lester Brown’s statistics). These terms function as an element of substitution for World Watch Institute and, consequently, the Institute’s report systematically collocates with Lester Brown to create textual cohesion throughout the broadcast: the report is both the Institute’s and, increasingly so as the text unfolds, Lester Brown’s. This modification of meaning works in this text to personalize the report and perhaps deprive it of its institutional authority and collective nature: if the ‘statistics’ are attributed to Lester Brown only (as opposed to a group of scientific researchers) then the chances of ‘his report’ being proven wrong are higher. At the same time, however, the status of World Watch Institute’s report as expert knowledge is reinforced through the labelling of the report as a recognised classic. The description of Brown himself as the environmental guru of all environmental gurus can also be understood as reinforcing this status. But, on the other hand, the terms guru and doomsday prophesies have connotations of religious extremism which challenge Brown’s scientific credibility.

Lester Brown’s critics are positioned more unambivalently as both experts and ‘ordinary people’. Their description as some researchers endows them with scientific authority while the statement that they are getting tired of these doomsday prophesies gives them credibility as ordinary people who have feelings based on common-sense judgements rather than scientific knowledge alone. Thus they are ascribed identities both as experts and as ordinary people through their positioning within a mix of scientific discourse and everyday discourse, promoting identification between experts and audience. Identification is reinforced by the fact that they are not ascribed names, titles, or institutional affiliations – such labels would create specific expert identities and so create a sharp divide between lay people and experts (Chouliaraki and Phillips 1999). It may also be accomplished through Bjørn Lomborg being introduced as ‘a Danish researcher’ – one of the Danish people – instead of his being introduced in terms of his academic position or relevant research interests.

Bjørn Lomborg’s views are defined as an anti-discourse. It is an anti-discourse in that it does not put forward a developed independent vision of the environment but defines itself in terms of a relationship of opposition to the discourse of high risk. This is most clear in the formulation, But this year Lester Brown is not going to deliver his report without a fight. In addition, the discourse is a hybrid mix of scientific discourse and everyday lay discourse which positions speakers as both experts and lay people. For instance, in the statement, ‘A Danish researcher has turned Lester Brown’s statistics inside out and thinks that they do not hold water’, the researcher is positioned in this dual way as the agent of two processes – a material one (has turned Lester Brown’s statistics inside out and a mental one (thinks): while the second process, thinks, constructs the researcher as a ‘senser’, a rational, thinking being, the first process, has turned ..inside out, constructs the researcher partly as a ‘senser’ (the process involves cognition) and partly as a ‘doer’ actively involved in some material action (turning the statistics inside out). Positioning as both ‘senser’ and ‘doer’ may work to blur the expert-lay boundary. In addition, both ‘turning statistics inside out’ and ‘thinking that they do not hold water’ are both instances of everyday discourse which work to re-signify the scientific
process of establishing validity in lay terms (contrast, for example, alternative descriptions of the processes such as ‘re-calculated the statistics’ or ‘judged them to be inaccurate’). Within the anti-discourse, expertise is cast almost entirely in lay terms, with only one element of scientific rationality - statistics - surviving re-signification (Chouliaraki and Phillips 1999).

The high risk discourse is firmly positioned as an institutional and expert discourse with particular and clear meanings on risk and the environmental condition. In contrast, the environmentalist anti-discourse is ambivalently positioned as both lay and expert, with no clear meanings on risk but with a clear representation of expertise itself: the scientific evaluation of expert knowledge is about how to calculate (statistics) and what kinds of meanings to assign to these calculations (the world environment is not well as opposed to doomsday prophesy). Thus the newsreader’s and reporter’s texts do not establish two discourses with equal authority claims, but rather one environmentalist discourse which constructs the environmental problematic from a particular point of view – that of high risk – and the expert as a prestigious institutional agent and activist and another discourse which ‘bypasses’ the construction of the environmental condition and, instead, directly challenges the validity of the former in terms of its interpretation of the world and its scientific processing. I think, then, that the relations between the competing discourses and the positions assigned to the different speakers in the subsequent debate are partly established by the newsreader’s and reporter’s text in ways which subtly but consistently promote the anti-discourse at the expense of the authority of the high risk discourse.

Debate between Lester Brown and Bjørn Lomborg

In the debate between Lester Brown and Bjørn Lomborg, the two discourses are articulated through combinations of scientific discourse and everyday, lay discourse. Both speakers construct their accounts in ways which challenge each other’s alternative version of reality and give the impression that their own version is not in their own private interests but represents facts. Both discourses are constructed as solid and objective through rhetorical strategies such as the use of categorical modalities: within both discourses, claims are presented as clear and uncontrovertible facts. For example, Lester Brown states that FAO’s information shows that the world’s corn production per person has risen from 1950 til 1984 by 38%, but since then it has fallen by 6% rather than, for example, corn production may have risen from 1950 til 1984... but... may have fallen. And the claims are further presented as facts that exist independently of the individual speaker through the use of objective rather than subjective modalities – BL says, for example, It isn’t relevant here instead of I don’t think it’s relevant here. A nother rhetorical strategy is the use of figures to support the speaker’s own version and challenge the other’s use of figures. For example, BL implies that Browns use of figures from the 50’s isn’t legitimate: You insist on using information from the 50’s.

While both discourses contain the above typical features of scientific discourse, they each represent different types of scientific discourse as pointed out earlier in discussion of the newsreader’s and reporter’s text. While the anti-discourse does not reject scientific knowledge – its challenge to the competing discourse is based on LB’s failure to use scientific methods properly – it is based on a principle of epistemic doubt directed towards the truth claims of the high risk discourse. This principle of epistemic doubt may gain resonance amongst audiences as it may feed on people’s loss of faith in scientific authority.
As in the newsreader’s and reporter’s text, the two discourses combine scientific and everyday discourse in different ways in the discussion. Brown draws on a discourse of everyday life when he draws parallels between treatment of the environment and people’s treatment by doctors. And at the end of the discussion, the participants switch from scientific discourses to an everyday discourse in which they challenge each other’s use of figures: luck replaces scientific criteria for determining the truth: shall we bet? By using everyday discourse they draw on a conversational genre. This is articulated through language and humour (smiling etc). Conversational elements and humour also work rhetorically: BL constructs an identity as an ordinary person who is on the side of the people against the expert LB. LB has told his story over a lifetime, while BL has control over the present; he expresses a popular skepticism for scientific authority. He exudes what Fairclough calls an ethos of commonsense which is populist. This supports the anti-discourse which is based on epistemic doubt – a scepticism towards scientific claims. Other features that construct this ethos are his youth, his informal clothes, his reference to LB’s use of old figures, and, perhaps, his Danishness. The discussion is thus partly a scientific discussion and partly a private conversation. By using the conversational-genre the discussion simulates a private conversation. The two men sit and talk on a sofa in a room instead of around a table in a studio. The audience become “voyeurs”, observing a private conversation.

Above I have sketched out the discursive practice and illustrated ways in which the discourses of high and low risk and the conversational genre are articulated textually. Turning to the issue of social practice, I now focus on what kinds of insight the analysis of discursive practice provides into social practice, power and democratic politics. One can view the use of competing scientific discourses as a social practice which expresses and promotes a conflict between competing understandings of environmental risk and between different claims to expert status (each of the speakers threatens the other’s identity as expert). This struggle can be understood as a reflection of, and a contribution to, broader social developments in risk society: different discourses struggle to define the truth. The public come to know that there is not one truth and one authority but several, and that people’s claims to be experts can be questioned. This can be seen as an expression of democratic politics whereby there is not one hegemonic discourse, dictating the terms of debate, but several discourses which offer alternative forms of truth and alternative identities. The use of the conversational genre can also be seen as part of this democratization process in two respects: firstly, as expert knowledge is not mediated by journalists but by two experts, it is as if the viewers gain direct access to expert knowledge; secondly, the construction of knowledge partly in lay terms may both enhance viewers’ understanding and also echo their own perspectives. However, the inequality between the different discourses works against this. The newsreader’s introduction challenges the high risk discourse and favours the anti-discourse through linguistic devices noted above. Moreover, through the simulation of a private conversation between Lester Brown and Bjørn Lomborg, the public are addressed as voyeurs or consumers of an entertaining show rather than as active citizen-participants in a debate. This can be seen in the light of the mediatization of politics, whereby politics has, to a large extent, become mediated and the boundary between the public and the private has become blurred. Mediatization involves an aesthetization of communication whereby the focus is on appearance and image and people become consumers of the visual spectacle: ‘people, objects, events perform for the diffused audience through their involvement in a richly symbolic world of spectacle’ (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998: 88).
The implications of the above discursive practices can be explored further through analysis of the reception of the text by audiences. Reception analysis is a way of investigating how people respond to being confronted with rival scientific claims about risks rather than with uncontested scientific knowledge. How they do so provides insight into the implications of the mediatized contestation of expert knowledge for democratic politics.

**Audience Discourse**

Many respondents drew on the anti-discourse, appropriating it in different ways. And many audience members accepted the principle of epistemic doubt at the core of the anti-discourse. They used BL’s arguments in order to claim that the risks were exaggerated, as in the following case:

Interviewer: Og hvad tænkte I mens I så det her indslag?

Martin: (2) Jah, hvad tænkte vi. (2)

Katrine: Ja, altså jeg, jeg, jeg tænkte nok første gang da jeg så det, at øh, jamen altså jeg sy, jeg synes heller ikke at, at, at de katastrofer og, og de ting som, som de gør så negative, er så negativt. Som, som det nogen gange bliver gjort til, vel. Fordi der er nogen ting vi, vi bare ikke kan hamle op imod. Og øh, vi har en skovbrand her, vi har en skovbrand der, ikke. M en, men øh, men vi har jo, vi har jo stadigvæk, man har jo sagt i mange år at, at nu skal du passe på, på træerne, for vi har, ikke, vi bruger for meget papir, øh det går ud over vores skove(ne), men vi har jo stadigvæk øh (1) plantet nye. Øh, jeg tror ikke det der, det er, det er så sort. Som de nogengange gør det til.

Interviewer: Nej (4) Hvordan optagede er I af sådan et, et problem som det de diskuterer? Hvordan synes I det er? (2)

Martin: Jordens miljø? Synes jeg er meget vigtigt. =

Katrine: =Mm

Martin: Men den vil i snar, det, der der, øh, altså jeg synes egentlig at, at den, det indslag det er jo øh, giver jo et, et glimrende øh, indblik i at (2) øh information nødvendigvis ikke øh, altså information (.) fra en eller anden (.) institut eller en eller anden forsker ikke nødvendigvis er fyldestgørende og ikke nødvendigvis er, er den r, den, den evige sandhed. M en at andre, øh, ligeså dygtige eksperter ud i, i det samme emne, ka’ ha’ en helt anden holdning og indfaldsvinkel og øh konklusion på, om jeg så må sige, de samme statistikker. Øh, og der (1) mener jeg jo nok at meget af den information vi får idag øh, er (.) meget manipuleret, øh, og bliver brugt øh bevidst øh i en eller anden øh s, interesser eller en eller anden organisations interesser.

Katrine: M m

Martin: Øh, hvis Jordens øh (3) miljø var (1) upåklageligt, så ville øh World Watch Institute have et problem med øhm (.) overleve sig selv. Så altså, information er jo øh (.) godt nok, øh og god at få, men den skal også være pålidelig. (4) Så (.) jeg synes der er mange (.) facetter i hele det der informationsræs (vi har).

[... ]

Interviewer: Så udsendelsen giver ikke rigtig noget svar på (.)

Martin: Der er ikke noget svar.

Interviewer: M m

Katrine: Nej.
Martin: Problemet er at, at hvis der kommer en og siger han har svaret, så er han meget utroværdig. For der er ikke noget svar. Men folk vil gerne have et svar, så de tror på ham der siger han har et svar. Sådan, sådan opfatter jeg det.

Interviewer: M m. Hvad gør man så når de begge to tror de har svaret i en udsendelse som

Martin: Og der (kan)

Interviewer: denne her?

Martin: Jamen altså øh, jeg tror ikke øh, at den danske forsker tror han har svaret. Jeg tror den danske forsker øh stiller sig op og øh (. påviser at man kan så tvivl (1)
Katrine: M m

Martin: om at World Watch Institutes information er korrekt.

Translation

Interviewer: And what did you think when you watched this clip?

Martin: (2) Yeah, what did we think. (2)

Katrine: Yes, so I, I, I, I thought the first time I saw it that oh, well so I th, I don’t think either that, that, that these catastrophes and, and the things which, which they do so negative, are so negative. Like they’re sometimes made out to be. Because there are some things we, we just can’t compete with. And oh we have a forest-fire here, we have a forest-fire there, no? But but oh oh but we do have, we do still have, it’s been said for so many years that, that now you’ve got to look after, after the trees, because we have, no, we use too much paper, oh it harms our forests, but we still have oh (1) planted new ones. Oh, I don’t think this here, it’s, it’s so black. As they sometimes make it out to be.

Interviewer: No (4) How, how concerned are you by that kind of a, a problem like the one they are discussing? How important do you think it is? (2)

Martin: The earth’s environment? I think it’s very important =

Katrine: =M m

Martin: But what we talk, that, that there, w, oh, well I really think that, that the, this clip, it’s ohm, it does give a, an excellent ooh insight into that (2) oh information isn’t necessarily, oh, well information (. from one or other (institute) or one or other researcher isn’t necessarily complete and isn’t necessarily the r, the, the eternal truth. But that other oh, just as clever experts out in, in the same area, can have a completely different attitude and angle and oh conclusion about what I can call the same statistics. Ooh and there (1) I do think that much of the information we get today ooh is (. very manipulated ooh and is being used ooh consciously ooh consciously oh in someone or other ooh’s interests or in some or other organisation’s interests.

Katrine: M m

Martin: Ooh if the earth’s ooh (3) environment was (1) unimpeachable, World Watch Institute would have a problem to ohm (. So the information is ooh (. good enough, ooh and good to get, but it should also be reliable. (4) So (. I think there are many (. ffacets in all this information race (we have).

[... ]

Interviewer: So the programme doesn’t really give any answer to (.)

Martin: There is no answer.

Interviewer: M m

Katrine: No.
Martin: The problem is that, if someone comes and says he has the answer, so he's very untrustworthy. Because there is no answer. But people would like to have an answer, so they believe in the one who says that he has an answer. That's, that's how I see it.

Interviewer: Mm. What do you do then when they both think they have the answer in a broadcast like

Martin: And which (can)

Interviewer: This one here?

Martin: Yeah well oh I don't think that the Danish researcher thinks he has the answer. I think the Danish researcher oh puts himself forward and oh (.) proves that you can doubt (1).

Here Katrine uses the principle of epistemic doubt at the core of the anti-discourse in order to legitimate a position of optimism. She backs up her doubt about the claims of the environmentalists by restating Lomborg's claim that new trees are being planted. Martin also aligns himself to BLs version of reality and supports this version partly through challenging LB’s story. Martin uses rhetorical strategies in order to establish his and Lomborg’s version as solid and objective and LB’s as false and subjective. A key strategy used to undermine the truth value of Brown’s claims is the reference to Brown’s private interests or personal stake in his claims:

Ooh and there (1) I do think that much of the information we get today ooh is (.) very manipulated ooh and is being used ooh consciously ooh consciously oh in someone or other ooh's interests or in some or other organisation's interests. Ooh if the earth’s ooh (3) environment was (1) unimpeachable, World Watch Institute would have a problem to ohm (.). So the information is ooh (.). good enough, ooh and good to get, but it should also be reliable. (4) So (.). I think there are many (.). ffacets in all this information race (we have).

Martin draws on two scientific discourses. One is a communication science discourse according to which there are five criteria for reliable information:

Martin: Man har jo, man har jo sådan rent, øh, informations øh (1) teknisk har man jo 5 punkter som skal være opfyldt for at informationen er, er god nok.

Katrine: Mm. (2)

Interviewer: Hvad er det for 5 punkter?

Martin: Den skal være tilstede, til tiden, tilstrækkelig, troværdig og relevant. (2) Og hvis ikke den er det, såååh kan man ikke rigtig bruge den til noget. Hvis ikke alle 5 kriterier er opfyldt, såh øh, så kan man ikke rigtig bruge informationen til noget. Og det der er problemet med information, det er at sørge for at den er tilstede på det rigtige tidspunkt, øh, hos de rig, hos de mennesker som skal bruge den på det tidspunkt, øh, (1) og er relevant i det hele taget i den sammenhæng den bliver givet, ikke

Translation

Martin: You have, you have oh information oh information oh (1) technically you have 5 points which have to be satisfied for the information to be be good enough.

Katrine: Mm. (2)

Interviewer: What are the 5 points?

Martin: It should be in the right place, on time, sufficient, trustworthy and relevant (2) And if it is not, well one cannot really use it. If all the 5 criteria are not satisfied,
well one cannot really use the information. And that is the problem with information, it is making sure it is in the right place at the right time oh, with the right, with the people who need to use it at that time oh (1) and is relevant in general in the context it which it is given, right?

The interviewer asks Martin about the nature of the five points and, in reply, he lists them as scientific information. In this way, he positions himself as an ‘expert’ and invests his statements with an authority based on scientific knowledge rather life-experience. The other scientific discourse drawn on by Martin is a relativist discourse. He provides support for Lomborg’s position by defining it as relativist: Yeah well oh I don’t think that the Danish researcher thinks he has the answer. I think the Danish researcher oh puts himself forward and oh (.) proves that you can doubt (1). Thus by presenting Lomborg’s position as a challenge to a scientific truth-claim rather than a scientific truth-claim in itself, Martin’s allegiance to one particular version of the world – Lomborg’s – is united with his support for the position of epistemic doubt and his lack of faith in scientific knowledge (“there is no answer”). Scientific information is manipulated for group interests; scientific truth is non-existent. Together with sustained optimism, this scepticism towards scientific knowledge works to legitimate a lack of intervention in the environment and a lack of engagement in environmentalist politics/activism.

Several informants did not align themselves with either Lomborg’s or Brown’s positions but expressed confusion and dissatisfaction with their disagreement. They did not challenge scientific knowledge per se: unlike Martin and Katrine they do not express a lack of faith in science but a lack of faith in the two speakers because they air an argument which reveals scientific uncertainty, instead of presenting the truth about the world; the respondents position themselves as ordinary lay people who expect that scientists’ role is to present certain knowledge:

Interviewer: det, jeg synes det er flot at der nogle mennesker der (er villige til at), der interesserer sig for hvordan det ser ud, ikke altså, (?)

Tina: Men det skal også helst være realistisk, altså (.). Sådan noget der, det siger ikke mig noget, altså påstand mod påstand, jamen det kræver så at man begynder at, at grave i sådan en sag og, og, det kan man jo ikke, vel, altså, jeg v, jeg synes egentlig altså øh, det virker lidt pinligt at, det – sådan ‘hvem ved mest’, altså hvem har ret? Jeg synes det er pinligt, sådan noget.

Frederik: Ja.

Interviewer: Hvordan synes du så man skulle gøre? Eller hvem sku’, hvem sku’, ja hvordan skulle det foregå?

Tina: Ja, ved at sætte sig sammen, altså det er jo forskere, ikke. Altså sætte sig sammen og finde ud af, men hvordan ser det ud altså, (.) en af dem har jo taget fejl, ikke. Eller har ikke ret ihvertfald.

Tina: Det er ikke noget der er værd at spekulere over, når øh, du ikke ved hvordan, hvad realiteten er.

Frederik: Nej. (3)

Interviewer: Føler I at der er en eller anden sandhed om det her?

Tina: Ja selvfølgelig er der en sandhed, men, vi ved jo stadigvæk ikke, ‘hvem har ret?’

Frederik: Ja. Det kan lige så godt være
Tina: Fordi de lå så langt fra hinanden, ikke, altså det var jo virkelig 180 grader den ene havde drejet, ikke?

**Translation**

Interviewer: It, I think that it’s great that there are some people who (are willing to), who are interested in how things are, don’t you think, (?)

Tina: But it’s all should be realistic, well (.). that sort of thing, it doesn’t do anything for me, claim against claim, well it requires that you have to start to, to dig into that sort of subject and, and you can’t, well, so, I w, I think really so oh, it seems wrong in some or other way, to put forward that kind of thing well it should be a discussion one had before it came on the media, right? (1) It can just seem a little embarrassing that oh it ”who knows most”, so who’s right? I think it’s embarrassing, that kind of thing.

Frederik: Yes.

Interviewer: What do you think one should do? Or who should, who should, yes, how should it be done?

Tina: Yes, by sitting down together, they are researchers, aren’t they? Sitting down together and finding out, how things are (.). one of them has made a mistake, hasn’t he? Or isn’t right anyway.

Tina’s argumentation is constructed in opposition to the interviewer’s position (a positive view of the discussion). She positions herself against the experts by critising their performance, but she does not question expert knowledge and experts per se. On the contrary, she criticises Lomborg and Brown for not behaving like experts – that is, for not producing certain knowledge. Thus she does not express a lack of faith in science as such but in the two scientists for not providing the end-product of science: truth about the world. She evaluates their talk not in terms of expert discourse but in terms of an everyday discourse according to which things should be “realistic”. By drawing on an everyday discourse, she positions herself as a lay person who expects that scientists present certain knowledge.

Another couple also express dissatisfaction with the situation of uncertainty in relation to which speaker is right and they both take for granted that there is a definite answer/certain truth:

Interviewer: Hvad tænkte I mens I så det? (3)

Tonya: Jeg har set det før, altså.

Daniel: Jamen jeg, altså det, det der jo sker det er jo at øh, den ældre amerikaner der kommer der han kommer jo med (2) med (.). egentlig det vi er, er blevet fyldt med (2) de sidste mange år. Og og har fået at vide. Så kommer der sådan en frak fyr (1) og siger (1) det passer ikke. Verden ser helt anderledes ud. (4) Og så sidder vi her, (du), og hvem skal vi tro på, og hvad

Tonya: Ja man giver sig til at spekulere på, hvem skal man nu tro på ikke, skal man tro på ham den gamle garvede der har undersøgt tingene der har undersøgt tingene i masser af år, eller (1) eller det er den unge der har ret, ikke. Og øh, er han for (2) populær i sin fremgangsmåde, den unge måske, eller sådan et eller andet, ikke altså fordi han har en helt anden fremtoning (det kan jeg da huske ihvertfald, fra) (?) Helt anderledes.

Daniel: Ja, han er også, han er også meget politisk i det ikke fordi der er jo nogen der vil sige (3) altså dem der siger miljøet skal nok klare sig selv, ikke, de vil sige der kan vi se. Det passer slet ikke. De har sagt det (mange gange)
Tonya: Man kunne godt gribe sig selv i at tænke på at få lov at se de tal (.) de begge to sad og diskuterede. Dem ville jeg godt se. Og så prøve at regne på dem, altså. Og finde ud af (2) ja fordi det irriterer én lidt at man ikke rigtig ved [griner] hvem har ret, ikke?

Daniel: Det er jo også svært. Det er svært (?) Vi kan bare se sådan noget som øh (2) med olie, altså vi havde de to første kriser dør, der snakkede (vi) om at nu var der olie til de næste 20 år og så var det knagme slut. M an finder mere og mere olie og man finder ud af at bruge mindre og mindre olie. J a nu har vi så sågar

Tonya: Ja det er rigtig nok.

Daniel: sådan at de måtte (.) bliver nødt til at (1) producere mindre olie for at holde priserne oppe. Så det vil sige øh der snakkede man jo dommedag omkring olie (branchen) og vi dør af kulde allesammen og jeg ved ikke hvad. Og det er altså (?)

Translation

Interviewer: What did you think while you watched it? (3)

Tonya: I’ve seen it before.

Daniel: Well I, what, what happened, was that (oh) the elderly American, he comes, he comes with (2) with (.) really what we’ve been filled with (2) the past many years. And have been told. So this cheeky guy (1) comes and says (1) it’s not right. The world looks completely different (4) And here we sit, (you, and whom should we believe in, and what

Tonya: Yes it gives you something to speculate about, who should you believe in, should you believe in him, the old experienced one, who has researched things for many years or (1) or is it the young one who’s right, well? O g oh is he too (2) popular in his approach, the young one maybe, or something like that, because he has a completely different appearance (I can remember that anyway from) (?).

Daniel: Yes, he is also, he is also very political, right? Because there are some who would say (3) that is, those who say the environment can manage itself, right? They will say, there we can see. It is not right. They have said that (many times).

Tonya: You can easily find yourself thinking about getting permission to see those figures (.) the two of them sat discussing. I’d like to see those. And try and work them out. . And find out if (2) yes because it irritates you that you don’t really know [laugh] who is right, isn’t that so?

Daniel: It is also hard. It is hard (?). We can just look at something like oh (2) oil, we had the first two crises there, then (we) talked about how there was oil for the next 20 years and then it was bloody finished. One finds more and more oil and one finds out how to use less and less oil. Yes now we have even

Tonya: Yes that’s right enough.

Daniel: : so that they had to (.) have to (1) produce less oil to keep the prices up. So that means oh they talked about doomsday about (the) oil (branch) and that we’d all die of cold and I don’t know what. A nd there’s actually(?)

Like Tina, Daniel and Tonya present themselves as equals to the speakers rather than viewing them as greater authorities. They describe them in informal terms: Brown as the older American and “him, the old experienced one”, and Lomborg as the “cheeky guy” and “the young one”. In addition, they position themselves as critics who challenge the so-called experts: You can easily find yourself thinking about getting permission to see those figures (.) the two of them sat discussing. I’d like to see those. And try and work them out. And find out if (2) yes because it irritates you that you don’t really know
[laugh] who is right, isn’t that so? In order to cast light on people’s irritation at not being presented with certain knowledge, we can draw on Giddens’s theory about trust in expert systems: he argues that despite the loss of faith in science, trust in experts and mediated knowledge works as a strategy that prevents people’s feeling great anxiety because of uncertainty and the unknowability of risks – that we cannot precisely identify the sources of risk or undertake a course of action that we know with certainty will solve the problems (Giddens 1990).

Conclusion
A nalysis of media and audience discourse indicates the dominance of the principle of epistemic doubt, an important component of the anti-discourse of low environmental risk. One group of viewers expressed a scepticism towards scientific knowledge per se whereas another group expressed a scepticism towards the speakers’ knowledge as their knowledge is revealed as truth-claims which can be challenged rather than as definite facts. The first group’s expressed lack of belief legitimated acceptance of Bjørn Lomborg’s position of optimism about the environment. In accepting the terms of the anti-discourse, they did not recognise that Lomborg also constructed truth-claims and presented himself as an authority. His knowledge-claims were accepted as ‘common-sense’. In contrast, in the case of the second group, their lack of belief supported a rejection of both positions, while their view that experts ought to provide the facts prevented them from formulating their own evaluation of environmental risk.

The question is whether these two forms of scepticism entail an opening-up of the debate to critical reflection on existing social arrangements (based on ‘social rationality’) or whether it entails a populist rejection of expert authority but no reasoned judgement. According to the view of democratic politics taken in this article, a populist questioning of experts’ authority in itself cannot be understood as democratizing. Democratic politics needs to contain three main features: it requires public debate between a range of different discourses, representing competing understandings of the social world; it involves giving people the resources to take a critical, evaluative stance in relation to the competing claims about existing social arrangements and suggestions for courses of action; and it demands a public sphere in which the views of different social actors, including both experts and non-experts, are expressed and taken into account in decision-making processes.

None of these criteria was met in the present case. While two competing discourses – the environmental discourse of high risk and the anti-discourse of low environmental risk – were articulated in media discourse, they were not given equal treatment. The favouring of the anti-discourse in the newsreader’s and reporter’s text and the way in which, throughout the whole broadcast, the anti-discourse drew on a conversational genre in which Bjørn Lomborg was positioned as both expert and ordinary person, worked towards populist rejection of the expert knowledge of Lester Brown, the speaker who draws on the environmental discourse of high risk and against a critical comparison between the two perspectives. The challenging of experts’ arguments by citizens is crucial for democratic politics but only on the basis of qualified, competent critique and not a populist rejection of all expert authority.

A nalysis of the media text indicated a link between populism and the mix of expert, institutional discourses and everyday, consumer discourses which simulate face-to-face, interpersonal communication. In this article, I discussed this briefly in terms of the aestheticization of communication whereby audiences are positioned as consumers of the
visual spectacle rather than citizens. The link between populism and the mix of public and private discourses has also been identified in other research on Danish news programmes (Hjarvard 1999). A crucial question is whether institutional practices in the media can be transformed so that they produce a form of media discourse which supports reflexive democratic debate rather than a populist rejection of all expert authority in the name of ‘the people’. To go further towards answering this question requires further research not only on media and audience discourse but on production processes in media institutions.

Notes


2. The study forms part of larger-scale research on discourses about ecological risks and political action across key social domains: public information material, media coverage and 33 interviews with media audiences (see, for example, Phillips 2000).

3. Pellizzoni (1996) distinguishes in an insightful way between approaches (such as Beck’s) which attribute the social definition of environmental problems to their intrinsic nature and to knowledge, approaches which attribute the social definition of environmental problems to their intrinsic nature and to power, approaches which stress the role of the cultural dimension and knowledge and approaches which stress culture and power.

4. This perspective is positioned between, on the one hand, poststructuralist discourse theory which identifies abstract discourses circulating in society or in a specific social field and, on the other hand, forms of discourse analysis (heavily influenced by conversation analysis and ethnomethodology) which concentrate on how social organisation is accomplished through talk-in-interaction. At its extreme, discourse theory tends to reify discourses, viewing the individual language user as a mere epiphenomenon of discourse, while the tendency, at the other extreme, is to neglect that the specific discursive resources to which people have access delimit what it is possible for them to say (Phillips 2000).

References


Communication Challenges in Connection with Catastrophes and States of Emergency
A Review of the Literature

Stig Arne Nohrstedt

When catastrophes happen, they generally happen suddenly and have far-reaching consequences. They strike everyone and everything - people, organizations, social institutions - but in different ways and, it should be stressed - they hit some harder than others. When we think of catastrophes we naturally tend to think of the suffering they cause those most directly affected. But there are also consequences of a more indirect nature: material damage, environmental damage, impacts on social relations and on public confidence in authorities and institutions.

The purpose of this review of the literature is to summarize the principal lessons offered by the research to date on communication aspects of catastrophes, i.e., people’s need of information, the success and failure of various communication efforts, changes in people’s confidence in authorities and mass media, the interaction between media and authorities, etc. Relevant findings from several fields are included: catastrophe communication, risk communication, and communication in emergencies or crises. It should be pointed out, however, that the field is quite heterogeneous, and there is no common denominator in terms of theory or methodology. This is a consequence of the fact that most studies are case studies that have been initiated by the events in question; ambitions to generalize have been secondary at best. Another contributing factor is that researchers from different academic disciplines have applied a variety of theoretical frames of reference.

It should also be noted that the terms catastrophe, risk and crisis are not synonymous or interchangeable. ‘Catastrophe’ denotes an event having serious negative consequences for many people, whereas ‘risk’ denotes a presumed or possible threat or danger. ‘Crisis’, finally, can defined on an individual or a collective level. In this context we will primarily be discussing collective, societal crises, events that threaten central values and call established authority structures into question (cf. Nohrstedt & Tassew 1993; Flodin 1993). At the end of the review I will discuss the relationships between these phenomena in an interactional perspective involving various crisis factors.

The field of research has grown rapidly in recent decades, both in Sweden and internationally. Perspectives on the role of communication have broadened. Whereas research in the area known as ‘risk communication’ previously concentrated on the char-
acter of the risk, today far more complex models that include both physical and social aspects are applied (Gutteling & Wiegman 1996).

Another purpose of the review is to describe the difficulties people in positions of responsibility, both within public authorities and mass media, face in extraordinary situations like these, and the lessons to be learned from studies of major accidents and catastrophes that have occurred in Sweden over the past twenty years. International research findings will of course be considered, but there is reason to focus on Swedish cases: doing so gives us a measure of the extent to which we here in Sweden actually apply what we have learned from past experience when confronted with new emergencies.

The present review builds substantially on a review of the disaster research literature done in the early 1990s by a group of researchers at the request of the National Board of Psychological Defence Planning (SPF) and the National Defence Research Establishment (FOA) (Flodin 1993; Jarlbro 1993; Nohrstedt & Nordlund 1993; Nohrstedt & Tassew 1993). It has been updated with subsequent studies. Nonetheless, due to the heterogeneity of the field the review makes no claim to offering a complete inventory.

It should be noted that the review does not include studies of the technical aspects of catastrophes. The author is a media researcher with training in the social sciences. Since social and media aspects of catastrophes and crises cannot be understood without certain basic knowledge about people’s risk perceptions, some findings from studies of risk perception have also been included.

**A Sudden Flood of Questions**

Since the word catastrophe can be used to describe a broad spectrum of events having different causes, different courses of development and different consequences, it is quite impossible to describe, in standard terms, how catastrophes affect communication and information processes in society or to say in few words what they can teach us. We can, however, see certain common patterns and conditions which appear to occur rather regularly, whether the event is a fire, an emergency at sea or, say, a nuclear accident. In the following we shall focus on experiences that relate to some of the central communication problems that catastrophes present and the lessons organizations have learned from them.

The principal factor with respect to how catastrophes impact on public information processes is a tremendous surge in people’s need of information. The needs may be regarded as an expression of a need to get a grip on the situation, to ‘control’ or create order in their environment to the extent possible. When catastrophe strikes there arises a need for information about what caused it, its consequences and its victims. The first news of a catastrophe triggers a horde of questions, especially from individuals who may be at risk. The number of questions will, of course, vary widely between, say, a derailment caused by a blizzard (clearly delimited) and radioactive fallout after a nuclear ‘excursion’ (extent unknown). But although the flood of questions may vary in volume and intensity, the level rises extremely quickly, so quickly that authorities are often hard put to manage the situation.

A prime source of pressure on responsible authorities are news media. News reporters’ business is to satisfy the public’s need of information as quickly as possible, and they are constantly on ‘Red Alert’ in case an emergency occurs. As one experienced observer puts it: “Disasters, crises and emergencies can strike suddenly and unexpectedly, anywhere at any time. The causes may be sudden and unpredictable. One factor, however, is certain. The news media will be close behind” (Howarth 1999:xii). Due to the
media’s preparedness, journalists often know more about the situation than the individuals who are responsible for providing information in the most acute phase of the event. This is a source of friction between authorities and the media, but worse, it can develop into a major crisis of confidence (Nohrstedt 1988).

“The Risk Society”

Modern or ‘late-modern’ society is characterized by a high degree of risk as a consequence of ongoing processes like urbanization, industrialization and globalization. The successive concentration of populations in metropolitan cities, the use of large-scale and technically sophisticated systems for production and distribution, and the rapid integration of previously independent markets and economic systems all imply new, and to some extent unfathomable, threats. It would not be accurate to claim that modern Man faces more or direr risks than our predecessors in, for example, the pre-industrial era, but it is clear that the risks we face today are to a greater extent a consequence of human activity, and that the risks are perhaps more insidious and harder to understand. In addition, we should note that awareness of risk in a general sense has increased, and continues to increase, as a result of research and media reports. It is particularly this latter point – our growing awareness of threats like acidification, the greenhouse effect and radioactive emissions from nuclear facilities of various kinds – that brings Ulrich Beck to speak of “the risk society”. Beck’s idea is that these new risk scenarios have combined to create a growing feeling of insecurity among the public at large and to reduce public confidence in authorities (Beck 1986).

Disaster as a Process

Beck’s theory offers a frame of reference in which to understand people’s sense of vulnerability and their risk perceptions today, even if his ideas are not universally accepted. It must be supplemented if we are to explain people’s reactions to hazardous situations. For example, it has been observed that people often actively turn to the responsible authorities for advice and information and then follow their recommendations (Nohrstedt & Nordlund 1993). Only in exceptional situations does that trust and obedience change to mistrust and turning a deaf ear to authorities’ messages.

Behavioural and psychological aspects are not the prime focus of this article, yet a few words have to be said about the most common patterns of cognitive processing and behaviour in response to acute situations. (Unless otherwise noted, the findings are taken from Jarlbro (1993) and works cited in that report.) These shall be noted in connection with several identifiable phases or periods: the planning phase, the warning phase, the acute phase, and the aftermath (consequences and recovery).

During the planning phase, i.e., before the event has occurred or even looms on the horizon, many tend to deny or belittle the risk. Several studies document the difficulty of making the citizenry, and in some cases even authorities, aware of the danger in time, before it is too late. Individuals react differently. Some studies of technological risk perceptions have found that men tend to discount the risk factors more than women do. Studies have also found class differences in that individuals with low incomes and little formal education are more concerned about these kinds of risks than highly educated individuals in high income brackets. Some studies have found that risks to one’s own person tend to be discounted, compared to the risk to the population at large. This difference probably has to do with the control aspect. That is to say, where the indi-
individual has control over a risk behaviour, such as smoking or drinking, the risk will be considered less for oneself than for others. Dramatic and sensational threats are often considered more likely than they actually are, whereas risks of an everyday nature are more often underestimated. The difference may be due to media coverage of dramatic events.

Recent research on risk perceptions in the USA has found a pattern that has been termed, “the white male effect”. White men in the USA have been found to tend to consider the world much less risky than other groups (Finucane & Slovic 1999:24). This was true regarding a whole range of risks: from smoking and sunbathing to nuclear meltdowns and climatic change. White males consistently considered the risk less than white women, non-white men and non-white women did. The authors test various possible explanations of these findings and offer convincing arguments against the idea that the differences might be a function of differences in levels of knowledge or sex.

First of all, the difference persists when controls for level of formal education are applied; secondly the difference between the sexes does not cross race lines. The judgments of non-white men and women were more similar than those of white men and women. The explanation that Finucane and Slovic give most credence is the fact that white men have more influence or ‘control’ over their situations and derive more benefit from use of technologies and other risk activities than the other groups do. Consequently, they apply a different measuring stick: “In other words, one’s risk perception seems to be related to one’s power to affect decisions concerning how the risks are handled. ... Compared to white males, many women and non-white men have considerably less power and control, nor do they derive the same benefits from technology and social institutions. Consequently, they perceive the world around them to be riskier” (Finucane & Slovic 1993:25f).

When catastrophe looms overhead and the alarm is sounded, we enter into the warning phase. Reactions in this phase vary widely. Some are traumatized; behaviour ranges from apathy to manic hyperactivity. Generally speaking, one may say that warnings are given credence according to the perceived credibility of the sender. Another common pattern is that the warning elicits a wave of information-seeking to check or verify the warning message. This reaction often comes as a surprise to crisis managers, with the result that telephone lines and switchboards and other channels of communication can become jammed.

After the warning phase comes the acute phase. Here again, different reactions may be expected, depending on the nature of the catastrophe. Panic is the reaction that has received the most attention in media and in the research literature. Whereas the media have tended to exaggerate the incidence of panic connected with catastrophes and major accidents, the research shows that such reactions are relatively uncommon and that people often react quite rationally even under extreme stress. The exception to this rule is catastrophic fires. These can fulfill the prerequisites for panic, namely, that the individual feels an acute, mortal risk from which there is no escape.

Another common feature of the acute phase is the spreading of rumours. The lack of information regarding the causes of the situation combined with acute danger give rise to speculation and assumptions in both interpersonal communication and communication between the media and the public. Classical studies offer a mathematical formula for the extent rumours will be spread: the volume of rumour in circulation is assumed to be a function of the importance of the subject to the population involved in the spreading of rumour, multiplied by the degree of uncertainty of the information concerned (Allport & Postman 1947). If the catastrophe is perceived to be the result of factors that
still can cause damage to certain people - e.g., a specific social or ethnic group - and reliable and accurate information is in scarce supply, the risk of that rumours or unconfirmed information will be widely spread is overhanging.

After the acute phase comes a period of processing the experience, the aftermath. This phase may see various initiatives for dealing with the situation. Spontaneous or organized activities mobilize those affected by the event and people in the vicinity to pitch in and help one another. Victims of the catastrophe try to incorporate their experiences into their lives and to reinstate their everyday routines. They may seek more information about the causes of the event and/or plan for the eventuality of a similar occurrence in the future. But there may also be more destructive reactions and feelings of survivor guilt, aggressions and conflicts between different groups of victims. It is not uncommon in this phase that the search for reasons and explanations turns into a search for the person or persons responsible and perhaps also for scapegoats.

**Communication Problems Between Experts and the Public**

As mentioned earlier, different people’s risk assessments (the likelihood and seriousness of an event) can differ substantially. A problem the particularly impacts on the communication process surrounding catastrophes and other emergencies is that experts often perceive risks differently from laymen. Many factors contribute: differences in knowledge, degree of vulnerability, personal influence or power, and so forth. Two factors deserve special mention: first, vocabulary or jargon, and second, differences in risk perception.

Experts’ jargon is made up of many special terms that laymen have never heard or, in any case, cannot grasp the meaning of. Obviously, this hinders communication. Regardless of the nature of the catastrophe, problems of comprehensibility often arise, and these can have a negative effect on public confidence and trust in responsible authorities and experts. Information gaps especially tend to arise in communicating the findings of technical studies. In Sweden such problems occurred in conjunction with the Chernobyl crisis (patches of fallout scattered over large regions of central and northern Sweden) in 1986 and after the sinking of the ferry, “M/S Estonia”, in 1994. Successively changing estimates of the amount of radioactivity in Swedish topsoil after the explosion in the Ukraine naturally caused considerable confusion. Similarly, assessments of the technical possibility of bringing the sunken ferry to the surface, as well as conflicting views on the ethical acceptability of doing so, are difficult for the public to grasp – both because of lacking expertise or background knowledge and because of technical terminology in the information and arguments, that are put forward.

Differences in risk perception are, if possible, even more problematic in such circumstances. It has to do with what was said in connection with the so-called “white male phenomenon” above. Several studies have shown that experts who are responsible for designing and/or monitoring projects that involve risk often define the risks involved more narrowly than laymen do. Experts’ definitions presuppose carefully demarcated and specific definitions of risk and usually result in definitions of risk as the product of the factors, probability and (extent of) the consequences of a given threat; laymen, on the other hand, perceive risk as having more dimensions and aspects (Slovic 1987). Furthermore, risk factors are valued differently by different individuals (Drottz-Sjöberg 1991). Renn et al. (1992) write, for example: “[A]n exposure of a few people resulting in numerous casualties is likely to be less influential for risk perception and public response than an exposure of many people that results in minor injuries or only
a few casualties” (154, cf.also 156). Other studies have shown public perceptions of risk to be related to what has been termed the “outrage factor” (Sandman & Miller 1991), i.e., aside from the perceived danger of serious consequences, public perceptions of authorities’ risk perceptions and the adequacy of the measures taken also play in.

Mistrust and lack of confidence in authorities can presumably arise in numerous ways in a catastrophic situation or in the face of acute danger. Differences in experts’ and laypersons’ risk perceptions can lead to public perceptions that the responsible authorities do not take the risk seriously or that their response to the threat is less than the situation requires. Stress and mistrust can arise as much due to the measures authorities take (or do not take) as to the acute stress and fear that exposure to danger entails (Hallman & Wandersman 1992). Low levels of confidence need not even have to do with the decisions and measures taken, but can sometimes be the result of latent distrust. Such a mood can have two causes: (1) the layperson’s awareness of his/her subordinance vis-à-vis authorities in terms of knowledge and information, and (2) a suspicion that the authorities may not be forthcoming with all they know about the situation in cases where they may possibly have been remiss in their responsibilities. If, furthermore, conflicting information and recommendations are in circulation while, at the same time, the public is urged to remain calm, the result may be quite the opposite of what experts have calculated: the risk may be perceived as greater rather than less (Nohrstedt 1988).

**Authorities’ Risk and Crisis Communication**

‘Authorities’ are, of course, human beings, and how they or other organizations act and react in a catastrophe or severe emergency can vary in much the same ways as the general public’s behaviour does. A pathy and exaggerated responses may occur in these environments, as well. What we shall be considering here, however, is the body of research that documents the behaviour of public authorities in crisis, how crises impact on the organizations, and the lessons to be learned from past experience. Unless otherwise credited, the discussion relies heavily on Flodin (1993).

Organizations of this type have the following typical characteristics: their performance is highly goal-oriented with well-defined objectives; the organization’s sphere of authority is clearly delimited and its performance regulated in law; ‘performance’ in these cases means the exertion of legal authority, i.e., power. A cute emergencies generally mean that the day-to-day activities of the organization must adapt to the special tasks the situation requires, which may imply rather thoroughgoing changes. The extent of these demands and the organizations and institutions involved will vary according to the nature of the emergency. A major fire on land usually activates fire-fighters and rescue organizations in a more or less predictable fashion; a major fire at sea poses another, more difficult challenge. And so forth.

Some studies make a distinction between major accidents and catastrophes in terms of the communication requirements the two classes of emergencies make. In the face of catastrophe organizations have quickly to establish contacts with new partners and develop new forms of cooperation that lead the organization beyond the bounds of its normal duties. There is a surge of information – both incoming and outgoing – that has to be processed and expedited, all the while issues of specialist competence and problems of coordination have to be solved. The organization’s ability to be flexible and adapt quickly to extraordinary circumstances is put to the test. The situation may require new duties which in turn require changes in the organizational structure. Perhaps the prime
deviation from normal routine is that responsible authorities, institutions which nor-
mally communicate along vertical lines, are forced to deal with horizontal flows in the
form of urgent questions from and information to mass media and the public. The
change, moreover, must be effectuated without delay.

The information provided by authorities should, of course, live up to high standards
of both accuracy and immediacy - which are not always easily combined. The following
‘laundry list’ is an attempt to systematize what the public has a right to expect of the
information public authorities put out in an emergency situation (Guttling & Wiegman
1996). (No order of importance is implied.) It should be

- credible
- reliable
- clear and comprehensible
- immediate
- legitimate.

The list is hardly exhaustive, and the terms overlap somewhat. Still, it highlights some
of the central features of the responsibility authorities must shoulder in emergency situ-
ations. It should be noted that no firm distinction is made here between public percep-
tions of the message and perceptions of the sender. Credibility is closely related to how
the source of the information, the sender, is regarded. Information will be credible pro-
vided it comes from a legitimate source, i.e., a body that is authorized to provide infor-
mation in the kind of situation that is at hand and whose competence or expertise is rec-
ognized. Obversely, we can expect information from a non-legitimate source whose
competence is unknown to be less credible. Information from a ‘grassroots’ source that
is contradicted by authorities’ information - all else equal - will not be accorded the
same credibility as what authorities say.

Reliability is achieved when the information one provides proves to be accurate/true,
consistent and relevant. Accuracy or truth is clearly the crucial factor here. There is
nothing so destructive of confidence than to be ‘caught in a lie’, or, as Harrison (1999)
puts it: “From the point of view of the organisation’s reputation, being found out in
some kind of cover-up is the kiss of death” (24). Inconsistencies - when different mes-
sages from the sender are not in total agreement - are not as damaging as misrepresen-
tation or untruths. An authority can still enjoy public confidence if the reasons for any
discrepancies are made clear. ‘Coming clean’ with such information is a test of the
communicator’s moral fibre; one is always tempted to suppress information that con-
flicts with one’s previous statements. The importance of relevance is illustrated by the
common observation that politicians are expert at ‘ducking’ pointed questions, that is,
the answers they give sometimes have little to do with the question. The public author-
ity who behaves in such a manner in an emergency or risk situation will find it very dif-
ficult to maintain its credibility and reliability in the eyes of the public.

Clearly, information to the public (or other intended receivers) should be clear and
comprehensible. This is sometimes easier said than done. Sometimes the problem is the
above-mentioned gap between experts and laymen. Furthermore, the public is highly
heterogeneous, with widely varying verbal skills. The range may become even wider as
our societies become increasingly multicultural.
Catastrophes and emergencies often arise suddenly, which makes it important to issue warnings and recommendations immediately, without delay. Speed of delivery is not always compatible with goals like accuracy and comprehensibility (see further below).

Legitimacy means that the authority’s information should be perceived to be compatible with morally acceptable objectives. Here, above all, perception of the message depends on the reputation of the sender. Perceptions of the legitimacy of the message relate to both message and sender. Some characteristics that are decisive with regard to perceptions of the sender’s and the message’s legitimacy are that the message relates to the needs and circumstances of victims and others affected by the catastrophe, i.e., that the sender/message displays some empathy and compassion, and that the communicative situation is characterized by openness. Obviously, these features are closely related to the broader concepts of ‘risk’ that laymen apply, compared to the narrow ones experts use and to the phenomenon of ‘outrage’ referred to above.

On the whole, research in this area shows a growing interest in aspects that relate to what in the field of rhetoric is known as the ‘ethos’ of the risk information. Even research on planned communication and public relations have contributed insights of relevance to risk and crisis communication. Some conclusions are briefly summarized in the following.

Two traditions within communication research that have quite different roots have come to approach one another in an interesting manner in recent years. Jürgen Habermas’ (1990) theory of communicative acts, with roots in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, posits a fundamental distinction between communicative and strategic acts which may be used as starting point for analyzing communication processes. Habermas operates with ideal-types, that is, he describes pure forms, whereas in empirical reality only imperfect, hybrid forms of the phenomena will occur. The idea is not to use these terms to classify some information as communicative and other as strategic, but rather to apply them analytically to help judge the potential of different messages to fulfill the criteria outlined above. Communicative acts are, Habermas writes, oriented toward understanding; the parties to a conversation or exchange strive to achieve agreement and a common outlook. In the case of strategic acts, on the other hand, the goal is not agreement or consensus; here, one of the parties – perhaps both – strives to realize his/her own agenda. Even in such cases the result of the interchange may be agreement and a common outlook, but the strategic actor will not be willing to modify his position if it conflicts with his personal interests. Consensus will be reached, if at all, through adaptation on the part of the other party. According to Habermas, communicative acts are characterized by a special openness, namely, that both parties are prepared to redeem their ‘claims to validity’. In other words, they are prepared to explain their standpoint.

Public relations researcher James Grunig has been quite influential with a so-called theory of excellence, whereby the most effective information programmes are those which are two-way and symmetrical (Grunig & Hunt 1984; Grunig 1992). One can hardly equate Habermas’ communicative acts with Grunig’s two-way, symmetrical information. The latter’s background in systems theory and its relatively rudimentary conception of the dialogicity of the communication (Larsson 1997) place Grunig’s information in the category of tacit or latent strategic acts rather than a communicative one in Habermas’ sense. Nonetheless, both Grunig and Habermas point to a crucial factor that decides whether a communicative process results in relationships of trust, viz., the power relationships that prevail in the communication situation.
Peter Sandman, a leading researcher and consultant in the field of risk communication, reaches similar conclusions regarding the importance of openness and dialogue for the success of communication, particularly in connection with risks and threats. Sandman’s theoretical background is neither Habermas’ communicative acts nor Grunig’s model of two-way symmetrical interchange; instead, his ideas are based on findings relating to risk perception. Like the other two, Sandman emphasizes the importance of dialogue and responsiveness, but he also points ahead to a next crucial aspect: “The cutting-edge risk communication question today is no longer how to communicate with the public about risk; we have moved a long way toward answering that one. The cutting-edge question is how to become the sort of organization that can do it” (Sandman 1992).

Sandman touches on what is undoubtedly the weakest link in the chain between research findings and concrete practices in the field. There is apparently a great deal of inertia to be overcome before findings can be put into practice. Several studies have found that contingency planning for possible catastrophes often has low priority and that the lessons of painstaking evaluative studies are often ignored. As a Swedish government ‘Commission on Threats and Risks’ wrote in 1995: “Very little has been done to prepare for the great volume of information output that serious situations of the kind the commission has studied will require” (SOU 1995:20). A recent review of a number of major accidents in Great Britain during the 1980s found that several of these accidents might have been prevented, had one learned the lessons of previous catastrophes (Young 1999). A Swedish study of local authorities’ information preparedness found that awareness of the need for such preparedness was keen, but that it “had not been translated into detailed information plans, specially trained staff and realistic drills” (Dahlström & Flodin 1998). Handbooks and practical recommendations in the area stress the importance of planning risk and crisis communication in order to avoid errors and to minimize secondary injuries and damage (Chess et al. 1990; Covallo 1987; Dahlgren & Flodin 1998; Harrison 1999; Regester 1987). There are, of course, reasons why politicians and authorities may be hesitant to commit considerable sums of public funds to improving the standard of preparedness for catastrophes – other, more imminent needs cannot be ignored, the risk of a catastrophe is only a statistical probability, and should a catastrophe happen, it will most probably be long after the current term of office has expired, etc., etc. Although the reasoning is understandable, in the longer term there is no justification for turning a blind eye to the information and leadership responsibilities authorities will have to shoulder in the event of a catastrophe or emergency situation. The lessons from the fall-out from Chernobyl and the sinking of the M/S Estonia are prime examples in this regard (Amnå & Nohrstedt 1987; Larsson & Nohrstedt 1996). In retrospect, it seems that Swedish crisis and catastrophe preparedness was in some respects better thought-through among companies in the private sector than among public authorities (cf. Lundin & Nohrstedt 1995).

The objectives of risk communication and crisis management listed above are fairly straightforward and simple in theory and principle. Neither are they controversial in any way. But putting them into practice is often much more difficult. Harry Otway and Brian Wynne summarize the kinds of problems associated with successful risk communication. They do so in terms of a set of paradoxes which, they contend, are neglected by the dominant risk communication paradigm (Otway & Wynne 1989; cf. Flodin 1993):
The reassure-but-warn paradox: It is not unusual for authorities or information officers to have to accomplish two quite disparate goals in one and the same communication. For example, they may have to persuade a group of people to accept certain risks that are considered ‘necessary’, i.e., unavoidable, while making the nature of risk involved quite clear. For example: if a processing plant for hazardous wastes needs to be localized in a populated area, residents need to know what to do in case of an emergency. The task is to convince them that the risk is small, yet great enough that they need to be ‘prepared for the worst’.

The paradox of the target-tailored message: Effective information should be adapted to the needs of the target group addressed. In cases where the risk is great enough that it can be expected to affect large sectors of the population – e.g., ionizing radiation leaking out of a nuclear reactor – problems of credibility may arise if the message directed to nearby residents differs from the information directed to the population as a whole. If the operators of the reactor advise nearby residents about what to do in case of a so-called excursion, but do not inform those whose homes lie just outside the primary risk zone, the difference may be perceived as an inconsistency and suggest that the operators are trying to keep something from the public at large.

The paradox of information cultures: Every organization has a more or less specific information culture, which includes vocabulary, channel preferences and so forth. The established pattern makes it easier to handle information flows under normal circumstances, but in emergencies, when the organization needs to collaborate with entirely new partners with information cultures of their own, established routines can be a hindrance, particularly if one party has an authoritarian and secretive culture, and the other a decentralized and open culture.

The need-for-information paradox: Often, responsible authorities find it difficult to attract the public’s interest when they try to inform them about possible dangers, but once a catastrophe has occurred the public’s need and desire for information is virtually insatiable.

The ‘body-language’ paradox: In concrete situations information is often equivocal and can be interpreted differently, not least in cases where what seems to authorities to be clear and unequivocal is perceived by members of the public to be diffuse and contradictory. The problem is particularly acute when authorities behave in ways that seem to contradict what they say. One example of such inconsistency occurred immediately after the fall-out from the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986, which affected parts of Sweden a great deal. Authorities told dairy farmers to keep their cows in the barn due to the fall-out; meanwhile, the general public was being told that there was no need for alarm. Not surprisingly, many people found this contradictory. A newspaper in Gävle (the largest community in the hardest-hit regions) carried the following headline: “RADIATION SUBSIDING ... BUT COWS, BEWARE!” (Gefle Dagblad, 3rd May 1986).

The confidence/alertness paradox: In cases where the responsible authorities enjoy a high degree of public confidence it can, paradoxically, make it difficult to keep the public alert to imminent danger so that those in danger can act quickly and effectively should the situation become acute. In other words, public confidence that authorities can and will master a situation is not an unmixed blessing – not if it means that people relax when they should be watchful.
• The accuracy/frankness paradox: Referring to the goals of risk communication mentioned earlier, this paradox means that it is not always enough that one’s information is correct, if the sender does not also warn the public that it is preliminary and perhaps incomplete. Once again an example from the Swedish handling of information about the caesium contamination after Chernobyl is illustrative. Once the source of the radioactivity was determined to be fallout from the Ukraine, the Swedish Radiation Protection Institute (SSI) announced that the levels were two to three times natural background radiation. The next day, SSI announced that radiation in some places might be ten times natural background radiation. Three days after the initial announcement, SSI said that in certain ‘hot spots’ radiation might be up to one-hundred times natural background radiation. All three messages ended with the comment that the levels were “low enough not to require any special measures”. The problem was not that SSI’s information was inaccurate or that their interpretation of it was unreasonable. On the contrary, the data were quite accurate and the interpretation well-founded. The problem was that SSI made the first announcement without telling the public that the data were preliminary and incomplete. Failure to do so caused confusion as the picture became more detailed and SSI revised the data upwards. Worried people in the areas concerned presumably got the impression that SSI did not really know what the situation was, but wished to keep them calm at all costs (Nohrstedt 1988).

A second, fairly common reason why an organization - be it an authority or private company - might be less than frank regarding possible errors or misjudgments is the risk that such an admission might lead to criminal or civil proceedings in court (Harrison 1999).

The paradoxes above point out several difficult conflicts that must be resolved when an organization has to communicate about risks, catastrophes or crises. Past experience suggests that numerous problems arise concerning authorities’ interaction with the general public and mass media in these kinds of situations. The Norwegian government’s study of the aftermath of Chernobyl (NOU 1986:19) notes the following conflicts relating to the objectives and operations of authorities and mass media:

• Time: Responsible authorities generally give priority to completeness and accuracy of their information; they therefore often wish to wait for more details before issuing a statement; media, on the other hand, want information fast.

• Sources: Responsible authorities prefer for the media to carry their information and judgments, whereas journalists are trained to seek out a variety of sources.

• Responsibility: Authorities are legally bound to provide correct information that does not cause harm. Media are freer; they can let the public be the judge of the value of their content and leave it to them to draw their own conclusions.

• Knowledge: Experts generally describe the situation in all its complexity; they wish to specify degrees of confidence and so forth. Journalists want to popularize and simplify; nor do they always understand the experts’ jargon.

• Priorities: Media and authorities do not always agree regarding what information it is most important for the public to know.

• Credibility: A credibility crisis may arise if in the confusion surrounding an acute situation authorities provide information that subsequently proves inaccurate or in-
correct. Mass media may not trust the institution’s information further along in the course of the event.

Toward the end of this review we shall consider a number of crisis scenarios in which conflicts of these kinds figure and contribute to the course events take.

**The Role of the Media in Catastrophes**

In a well-known review of mass communication theory Dennis McQuail (1989) set out a conceptual model in which he refers to the system of normative and legal preconditions for media activity as “the media institution”. These include organizational and professional prescripts for mass media messages, here primarily news reporting. In the following I shall highlight contradictions and complications inherent in crisis and catastrophe communication via mass media and journalists, with an emphasis on news copy. (Unless otherwise noted, the material is based on Nohrstedt & Nordlund 1993 and sources cited there.) Mass media and journalists play complex roles in society, and they are subject to a number of criteria that are not always compatible. As a result, individual editors and journalists are often confronted with difficult decisions and dilemmas.

What are the main difficulties media and journalists face in connection with emergencies and crises? Here we shall confine our attention to the major problems which research has identified and documented. They are representative of the kinds of conflicts journalists reporting catastrophes and conflicts can find themselves in, due to inherent contradictions in their own roles and expectations regarding their performance:

- **Channel of information or Fourth Estate?** The equivocal role implicit in the term, “Fourth Estate”, calls attention to perhaps the most fundamental conflict in journalism. On the one hand, the media – especially news reporting – is expected to provide a channel that conveys vital information to all sectors of society, thereby helping to strengthen social cohesion. This role entails expectations on the part of government that the public be kept abreast of decisions and policy, but also an implicit expectation that the media have a share in the responsibility to maintain and preserve the fabric of society. These expectations come to the fore in emergencies, when vital information regarding current risks as well as recommendations and orders regarding measures and behaviour need to be communicated without delay to the entire population.

On the other hand, the status of “fourth estate” implies that the media should maintain their independence vis-à-vis government and critically scrutinize the exercise of power, the wisdom of public policy and the moral conduct of individual public figures. It is an essentially adversarial role, whereby the journalist gives the public a factual basis for their democratic participation as citizens. Under normal circumstances this latter role is quite self-evident, but in the face of a catastrophe, maintaining the independence of the media voice is at once both difficult and problematic. Journalists face difficult decisions. What is a reporter to do if he or she discovers that the rescue and clean-up operations after a major nuclear accident might have been handled better, because, for example, the responsible authorities had made an all too optimistic prognosis so that the measures implemented proved inadequate? Should the criticism be raised while the situation is still acute – which might make rescue operations even more difficult by lowering people’s confidence in authorities, thereby raising the level of anxiety?
One thing is certain. There is no patent answer. The problem must be tackled with specific reference to the situation at hand by the medium and the journalist directly involved. The decision reached will depend on the role the medium/journalist chooses to play, and that choice will have been affected by any number of factors. Is the emergency still acute, or has the situation stabilized? Have people begun to process their experiences mentally, to integrate them into their memories in order to move on? What kind of medium does one represent – public expectations vary, for example, with regard to the press and broadcast media. There is, for example, generally greater acceptance of delays in the case of print media.

- **Speed or accuracy?** Catastrophes and crises often bring the latent conflict between reporting as quickly as possible and reporting as accurately as possible to a head. The conflict is genuine; the goals are contradictory, and a balance must be struck between the two. Journalists follow one of two strategies. The first one is to strive for speed and report all available information immediately. The task of evaluating the reliability and implications of the information is left to the receiver, i.e. in most cases the individual citizen or resident. The problem with this strategy is that it may lead to a reaction on the part of the public to "act first, ask later". The other strategy puts priority on accuracy and prescribes confirmation of facts before publication. In this case the medium/journalist takes responsibility for the reliability of the message. The problem with this strategy is that the confirmation and evaluation process may mean that the information reaches the public too late to be of any use.

- **Understanding or entertainment?** Mass communication researchers sometimes speak of a ‘logic’ of the media – albeit not always entirely consistently and with the same meanings. But the basic idea is that the conditions under which media operate give rise to certain modes of presentation which are frequent enough to be called ‘typical’. One might also call it ‘media dramaturgy’. Information is shaped according to stereotyped moulds: polarization, sensationalism (i.e., emphasis on aspects that are arousing, but not necessarily significant), personification, and story-telling, i.e., constructing a narrative structure with constitutive elements like ‘problem – climax – resolution’.

  The reasons why media choose narrative forms that have these characteristics may be several. For one thing, the standard form may make it easier to reach the great variety of individuals (having different degrees of background knowledge, etc.) who make up mass audiences. Furthermore, dramaturgic techniques – as the name implies – heighten the dimension of psychological involvement and human interest.

  In cases that are dramatic in themselves, however, such features can get in the way of conveying information and an understanding of the events at hand. A drastic and simplified form of presentation, which the media regularly use to arouse readers’ interest, can make it harder to get important nuances across in a stressful situation (“RADIATION SUBSIDING ... BUT COWS, BEWARE!”).

  A special reflection of the dilemma is the empirically documented fact that dramatization of news events tends to increase with the geographical distance from the event.

- **News value or follow-up?** A fourth conflict has to do with various media’s time frames in news reporting. A frequently heard criticism of news journalism is that journalists rush from one event to the next and seldom stop to give what they cover any deeper thought. Since news media tend to equate novelty with news value, news
journalists tend to lose interest in long, drawn-out processes. A catastrophic earthquake will, for example, be given thick, black headlines on the front page in its acute phase, but its aftermath will receive no coverage at all – which means that neither will evaluations and possible lessons for the future be covered. This conflict between news value and follow-up – which, parenthetically, also clearly imposes limits on the media’s watchdog function – is what underlies recurrent complaints about news media’s “short attention span” or chronic lack of historical perspective. In the case of crises and catastrophes, this tendency toward the novel means that the media fail to encourage the kinds of evaluations and analyses which they may have called for in earlier phases of the event.

Phases of Media Reporting
As noted earlier, a principal finding concerning media coverage of catastrophes and emergencies is that the media focus intensely, but briefly on such events. Joseph Scanlon (1980), among others, describes media interest as being virtually totally confined to the acute phase – a phenomenon he refers to as “the Big Bang”. One should, of course, be cautious about making sweeping generalizations. Media work differently. Coverage will differ depending on the relation of the medium to the threat or event. – Does it affect one’s own readers, etc., or only people far away? That said, the fact remains that “the Big Bang”, generally speaking, is accorded high news value and will therefore receive a lot of coverage.

Not surprisingly, research interest mirrors the media’s tendency to focus on the acute phase of emergencies. Earlier phases and the aftermath have received considerably less attention. Something can be said about media behaviour in the warning phase, however.

Several studies have documented the media’s, particularly local media’s, role in warning the public of imminent threats. This has been noted both when authorities have turned to the media and asked them to convey the message and in situations where the media are the first to be aware of the threat. These latter cases can be problematic for the responsible authorities inasmuch as they do not have the initiative from the start. It can prove difficult to answer journalists’ questions, and the risk of contradictory messages is relatively great. Meanwhile, it should be pointed out that the media’s prompt communication of information has on numerous occasions proved a valuable asset to authorities and operative personnel in the field. The Swedish response to the Chernobyl catastrophe is a case in point: authorities at lower (local) levels received information from central (national) authorities via Swedish mass media. American studies have found that in some cases responsible authorities have become aware of the full extent of a catastrophe thanks to media coverage.

In the acute phase the media play an important role, conveying information to and from authorities. But the research also includes some examples of negative effects of media activity in connection with acute emergencies. Probably the most interesting issue regarding the role mass media play in crises and catastrophes concerns the extent to which their coverage makes the situation more difficult – in cases, for example, where media coverage is exaggerated or contains misinformation. That the media may exaggerate or spread inaccurate information is clearly bound up with an assumption that a journalist’s prime motor force is to seek out sensational material. One facet of this problem complex is the media’s tendency to focus on destructive and irrational behaviours such as panic, plundering or raw egotism among the victims of the catastrophe. Experi-
ence shows that such reports create and help spread myths, inasmuch as such behaviours are relatively rare and, when they do occur, they are hardly representative of the victims as a group (Quarantelli 1988). Here, too, one must be cautious about generalizing. Not all media contribute to myth-mongering, certainly not to the same extent, in any case. There is mounting evidence to the effect that tendencies in this direction tend to grow stronger, the further away from the scene the medium is. Myth-mongering is most common in coverage of distant catastrophes (Goltz 1984). This is consonant with an impression that is widespread among Swedish journalists working for local media, namely, that their colleagues in nationally distributed media are much less sensitive to how exaggerated or melodramatic reports may impact on the victims and residents of the stricken community.

Some studies have found that journalists operating under stress, when the demand for information has reached a crescendo, may dispense with or lower their level of ambition to check their sources and confirm their stories. In states of acute emergency radio stations open their doors to any and all kinds of information. In one review of the literature, this overall view is specified somewhat: the waiving of quality control measures known as ‘gate-keeping’ and editorial oversight in states of emergency is common in broadcast media, but not in print media, where the tendency is the opposite, toward tighter controls (Wenger & Quarantelli 1989).

Paradoxically, it has been pointed out that some errors in news reporting may be due to overly cautious behaviour on the part of the media: in the acute phase of an emergency the media limit their reporting to the often quite scant information that authorities have received. It has been pointed out, however, that the so-called ‘command-post perspective’ may be overrepresented among cited sources inasmuch as the media always mention official sources, but do not always attribute material gleaned through unofficial and informal channels. Be that as it may, radio reports appear to be based to a considerable extent on information from the public.

There is also reason to mention the more direct operative problems that media activity in connection with crises and catastrophes can cause. Intrusive reporters can get in the way of rescue operations, etc. Disaster research has noted the stress caused by the gathering of large groups of people at and around the scene of a catastrophe – in many cases well-meaning individuals who wish to help investigators by providing information and so forth. But for unprepared authorities, the crowds can be a nearly unmanageable burden. The onslaught of journalists can also cause friction, especially among organizations which are short on information staff, as both the Harrisburg and Chernobyl events testify to. Media reporting causes other forms of stress, as well. A phenomenon mentioned earlier is the rush of private communications that news of an accident or catastrophe elicits among the populace; people contact friends and relatives in the area to verify and to complement the reports they have heard. This clogs both the telecommunications and traffic infrastructures.

In addition, on some occasions media and journalists go beyond helping authorities gather information and take on operative tasks that normally are the public authorities’ responsibility. In emergency situations radio stations sometimes carry communications between rescue units and organizations, and when operative personnel have too much on their hands, contacts with national media have on occasion been delegated to journalists from local media. In connection with acts of terrorism the media have even helped spread false information in order to mislead the terrorists.
A review of the research literature on media behaviour in the acute phase of emergencies (Nohrstedt & Nordlund 1993) found a quite varied picture. The following conclusions were drawn:

- Immediate, directly transmitting broadcast media play a more important role as channels of communication than print media.
- Local media near the site of a catastrophe will relate to the event differently than more distant national media.
- News reporting about a catastrophic event may be fragmentary, but the event may be shown and explained in greater depth in other material, e.g., features and documentaries.
- Media and authorities can collaborate actively and fruitfully to help manage acute emergencies.
- In other instances, mass media can hinder the implementation of a measure through thoughtless and irresponsible behaviour.
- Media can cause credibility crises between the public and responsible authorities both by uncritically conveying their messages and by subjecting the authority’s every message and every measure to critical scrutiny.

With regard to the aftermath, the phase of mental processing and physical reconstruction after a catastrophe, there is an aspect of media behaviour that research has identified, namely, a reaction or ‘pendulum swing’ on the part of the media in relation to their behaviour during the acute phase of the event. As mentioned above, the scrutinizing function is often toned down or even suppressed during the acute phase of a catastrophe. This – in most cases a quite reasonable response – may lead to compensatory behaviour in the aftermath if journalists feel they perhaps should have been more critical earlier on. In such cases the media may become overly fault-finding and start looking for scapegoats. Studies of Swedish media’s follow-up coverage of the radioactive contamination of parts of Sweden after the Chernobyl catastrophe have found instances of such compensatory behaviour.

A critical role is an integral part of journalistic media’s role, and it is natural that criticism of authorities’ measures be raised once the worst of the catastrophe is past. Media criticism can help improve performance in the future. This represents a vital service to democracy, which means that the tendency to concentrate on “the Big Bang” and then rush on to other, more pressing issues is problematic.

Emergency Turns Into Crisis: An Interactive Model

So far, we have treated this field of research inquiry as consisting of separate sectors like disaster research, risk perception, and crisis communication, respectively. Such a typology reflects the respective academic perspectives from which researchers approach the subject. But my intent here is to try to integrate the knowledge from these different fields into a single, comprehensive model. Thus, in the following I shall interrelate the various research findings in plausible scenarios, whereby crises arise in connection with catastrophes and situations of extreme risk.

First of all, for the sake of simplification we may consider crisis development processes as the result of the interaction of three groups of agents: authorities – media – citi-
zens. Theoretically, this means that the explanatory factor behind crises has to do with problems in the communication between these parties, which arise because the respective parities have different and partly conflicting agendas, priorities and expectations. Crises of confidence, etc., can in turn threaten basic values or damage the credibility of social institutions. Applying such an interactional perspective, we may see crises as arising out of public anxiety, out of sensationalism on the part of news media, or out of blunders or shortcomings in authorities’ performance. Naturally, all three factors or combinations of any two are also possible, but for the sake of clarity we shall deal with the respective causes separately in the following scenarios.

1. Public anxiety leads to crisis. Here the causal mechanism lies in irrational reactions to the catastrophic event on the part of laymen and the general public. The scenario may be outlined in the following steps: (a) people generally do not take measures to protect themselves against possible risks; (b) they lack background knowledge about the threat, its consequences, and how they can avoid danger; (c) they become confused and overly stressed by contradictory messages from different sources, (d) they react in panic, which exposes them and others to yet greater risks, (e) this reaction makes it even more difficult for the responsible authorities to manage the situation; (f) mass media criticize the authorities for their failure to manage the situation; and (g) the public begins to doubt the authorities’ competence and ability to deal with the situation, which makes their task even more difficult.

This scenario is fully conceivable, yet a number of observations speak against it. Although people generally do not take measures to prepare themselves for possible catastrophes, they seldom become panic-stricken and react irrationally when catastrophe strikes. They have an acute need for information, and they do have problems sorting out contradictory messages from different sources, but in most cases – except for situations of life-threatening danger with no time to think – their behaviour is rational. They may not always follow authorities’ directions or recommendations, but that should not be confused with panic or irrationality, even if it may make authorities’ work more difficult. And if public opinion turns against the responsible authorities, it is more likely a consequence of how they have met the public’s need of information earlier on, than that they have been made scapegoats for the problems caused by irrational reactions on the part of those stricken.

2. Media sensationalism is to blame. In this scenario the root of the problem is the way mass media handle information in the early phases of the emergency. The media’s reporting of unconfirmed rumours, hysterical opinions and the complaints of anxious citizens, together with exaggerated estimations of the threat at hand, lead the public to conclude that authorities are not taking the threat seriously enough. The citizens lose faith in the responsible authorities and turn instead to alternative sources who claim to have access to more initiated and more accurate information about the risks involved. Authorities lose the public’s confidence and therewith their ability to deal with the situation at hand, thus living up to the public’s negative expectations – a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. As a consequence, the public blames the authorities for failing to manage the emergency. Picking up momentum, the spiral of crisis spins on.

This scenario is also fully conceivable, but here, too, the empirical evidence does not fully support it. First of all, we have no immediate reason to believe that the media will prefer to report what alternative or unofficial sources have to say – unless, of course,
official sources are extremely tight-lipped. The public’s acute thirst for information naturally leads especially broadcast media to open their microphones to a wide variety of sources, but they are generally careful to note the status of the report or source in question. Neither do we have any conclusive evidence that members of the public are unable to sort out contradictory information, even if they are sometimes quite frustrated by it. There is also a desire among media, particularly media close by, not to worry their audiences unduly. To the contrary, research findings indicate that journalists frequently adopt the perspective of the responsible authorities – the so-called “command post-point of view” – in the acute phase of catastrophes. They share authorities’ assessments of the situation and do what they can to help authorities in the rescue and clean-up operations. Only later, in cases where a crisis of confidence is already budding, can media reporting sometimes turn into a hunt for scapegoats.

3. Crises arise in response to authorities’ shortcomings. Having argued against the first two scenarios, what support do we find for the thesis that crises arise because of errors and shortcomings in authorities’ and organizations’ manner of dealing with the emergency in question?

First of all, a fundamental paradox that characterizes ‘the risk society’ is at play here, namely, that whereas awareness of various risks and threats has increased among the public at large, the gap between experts and the lay public gapes ever wider. This is perhaps most apparent with respect to threats like radioactive contamination, the greenhouse effect and climate change, acidification, and so forth. Most people have neither the knowledge nor the equipment that is required to assess the threat, even as it relates to themselves.

This situation of dependency gives rise to a latent suspicion of responsible organs and exerts, a feeling that they might not be telling the whole truth, that they may be abusing the power their expert knowledge gives them vis-à-vis the public. Inasmuch as the public actually is quite dependent on the judgments experts make, one cannot dismiss this suspicion as irrational. Seen from the individual citizen’s point of view, it is a quite rational response – no matter what experts may think about it and whether or not the reaction is well-founded in relation to the facts of the matter.

These factors – dependency and the ‘knowledge gap’ – may help explain the relative complexity of laymen’s risk perceptions in relation to experts’ judgments as documented in research. Given this complexity, it is perhaps not surprising if experts’ information to those involved in, say, an environmental catastrophe of some sort seems inadequate in relation to the threat as members of the public perceive it. To solve this problem, and to reduce the degree of suspicion of the responsible authorities, demands that the public – or at least those who are directly concerned – be given access to ‘a second opinion’ – other information against which they can check the information and assessments their authorities have issued. It is a question of openness. The decisive factor is how authorities react to this need.

One cannot exclude the possibility that authorities will respond in a way that in fact worsens the situation. The reason is an observed tendency on the part of authorities to adopt a communication strategy that is based on the first two scenarios. That is to say, the main objective is to allay the public’s fears and to orchestrate (centralize) information output and to avoid journalists, the assumption being that journalists will misconstrue what the experts say and exaggerate the risks. Such a reaction on the part of authorities will most probably elicit precisely the kind of crisis they had hoped to avoid. It
will lead people to conclude that authorities do not take the situation seriously enough – the ‘outrage factor’ – and that they are hiding something. All of which adds up to heightened suspicion on the part of the public, which makes it harder for the responsible authorities/organizations to manage the situation since they no longer have people’s confidence.

A Last Word

The really difficult lesson for authorities and experts seems to be the insight that they themselves can be a factor that contributes to crisis, that they actually may be perceived as a risk factor by those affected by a catastrophe. This idea is totally foreign to their own self-perception, nor is it compatible with their position of authority, which presumes that it is they, not members of the public at large, who are ‘authorities’ on the subject. For the media strategist – caught in the middle, so to speak – this self-perception can pose a difficult problem. But it is presumably the media strategist alone who has the capacity to understand the nature of the problem and the competence to solve it.

Translation: Charly Hultén

Note

1. A n earlier version of the review was included in a government fact-finding study of a tragic discothèque fire in Göteborg in 1998.

References


Monitoring Media Crisis
A Decade of Stories about Unemployment in Helsingin Sanomatin

Sanne Valtonen

Media space will always be contested space. This itself is a good reason for monitoring what takes place in that arena (Eldridge 1999).

Common values bind societies together. In the 90s, Finland has gone through a set of changes that endeavor traditional Finnish values. Seemingly, the most drastic changes were external. Finland became a member of the European Union and was thus defined as ‘western’ more strongly than ever before. At the same time, however, the cultural and political meaning of ‘west’ has become more equivocal and vague (see e.g. Alasuutari & Ruuska 1999). The internal changes, too, have been dramatic. Finland faced a deep economic crisis, that had effects in all aspects of Finnish society. In three years (1990-1993) the unemployment rate went from 3.5% up to 20% (Kiander & Vartia 1998). In addition to and because of the depression, there has been considerable re-organization going on: fields, that have traditionally been controlled by the state have been denationalized and the line of activities still governed by the state have acquired new ways of functioning from business world. There has also been a number of cut-backs in social security benefits (Uusitalo 1997). From the point of view of Finnish people though, it seems that, the economic crises and the massive unemployment were the most meaningful changes (e.g., Kivikuru 1996, Vähätalo 1998).

The influences of the economic crisis of the 90s were not only economical in their nature. The recession had an impact on political, social and mental dimensions. The social atmosphere in Finland has changed: in addition to politics, the media and the sphere of cultural practices have had to adapt their functions to new circumstances. This has had an effect on citizens’ everyday life and conceptions of the world and future.

Political and economic discourses were astonishingly homogenous all along the recession (Vartiainen, 1993, 62), which was reflected on the media discourse as well (Ilmonen 1993, 7-9). In the media, political decisions were presented as the ‘only real possibilities’, and within the same discourse, the role of the audience was turned from citizen into spectator. Public discussions about the recession and its consequences failed in creating self-understanding within the society: media discourse left citizens in the arms of economic irrevocabilities. Media discourse was also said to reflect different kinds of post modernisms, into which the fast tempo of social and political changes in the beginning of the 90s has coaxed political discourse. Even though the post modernisms might plumb the spirit or atmosphere of the society, they have not provided any structural explanations to understand societal developments (e.g., Ilmonen 1993, 11).
APPRECIATED media scholars have described journalism as ‘the sense making discourse of modernity’ (e.g. Schudson 1996, Ekecranz 1996). Both journalism and modernity are products of developments in European societies during the last few centuries and both of them are associated with science, industrialization, imperialism and political liberation. Today, the media and society are deeply interwoven. The media can not be reduced to spaces or arenas where cultural or political interaction is made visible, for the interaction takes place through the media: the media has become the organizational focus for an interaction of political activity (McNair 1998, 55-56), and it’s hardly possible to imagine today’s political life without journalism (Hartley 1996).

The media and specially news journalism serve a vital democratic function. The news construct a symbolic world that has a certification of legitimacy and that is easily available for all of us. News are a resource when people are ready to take political action. (Schudson 1996, 33) The media so add something to every story they run. When the media offer a public item of news, they confer upon it public legitimacy. They bring it out to a common public forum and instead of merely reporting an event, they amplify it. Public amplification provides a certification of importance. (ibid., 19-21)

Journalism is a privileged cultural form. It lays claim to the qualities of truthfulness and accuracy - it asks to be accepted as the ‘approximation’ to truth or as ‘mediated reality’. The cultural power of journalism is rooted in its discursive status as truth, its ability to mobilize belief and consent through the telling of stories which are credible because they are journalistic. The producers of journalism can not take this credibility for granted, and therefore they must constantly assert and reassert their status through conventions and practices that signify the ‘believability’ to the audience. It is, at the same time, an ideological force communicating not only the ‘facts’ but also a way of understanding and making sense of the facts. And since there are several ‘understandings’ to facts, journalism is thus an arena for struggle between competing ways of sense-making. (see e.g., McNair 1998, 5-8, 56-57)

Amongst writings of Finnish media scholars over the years, it has been possible to detect a negative tone towards theorizing the relationship between media and democracy (e.g., Luostarinen 1993, also Curran 1991). There have been claims, that people do not use the media because of its societal dimension, but because its good entertainment: media use has been connected conceptually with patterns of consumption, and watching the news has been almost equated to watching serials and soap. On the other hand, journalism has been inspected as a machinery through which the elite is able to articulate and reproduce its status and power. And the ‘from few to many’-structure of modern journalism has been seen more suitable for informing people than for societal discussion.

To me it seems, though, that Finns, for example, have held to their habit of regular newspaper reading in their daily life because journalism somehow meets their life world and interests towards the society (not to say they would not be entertained by the same newspapers). The defining and concluding developments and phenomena of social reality which takes place within the media discourse is meaningful from the point of view of (imagined) communities and cultural identities. Texts represent the reader’s possibility to become involved with shared social reality. As members of (imagined) communities, news make us note same issues at same time, and often from the same perspectives. Therefore media studies, and even content analysis, should pose questions about whether there is an active attempt to create a public sphere, where interests of different groups of people can meet.
I believe that, the public sphere and imagined communities are different sides of the same coin, and that as well as different communities, the public is to be found from the texts and stories of the media. To study text comes from the idea, that within text, we can see the culmination point of the difficult relationship between action and society (structure). When focusing on society, action looks like its structural outcome, and when focusing an action, society seems to be a limiting factor. According to Pietilä and Sondermann (1994, 5-6, 73), when you look at mass communication as action materializing in text, texts come to represent both action and societal structures. Thus, when seeking the changing material media provided for building imagined communities during the crisis, news is essential.

**About Data and Method**

The extensive quantitative data includes all stories about both unemployment and work/working life published in Helsingin Sanomat (HS) and its weekly and monthly appendixes (Kuukausiliite, NYT-liite) during 1988-1997. HS is an interesting source of data for number of reasons. Firstly, in spite of discourses stressing globalization or localization, there certainly was a ‘national’ level in the crisis. No matter the stress and pressure recent developments might have put on the nation state system, modern societies are still built on nation state and its political organization. Accordingly, mass communication has been nationally organized (e.g., national broadcasting companies). In Finland, the newspapers have been regional, and only afternoon papers and HS have claimed being ‘national’. Their ‘national’, however, has been criticized for being more or less symbolic.

On one hand, globalization and its various consequences call forth new kinds of approaches to ‘national’. On the other hand, there is a vivid discussion about growing importance of ‘local’ (everyday practices, experiences etc.) in formation of cultural identities. The importance of locality and local public sphere is by no means diminishing, and there are interpretations about the growing importance of local during the crisis. (e.g., Moring 1999)

From the framework of my interests, this criticism, however, should be faced with another set of arguments. In spite of varying local consequences of the recession, there was still a crisis that encountered the whole nation. Because of the crisis people’s experiences changed in similar ways throughout Finland, and the changes penetrated places and spaces as well as social layers. The public discussions generated by the recession produced a lot of national level definitions and conclusions, and even after the recession, it seems that, at least amongst Finnish social scientists, there is an ever-increasing discussion about Finland, nation state and Finnishness going on. Many interpretations see the crises as a touchstone of national storylines, and a test of media’s democratic dimensions (Kantola 1997). Even though HS is not a national medium neither by circulation nor by content, it is the biggest and probably the most influential print medium in Finland. In its discourse, HS does not address a region like the regional newspapers do. Also HS has a special role in Finnish political culture and in formation of discussions of social issues. For journalists working in other media, HS is a source of information as well as a framework and measure stick for their own work (e.g., Pietilä & Sondermann 1994, 78 and Koistinen 1998). Therefore the ‘us’ HS constructs is of importance when thinking about the structures of belonging in Finland.

The method used in the analysis was quantitative content analysis. It is described as a method seeking to produce objective, quantitative and justifiable description of the explicit content (e.g., Fiske 1992, 179, Riffe & al., 1998). In other words, by monitoring
content I tried to produce valid and repeatable connections and relationships between phenomena in the data. The objectivity of these relationships is another story: to me the codes and modes of classifying in media studies are not unambiguous enough to make talk about objectivity possible. Media monitoring goes beyond merely recording content - it is characterizing something according to a criterion. Thus monitoring is judgemental by character and can therefore be considered a form of media criticism. The knowledge produced is always defined by the criteria used in producing it.

The data consists of a total of 31,401 stories. Because of the amount of research material, stories were collected on grounds of headlines and coded on grounds of glancing through. In a typical news story the headline reduces the central content and forms the first meeting point for the story and its reader. In most cases, the form of a headline is argumentative in addition to its pithyness; it leads to the foot of story’s interpretation of the issue and in some cases it also presents the grounds for the interpretation in condensed form. (Kunelius 1996, 276) In "Det redigerade samhället" Ekercrantz & Olsson (1994, 4-6) pointed out, that modern journalism is a mass phenomenon, a machinery producing massive amounts of texts for wide audiences, and that, it is thoroughly problematic to separate journalism’s qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Also the emphasis on events, that seems to dominate modern journalism is misleading, for all the phases in the production of (news)journalism are regulated by tighter or looser sets of routines. The choice of headlines as the unit of study in the quantitative analysis is also justified from this point of view of routines and continuity.

In spite of its problematic aspects, content analysis as a choice of method is justified, when you look at the size of the data: I can not figure out any other way of going it through systematically. In addition, content analysis gives a possibility to produce a ‘big picture’ or a general description of the object of study. As McQuail (1999) puts it, monitoring is ‘not an academic luxury, but a vital function, for it serves as a means to audit democracy’. It is possible to point out when and in what quantities certain phenomena of working life were discussed during the recession, and by whom were these issues brought up with. I assume, that the economic crisis had an impact on discussions about social issues; their volume, topics and debaters. On grounds of quantitative content analysis it is possible to locate different debates and social actors in time dimension, and point out specially interesting moments or life-spans of interesting themes for further analysis.

**Media Monitoring as Constructing a ‘Meta-Narrative’**

Writing about unemployment and/or the decay of work-centered welfare state is of importance from the point of view of Finnish culture, for Finnish culture has often been defined as uniform and work-centered (see e.g., Anttila 1993, Heinonen 1997, Kettunen 1997, Valtonen 1998 and 1999). When looking at the problem of unemployment from a constructionist framework, it is not only the number of the unemployed that create ‘crisis’, but the ‘crisis’ has also to do with the way unemployment is interpreted and defined. The economic crisis of the 90s caused a tension between the traditional values of a work-centered welfare state called Finland and the ‘reality’ of mass unemployment. I am interested in how the tension and its dynamics was represented in the media discourse. Journalism mediates claims of social problems to masses of people. As a social actor, the media is multidimensional: on one hand, it can set out demands itself, and on the other hand, it provides an arena for demands of other social actors and their de-
mands. The latter includes a possibility of deciding whose perspectives and demands get to be on a public agenda.

As stated before, monitoring media content is a controversial way of producing research material, but from the point of view of construction of social problems, the longitudinal content analysis makes sense. A longitudinal study of media content provides and interesting perspective to cultural transformations: the appearing of certain themes, their ‘refining’ into more sophisticated discussions, fading of other themes and discussions, the appearing of new ‘participants’ (actors, sources) in defining and discussing social problems and the disappearing of some others can be inspected as ways of constructing and coping with social problems on a societal level. Blumer (1971) talks about the natural history of social problems – some stay in the public debate constantly, some disappear to be born again later in some other form/context. It is justifiable to talk about ‘life spans’ of social problems (Hakkarainen 1998, 202). Monitoring media content in its political, cultural and historical context can be a relevant tool for understanding both the construction of the problem itself and the double role of the media as the arena of constructing social problems and the mediator of interpretations and claims criss-crossing the same arena.

Blumer comes forward with a 5-stage model on how this ‘natural history’ of a social problem is constructed. The first phase, the emergence of a social problem refers to social actors starting to demand attention to an issue. The second phase, legitimatization of a social problem, takes place, when the problem is widely recognized and discussed. If the importance of processing the issue is admitted widely enough, the third phase (mobilization of action) might be actualized. This is when communal resources are channeled for solving the problem, and the public debate is lively and targeted. Blumer suggests, that what is decided upon the problem depends upon this phase, for the next phase is institutionalization of the problem, ensued by the possible implementation of the official plan. When talking about persistent or long-term problems like unemployment, the processes of defining may recur, and the definitions may transform over time. I try to point out some changes of trends and re-definitions that took place during the crisis of the 90s.

I divided stories into generic categories crudely on grounds of ‘who speaks’. This categorization is unorthodox and perhaps too rough, but with it I have tried to illustrate an actor-based organization of public discussion. Within categories of ‘news’ and ‘columns, editorials etc.’ there are of course more sophisticated journalistic tools, that offer journalists different ways of tackling the topic. To my study purposes, however, it seems sufficient to reside in this crude categorization. A ‘theme’, in its turn, is the total of stories, that deal with the same issue on grounds of headlines/glancing over. Themes can be looked as serials which are in some contexts included and excluded in some others from the public arena of journalistic discourse.

The first figure represent all writing about work related issues. There were an average of 9 stories in each of the 3 500 HS papers published during the research period. A great deal of work related issues are institutionalized: for example the incomes policy negotiations and the collective labor agreements are reported every year as well as unemployment statistics (even though the rate of publishing statistics fastened and slowed alongside the unemployment rate).

In general, writing about work-related issues increased during the research period. On the other hand, writing about some themes vanished from the agenda during the hardest stages of the recession. This happened to debates about values in working life, job satisfaction and developing working life. The remaining stories in the mid 90s
about developing working life were very different from their angle, when compared to the stories in the 80s: questions of well-being and motivation were turned into questions of cost rationality and efficiency. A good example is the switch of framework in writing about telecommuting: in both beginning and end of the research period, telecommuting was presented as a factor increasing satisfaction and motivation, but during the darkest recession, the topic found its location from the economy-section of the paper, where companies were interviewed on how much money they saved switching offices to telecommuting.

Also writing about voluntary work was practically nonexistent in the end of 80s, but as the unemployment rate started to ascent, the writing begun. My hypotheses is that, when the crisis grew deeper, voluntary work started to look like a meaningful issue from many different frameworks. On one hand, voluntary work could be offered as a ‘mediator’ in conflict between the existing employment situation and the traditional values of work-centered society. On the other hand, the growing number of people living on different welfare and unemployment benefits started to make representatives of middle class (having to deal with a growing load of taxes and payments) nervous: pretensions about reciprocity in receiving benefits were put in. It is interesting to clarify the contents of the discussions and the discussants: what kind of voluntary work is suggested and for whom and by whom.

The relative proportion of letter’s to the editors -writings on work-related issues grew alongside unemployment rate, but also during big strikes (nurses, firemen and bank personnel). It has been most interesting to look at quantities of letter’s to the editors -writings monthly, for it seems, that when it comes to certain themes, a rush in letter’s to the editors -pages leads to dealing the issues also within editorials and other comment/column material. From the point of view of the current debate about public journalism, this seems utterly interesting.

It was not, however, only the number of discussions carried on unemployment that arouse during the research period. It seems, that the threshold of being published got lower for most of the work-related themes, for when working life was in the middle of transformation, most societal actors considered it inevitable to discuss the changes. The institutionalized agenda was suddenly accompanied with a selection of new agenda of recession-related topics and themes. The public sphere of work-related issues was thus
necessarily fragmented, and it is hard to avoid interpretations that emphasize the reactivity of the media. This reactivity of course reflected the diversity, that was characteristic to comprehension of the crisis and its impacts among politicians, economists and researchers.

**Figure 2.** Writings on Unemployment in Helsingin Sanomat 1988-1997

Quantitatively, writing about unemployment followed the unemployment rate with a couple of exceptions. When looking at the sum frequencies, as in figure 2, there seems to be a decline on the curve in 1994, which could be interpreted to be either wearing out of the themes and getting tired of the discussion or the shift of media-agenda caused by presidential election and the EU-referendum, or of course, both.

When looking at individual themes and their life spans during the research period, there is a bit more variation. Stories about the unemployed were common in the beginning of the decade – HS published a number of series about ‘life as unemployed’ in 1992-1995. In 1994, however, the angle in these stories started to shift. Earlier, the focus was on surviving strategies, everyday practices and possibilities to ‘recover’ etc. Around 1994 the emphasis started to be in more ‘regular’ news material, events, decisions and changes in policies or regulations.

In the beginning of the research period, there was just unemployment. The statistics were published twice a year, and every once in a while there was a story about unemployment as a social problem. Even when the recession started, unemployment and the unemployed were handled in the same stories – all the aspects of the problem were combined or generalized. Later, in 1992, unemployment as a theme started disperse into more specific categories. The stories started to report unemployment within a certain field, within young men, within young people in general, within aging people and within women. Long-term unemployment, social dropouts and marginalization became on agenda even later. In 1992, public discussions about adequacy or inadequacy of unemployment benefits started and were continued until the end of the research period. At the end of the period, though, the focus was on possible misuse of these benefits. Also writing about unemployment in general started to shift from describing its impacts on both the unemployed and the societal structure into speculating its costs and their equal division. These kinds of shifts and developments in the ‘agenda of unemployment’ undeniably tell something about changing values and hierarchies in the society.
These results are of course very general. Particular issues would call more specificity, but even this more general form of monitoring produces something useful. Even if we might never find out the extent of influence from outside the media, we can know something about the face showing to the public. The most traditional monitoring addresses content: media’s ability to report all sides of the story or all variations of the plot as well as the democracy of writing (are all groups involved in social issues given voice in the public space) (see e.g., Galtung & Vincent 1992). When monitoring the ‘form’ (Galtung 1999, 22) of the writing about unemployment, it is possible to compare the space given to journalism, commentary material and reader’s voices – an issue not really tackled in this article, but both pictures 1 and 2 indicate not only the amount of ‘cases’ or observations, but also the volume of these three different voices.

Monitoring content should be somehow focused on special moments (elections etc.) or certain discussions (monitoring the life span of a theme) (Edwards & al. 1999, 40). Galtung suggests comparative monitoring but not comparative only across media, but also through time (1999, 22). ‘All around’ monitoring draws attention to ‘earth quake there, ban of alcohol here and a crime wave in somewhere else’ and results easily in interpretations stressing the ‘blurring line of news and entertainment’ or the ‘melding of public and private’ or ‘politicization of once-private affairs’ (Schudson 1996, 170, also Galtung 1999). Even if these interpretations about transformations of the public sphere were right, monitoring alone can not provide straight empirical evidence, nor can it give answers to any ‘why’ questions. The idea behind monitoring is not theorizing, but monitoring can provide data that can serve as raw material for theories. I do believe, that even if answering a ‘why-question’ is not possible, selective media monitoring can help produce relevant questions for further analysis. It seems substantiated to look at some specific themes and their representation from the point of view of continuity, trying to look at what are the conditions under which a theme is taken into the sphere of the routinized gaze of journalism and how the sets of rules or conditions are re-produced and transformed over time.

Monitoring the Discursive ‘Us’

The writing about unemployment and the unemployed is extremely interesting from another angle: the point of view of discursive ‘us’. When circumstances in a society alter, the stories constructing (imagined) community, have to be re-produced. Constructing identity is a two-way street in the sense that, it is a process of both turning many into one (focusing on similarity and smoothing internal differences) and a process of distinguishing one from all others. In Finland, cultural identities are in close connection with the concept of work (e.g., Anttila 1993). Finns have come face to face with different kinds of crisis, smaller and greater, by increasing their work load. It could be said, that Finland is a typical work-centered society, where the surviving of majority of the population and the uniformity of the society and its values have been connected to work and labor market. Unemployment and ‘laziness’ have even been seen as threats to the social system. Work is the sphere of life, where Finns have traditionally measured their value in the eyes of their co-citizens and aspired culturally valued (economic) independence, self-sufficiency and control over one’s own life. In addition, in Finland work has had to do with citizenship: in many discourses, it is the working people, that construct the ‘us’ and people outside the labor market (e.g., the unemployed) are seen as ‘others’. Therefore the massive unemployment of the 90s disconcerted not only individuals and communities, but the very basis of Finnish society.
In post-modern societies, the concrete forms of collaboration have been replaced by ideas, principles and conceptions over which people form imagined communities (Anderson 1983, 6-12). If we assume a relation between discussions in the media and imagined communities, it is of outmost importance to study the discussions. I agree with scholars stressing the increasing importance of the media in modern society; it has not only grown in people’s spare time and entertainment, but also in politics and the sphere of economy (e.g., Thompson 1995, Väliverronen 1998). I believe it is possible to study communities and their characteristics by inspecting the stories communities produce about themselves. I gather, that stories about unemployment and/or the decay of work-centered welfare society are of importance from the point of view of Finnish culture, for it has often been defined as uniform and work-centered (see e.g., Anttila 1993, Heinonen 997, Kettunen 1997, Mäkelä 1989, Renvall 1998, Valtonen 1998 and 1999). In a way, economic crisis of the 90s challenged journalism and its ability to deal with transformations in central area of the society so, that mutual understanding remains. The ‘us’ in discourses of national identity and media is constructed around people working and voting and implementing all the duties and rights appertaining to the way of life of a work-centered society. The explosive growth of unemployment imposed journalistic discourse of HS a new task: if it still wished to achieve a ‘national’ or widest possible audience, it had to expand its us/them constructions so, that also new groups of people and ways of life could be fitted in.

As mentioned earlier, ‘themes’ can be looked as serials that come and go in journalistic practices. I have so far presented the historical dimension of constructing certain themes in HS. Now I wish to discuss the communal aspect of writing about a theme, starting with separating different ways of presenting a theme. Since the analysis is still based on quantitative, roughly coded data, the categorization is again as crude as possible.

In general, there were 3 ways of writing about unemployment (about ways of writing, see also Renvall & Reunanen 1999, 85), and these three types of representing an issue position ‘we’ differedntly. There were problem-centered, administrative or process-oriented stories, in which information about unemployment was given in a form, that easily dispels political or ethical dimensions. The ‘we’ in these stories was ‘universal’ or widest possible – journalistic discourse represents all of us.

The second way of writing consisted of stories representing controversy of interests. These stories brought up the competing views and stressed struggle. The construction of ‘us’ varied. In some cases, the voice of the journalism was similar to one (strongest or official) point of view, whereas the other competing voices were represented somehow selfish in their struggle. In other cases, the widest possible ‘us’ was constructed.

Third, there were moral, ethical and scandalous stories, in which the theme was dealt with in a way that easily provokes prejudice etc. (This kind of story construction was, however, uncommon in HS.) In these stories, the changes in the us/them –construction caused by the realities of the crisis was most noticeable. It seems that a notable number of arguments in discussions about working life and especially unemployment are located in the sphere of moral (see e.g. Vähätalo 1998). In media publicity of work related issues, questions dealing with the functionality of Finnish society, reasonability and rightfulness of policies and economic decisions are central – that is questions which have to do with common values and shared conceptions of right and wrong.

One of the themes constructed also as moral or even scandalous was writing about unemployment benefits. Quantitatively, writing about unemployment benefits reached its peak as late as in 1996, when the unemployment rate had been (slowly) lowering for
a year. I assume, that unemployment was such a painful problem from so many angles, that critical conversation about its costs was only possible after the worst was over. Before the culmination point of the unemployment rates, the stories were neutral and reporting in their character, and even though some stories about e.g., misuse of unemployment benefit were published, more critical stories remained as a side issue in the media discussion. In 1996 and 1997 as much as a fifth of all the stories about unemployment benefits and costs was about misuse. The moral (or the more traditional) aspects of unemployment gained foothold, even though moral panic forecasted by some researchers (e.g., Julkunen 1993, see also Golding & Middleton 1980) never happened in pages of HS.

There was a change also in the positioning of the unemployed. In 1992-1995 HS published a number of series about ‘life as unemployed’. In 1994, however, the angle in these stories started to shift. Earlier, the focus was on surviving strategies, everyday practices and possibilities to ‘recover’ etc. A round 1994 the emphasis started to be in more ‘regular’ news material, events, decisions and changes in policies or regulations. Significant here is, that, the unemployed formerly represented as the ‘marginal’ were turned into a group of social actors in the media discourse. As a hypotheses, when inspecting these discussions qualitatively, I assume, that the transformation has something to do with social moral and common values – it was impossible to repeatedly leave a fifth of working aged Finns out of ‘us’, so the conditions of decent citizenship were (even intentionally) expanded.

Heikki Luostarinen describes the relationship between media discourse, elites and the people aptly by using metaphors like ‘doormen of public sphere’ and ‘repairing coefficients’ (1993, 244-246). He claims, that journalists recognize their role as ‘doormen of public sphere’ and that they also can evaluate social groups and their abilities to function in society and influence social debates in the media. ‘Repairing coefficient’ are drawn from these evaluations, and with the coefficients, journalists try to distribute possibilities to take part in public debates more evenly. Luostarinen comes to argue, that, there are groups in the society like the unemployed, that are outside all coefficients. My longitudinal data shows, however, that slow changes happen, the unemployed were transferred from the margin to the active public sphere, where it is at least possible to become heard (and not only asked questions) in the media discourse and to benefit from repairing coefficients.

In different circumstances discursive landscapes grow different, and stories about ‘us’ as well: different actors are accepted to such stories, different conceptions of past chosen as official. The media is thus a dynamic machinery producing cultural meanings. Meanings produced within its texts are, however, not one-sided or monophonous, nor is their interpretation fixed in any way. Media discourse produces multiple social representations, multiple narrative strategies and dynamics of their mutual struggle. Media discourse is not either liberal or conservative as such, but often it strives for being ‘a little bit both’ in order to attract widest possible audiences.

Conclusion
Writing about work-related issues seems to have both increased and widened during the crisis – the recession forced themes which were unknown to the HS of the 80s to the agenda. It also seems, that some discussions came to stay: even if working life is discussed only a little bit more often than before the crisis, there are five times more stories about unemployment now than there were in the 80s. It seems, that after the end of 1993,
there has been also qualitative changes in many discussions: unemployment turned into bad situation in employment (EU policy), the unemployed gained new social status, discussions about developing working life re-appeared but in slightly changed colors. In addition, the solidarity the crisis produced started to disappear, and discussions loaded with moral resentment begun.

The unemployment caused by the economic crisis has been presented both from the frameworks of despair and possibility. From both of the frames, the recession was seen as a challenge or a touchstone to welfare politics and democracy. In the media discourse however, the crisis was re-presented with generalizing figures, growth curves and percentages, but at the same time the crisis touched people's lives in different ways and levels. This made the role of the media crucial, for it provided a link between political elites and (groups of) people.

One central dimension of the media is its ability to organize social reality. Via the media, communities can point out their central events and mark their (cultural) territory. The media constructs reality from a common point of view and helps its audiences to interpret important historical and spatial dimensions (Altheide 1985). Carey (1989, 19) claims that journalism binds audiences into communities with narratives of consensus, which leave structures of social power visible. The media brings up issues for masses of people to be aware of at the same time. By pointing out common experiences it creates sensations of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and community. In spite of challenges from directions of globalization and/or local particularities, commonplace nationalism, national pre-political ‘we’ has not disappeared. Naturalized and self-evident conception of us is according to Alasuutari (1999, 134) something media discourse produces, reproduces and maintains unnoticed all the time.

Economic crisis of the 90s challenged journalism and its ability to deal with transformations in central area of the society so, that mutual understandings can remains. The explosive growth of unemployment made journalistic discourse expand its us/them constructions so, that also new groups of people and ways of life could be fitted in. The life spans of themes related to working life in HS tell at least about an effort made in that direction, but it is only after qualitative text analysis of important discussions, themes and moments in the research period, that one can evaluate the limits, conditions and shifts of us/them constructions.

Heikkilä and Kunelius (1997) write, that journalism should be evaluated in terms of three concepts: access, dialogue and deliberation. When thinking of access, questions like who gets to define reality? what kinds of actors are noted in media discourse? what kinds of restrictions are set for information to become public? Become important. On grounds of my data, the economic crisis had an access-related impact on HS’s agenda in the sense that the unemployed were given new space as a group and as a social actor.

The concept of dialogue, in its turn, demands questions like: in what quantities does journalism provoke social debates? how does dialogue work as a form of journalism? how relevant descriptions of reality can dialogical journalism produce? The dialogue can be ‘internal’ that is, happen within the stories. Then the question is about diversity of definitions (Heikkilä & Kunelius 1997, 9, also Curran 1991). A sub-study on misuse of social security benefits conducted with Mika Renvall (Renvall & Valtonen 1999) shows, that questions challenging nation’s morals and common values are dealt with broadminded manner and diversity of actors. Predictions about moral panics and media panics given in the middle of the crisis did not materialize, and it seems that, in post modern society, it is no longer possible to pursue one uniform identity by defining/labeling some
group/s as other. On the other hand, it is possible, that the solidarity and mutual understanding that has prevailed vanishes, when the recession in public sector continues while the economy is blooming.

The dialogue can also refer to the relation between journalism and its audience. Good journalism should be able resonate with its readers. When thinking about the deeper meaning of the public, that is, for example, about creating space for new kind of social debate or political culture, one drifts into questions of deliberation. To my understanding, the most fruitful aspect of the concept of deliberation is its assumption, that everyone has know-how and capability when it comes to social and political. Thus journalism could learn from the people, if it only would stop locating people ‘outside’ the society and start taking people inside the processes of journalism (also Heikkilä & Kunelius 1996, 91).

There was an attempt to be seen in HS to bring up citizens perceptions of the recession, but when looking at citizens as actor in the data, it is clear that ordinary people have a minuscule role in the discourse of journalism. Tuchman (1978) called the position of the ordinary people in the news symbolic; people were there to cheer royalties or to cry in case of a severe accident, and their function was not to represent themselves, but the whole population. The growing number of stories, where the unemployed were presented more as actors than as objects in the end of the research period, hints, however, of a possibility for another journalistic culture.

Mass media continues to be important as instrument to address vast audiences and shape public and private minds. (Nordenstreng 1999). Thus, scientifically based description and assessment of media performance that traces trends of the ideological narrative of the media discourse is still needed. Overviews on content, and specifically on constructing a selected theme or time period are needed, as well as – parallel to it – monitoring of concentration and consumption and so on, for media content constitutes a strategic part of broader reasoning about the media and society. However, monitoring alone is (no matter how historical or comparative) seldom sufficient to produce more general or theoretical explanations on social phenomena. Reflecting what to monitor, how and when should be done carefully, for data itself carries no answers with it. But it can be harnessed as an aid of constructing both empirically and theoretically important questions.

Notes
1. On the other hand, HS is exceptional even internationally because of its large circulation within Finland. Suhonen (1994, 70) argues, that there might not be too many other newspapers that reach such a big national audience.
2. Also many studies about readers of newspapers support focusing on the headlines: newspapers are read in a glancing manner, and the headlines function as reference marks, on grounds of which decisions about reading or not reading are made (e.g., Miettinen 1980).
3. The obvious danger in constructionism and its analysis is that the research may be reduced into a critique of different actors and their discourses. To me, it seems though, that it has not so much to do with ‘facts’ and their truthfulness, but the claims presented within the process of constructing the problem, and the relation of these claims with other claims and ‘facts’. Therefore the solution may be found from contextualizing. By comparing the claims represented to both competing claims and other ‘knowledge’ about the issue, it can be understood why the claims have been brought up in the first place. By using contextual data for comparison, it is possible to ask why certain information has not been taken in the discussion etc.
4. After the second World war, the whole nation took part in the reconstruction processes, and in the 60s, economic growth was looked for with Pekka Kuusi’s program, which presumed widening the participation to the labor market. In general, it has been said, that in Finland things have been tried to organize in a way that as many as possible has been working. At the same time national unity has been
emphasized. On the other hand, it should be stressed, that this line of interpretation should be connected with longitudinal historical trends, or, as recent sociological writings (e.g., Alasuutari & Ruuska 1999) have shown, to cultural conceptions of Finland and Finnishness. Since the 70s, in the level of political decision-making, the pressure towards slowing down inflation has been stronger than the strive for full employment (Kosonen 1998).

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Scales of Space, Place and Money
Discursive Landscapes of Regional Inertia, Identity and Economical Change

Inka Moring

A whole history remains to be written of spaces - which would be at the same time the history of powers - from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat. (Foucault 1980, 149)

During the years 1991-1996 the national economy of Finland literally crushed down. The crisis followed a long period of economic expansion, the boost that was more or less financed by international debts. In the beginning of the 90s, the Finnish economy entered a depression. Although this happened in many European countries, the Finnish case was among the most severe. The consequences of the crisis varied by region and sector due to structural differences in production and population within the country. As a consequence of the crisis the Finnish society faced a set of new problems in the 1990's: large scale long-term unemployment and social exclusion, and the crucial question of the sustainability of advanced welfare provisions.

It is not yet clear whether the regional disparities increased or how the inequality between regions developed. One thing is quite clear, however. Regionally there were variations in the scale and nature of strategies handling the crises. These variations appeared to be in relation to the reporting of the crisis in regional newspapers. Applied solely, a structurally conducted regional analysis would in this case be inadequate. Subtle meaning-making and interpretation processes of the situation also varied, forming specific regional media landscapes. The process could be studied from the point of view of different hermeneutical devices for understanding the situation. How was the collective consciousness of the people linked to the crisis, and how did this interact with the common characteristics of the region? And how did regional newspapers serve as mediators of ideological everyday practices linking economical events of the nation to the collective and cultural sphere of the people?

The fondled myth of 'Finnishness', the wholeness of the landscape of national identity remained as one layer of the symbolic structure. It was, however, contested by strong regional voices. National and regional, or local, identities were intertwined and created 'discursive landscapes', the conceptual compound attributed with a seemingly common contextual denominator - 'Finland' (see Häkli 1998,1). These discursive landscapes were, of course, in Foucauldian terms, tied to particular epistemes, practices and regimes - which were contingent and both spatially and temporally tied to specific conflicts and
situations. There were both regional metabolism and inertia effecting the social change within regions.

**Spatial Perspective on Change**

The focus of my project has been the regional character of the crisis and its portrayal in regional newspapers. The media coverage of the crisis in locally profiled newspapers is analyzed, asking how the ‘stories’ of the crisis were brought to the people in a regional setting, and what kind of journalistic strategies were applied in handling the issues. I also explore how the regional settings of everyday life construct textually as ‘life worlds’ in the newspapers. The main focus is on the relation between places and regions (different localities) and the process of identity construction (discursive regional and/or national frameworks in newspapers).

In the first phase of the research process the content of the news agendas of the regional press were examined quantitatively. The results of this analysis were striking. In the light of a broad categorization, the subject matters discussed in regional newspapers did not differ that much. But as soon as the analysis went beyond abstract categorizations, quite specific ‘profiles’ of local content were detected, constructed by the journalistic representation of each of the four regions. Issues like regional politics, employment, the center-periphery dimension and regional identity categories were differently represented. The qualitative analysis gave support to, and partly explained, the differences detected in the quantitative analysis. So, for example, some themes had crucial importance in regional ‘life-worlds’ when some issues did not matter as much. At the same time, in the light of regional statistics on GNP, the news agendas did not follow that either. For example, some regions continued to report bad news on regional economy when according to the regional statistics the regional economy had started to recover and also the other way round. Regional news-agendas constructed their own time-space.

During the time-span 1988-1997, also a transformation in orientation towards regional self-reflexivity occurred. This notion of reflexive nature of regional journalism was displayed in ways that revealed the growing interest towards regional characteristics as such. Partly this could be explained as economical, geographic and demographic structures that faced severe internal and external tensions and setbacks due to the recession. The most interesting explanatory factor was, however, the cultural or identity landscape. Was the variation in newspaper content and interpretation of the situation, the ‘What is going on’, due to regional cultural landscapes? And what kind of factor was this regional landscape? Was Finland entering from a Hegelian state domination to a Herderian Kulturnation, giving room for regional voices and putting up with growing differentiation (see Joenniemi 1998)?

An encounter of these matters requires notions on ‘regional’ and ‘national’ identity as concepts of explanation and historical containers. This article also leans on the conceptualization of discursive landscape(s). Discursive landscapes in this case are opened in the context of economic crises and social change the regions have faced. Local journalism is taken into the analysis as a hybrid form of ideologically tuned regionalist discourse with commercial and economical constraints.

Empirically, the focus of this article is on how mediated ideological (textual) practices have constructed spaces of economy and identity within one region, Northern Karelia. The local news agenda of the newspaper Karjalainen is analyzed in order to show how the ‘crisis’ was experienced in this specific discursive landscape. Here, the main question concerns the nature of those strategies and techniques that construct a
‘strong regional self (journalistically speaking) in a peripheral borderland area, e.g., how were scales of space, place and money created as discursive formations?

National/Regional Identity as a Spatio-Temporal Container

Space, place and landscape are central to any enterprise mapping and analyzing the geographic imagination of the nation. These concepts do not denote a fixed and static object, but ongoing processes within cultures. Spaces (regions, territories, areas etc.) as such are not a background to socio-historical actions. They could rather be seen as more vital products and determinants of those actions (Lefebvre 1991; Gregory 1986; 1994; Jarvis 1998; Paasi 1986). Following the definition of Gregory (1986, 451): “Space is not merely an arena in which social life unfolds but a medium through which social life is produced and reproduced.” Space is always conceived, perceived and lived category (Lefebvre 1991).

Space/place/landscape are also inseparable from social relations and time. Geographical knowledge is impossible without taking historical narrative into account. Spaces and places contain stories and serve as palimpsests to specific contextual narratives of people. That is why space/place/landscape can be analyzed as sites of an ongoing struggle over meaning and value (Jarvis 1998). These concepts are represented as mental or textual constructions also in relation to the codes that are embedded in social power structures. From and within this spatial ‘grid’ or matrix of identities, also regional features are evolving as temporal containers within territories.

Usually, when we refer to regional or national identities, we are leaning on relational models of identity. These are formed by beliefs of common ancestry, or experience. They also give rise to shared characteristics or traits. In this case, identity can be defined as much by what we are as by who we are (Crang 1997). This is where geography and spatial dimension come into the picture, since these ‘us’ and ‘them’ are often territorially delimited groups and they need to be constructed with the help of the border(s). Relational identity models also have temporal dimensions. Anderson (1983) for example, in his work examining the rise of the nation and nation state, suggests that we have to regard ‘national’ identity as a historically specific form. For instance in feudal Europe, people did not use nation to frame their identity. National identity is something that has to be constructed in time and space. The maintenance of this symbolic construction needs also constant re-production with the help of cultural forms.

A short look into the Finnish historical past may give some clarity to this notion. A popular misconception is that Finns are a homogenous people who live within natural borders limited by the Baltic coast in the South and the West and with a political border in the East. Historical research, however, has shown that different types of Finnish communities and tribes existed in different parts of the Baltic area, connected by the sea that was their main communication road. At the same time, other Finnish communities were formed in the inner and northern parts of today’s Finland, kept together by inner-sea routes, but isolated from the Baltic communities due to transportation difficulties over land. The historian Matti Klinge (1984: 10, 38-48) notes that the sharpest linguistic border within Finland between Finnish dialects nowadays remains between the coastal areas in the South-West of Finland and areas only some hundred kilometers farther east (Tavastland).6

There are different kinds of social and personal identities that may give shape to, and be formed by, cultural landscapes. National identity is a particular case of identities because it is usually formed with political aspirations (Gellner 1997; Hobsbawn 1992;
Häkli 1998). The concept of national identity is problematic also when applied to analysis – because it usually implies national culture, as noted above – Finnishness (or Swedishness, Dutchness etc.) as an organic super-metaphor. Some central values of the group – collectivism, value of hard work, Lutheran ethic, and so forth – are assumed to apply, at least at some level, to each member of the nation. Furthermore, the national model usually tends to downplay the regional or individual human agency by focusing at the collective shaping of larger political entities. This vantage point reduces the comparative approach within one country with its tendency to flatten the cultural surface to one whole ‘national discursive landscape’. Also the normative assessment of the current discussion depends very much on what parts of national culture or identities are in focus, and how and for what purpose these identities and cultural features are focused.

Regional identity as a concept puts emphasis on spatially delimited space or geographical surrounding, sense of place. The sense of place is based on the need to belong to the particular place, home, not to the society in the abstract sense. In satisfying this need of roots, people make commitments and develop loyalty to localities (Sennet 1999, 15). Modern place-making involves a search for the comforts of sameness in terms of shared identity and reduction of density. But place-making also needs a system that constantly allocates distinctions between us and them. Place-making as a form of expression has to be available to consumption in order to come a part of identity production, be it national, local or regional. It has to have a common and shared daily basis that is collective to its nature. Part of this regional identity production is based on symbolic stereotypes of different mental characteristics of the areas. They have been kept alive in the regional press (also in cultural and educational praxis) as part of ideology of everyday practice within imagined communities.

What is the Structure of the Imagined Community?

The study of spatial dimensions of social life has quite often been considered theoretically problematic (Linz & de Miguel 1966; Paasi 1986; 1991; 1997; Alexander et al. 1986; Harvey 1989; Soja 1989, 1996; Jameson 1992; Allen et al. 1998; Bird et al. 1993; Meyrowitz 1985). In recent human geography-oriented studies, some of these problems have been discussed and also partly elaborated focusing partly on the role of media (Haarni et al. 1997; Relph 1976; Thrift 1996; Bauman 1998) and by shifting the methodological emphasis towards a more qualitatively oriented analysis departing from a constructivist view. Media tends to replace as a technology and cultural phenomenon the missing link between individuals and institutions – communities and cultures. But, as a research object, is this phenomenon a cultural or structural enterprise?

The most difficult problems are connected with the questions how to tackle classical traps of both inductive and deductive explanatory models. To apply the problem to my analysis: how can we interpret the life-worlds that media products reflect without being guilty of obscuring cultural essentialism by finding ‘regional’ identity as an overall explanatory factor at the commercial, strategic and social levels? And, how can we modify explanations derived from purely structural factors (demographic, economical, geographical, etc.), at the same time avoiding ecological fallacies?

Anderson’s (1983) conceptualization of the human capacity to create ‘imagined communities’ is one theoretical elaboration stemming from the constructivist vantage point. Any community in this sense is always imagined whether national, local or ethnic. Symbolic boundaries of language, culture and meaning-making process are essential in understanding that no area or territory is only a geographical site. It is always
part of cultural understandings by those who inhabit the area. (Morley & Robins 1995, 5). The concept ‘imagined community’ is also nowadays widely used in media studies (Meyrowitz 1985; Morley & Robins 1995; Ekecrantz & Olsson 1994). That is probably partly because it metaphorically circumvents the above mentioned theoretical problems. It replaces the classical dichotomy ‘agency-structure’ with imagination.

It is easy to see regional newspapers as analogous devices constructing textual spaces in which these ‘imagined’ human relations could take place. Speaking of ‘community’ means that relations between human beings are collective. Speaking of ‘imaginary’ in this case means that most of these relations are only imaginable but never actual. Most of the members taking part in this daily practice or ‘ritual’ of reading the newspaper never encounter their fellow-readers. Imagined community describes the orientation of an audience and this orientation is easier confirmed than contested.

Anyway, all the physical territory and regional structure – solid or not – does not melt into the air. Regional structures in economy and demography are more than imagined constraints of regional community. They are in an input relation to the newspapers as commercial enterprises. Journalists do possess – at least in some sense – the power of individual agency.

This is modified and supported by the professional and ethical codex of the profession. And, people constituting the audience do imagine and dream, as human beings tend to do, but they also live among political, economical and cultural structures – within borders that are more or less visible. The notion that people imagine and dream, also collectively, does not bring the process of analysis very far.

**Discursive Landscapes – Merging the Cultural and the Structural?**

We can also think that newspapers construct discursive landscapes. These context-sensitive landscapes are symbolic and textual webs of meanings and interpretations that frames the process of experiencing and understanding the living world. The discursive landscapes of the regions emerged with a broad range of cultural and political activities, events and projects, images and stereotypical flashes from the history producing the symbolic fabric linking the self-understanding of the people with a particular territory, concrete places and everyday practices and imagination. Regional cultures and spaces in this sense could be thought about in other ways than as bounded containers or as a background for imaginary practices (like national cultures; see Håkli 1998). They are processes where structures, representations of collective(s) and individuals change. And, as an explicit assumption, these ‘discursive landscapes’ are, at the same time, geographical, economical, textual and sociopolitical.

This conclusion is arrived at by coupling a term ‘regional’ (denoting collectivity of members of the community linked to each other, related to each other, belonging together) with members of (commercial, political, social) communities constructed by the newspapers. Described as a macro-phenomenon (structure or culture), discursive landscape also refers to the basic orientations of human beings. It provides spatial linkage between members of a collective (interest or identity).

But in this sense the term regional needs to be defined in new ways. In this analysis, the rethinking of the concept of region is defined as a system of a representation of spatial and social relations (see Allen et al. 1998). Regions then, are constructed and maintained in these relations. Regions are not facts to be found out there as geographical or physical entities. They are processes happening at different scales. These processes have
different speed in social change and different variety of counter-forces causing regional inertia. And if scale is defined the ratio between the size of something real and that of representation of it – we can describe how the discursive landscape is mapped in the newspapers. This enables us to make distinctive, though not always analytically exclusive borders between the different scales, fundamental to the definition of each type of region.

Different geographic scales construct three levels of identity. Macro scale identity could be European identity, whereas meso scale identity is formed in cultural landscapes having ingredients both from national (i.e., Finnish) identity and regional (i.e., Karelian) identity. Micro scale identity is the individual choice in different situations where people represent themselves upon their priorities and situational constraints (for example, as a consumer, in a professional role, or as a citizen). These scales are analytical frameworks for describing a regional identity construction process. The term meso-scale is particularly problematic, though, because it spans a wide range of intermediate identities between micro and macro. Meso-scale despite of this, in my analysis has real relevance in two senses. Firstly, it is a scale that in some way balances off identities at higher and lower levels. Secondly, it is a scale that approximates the geographic extent to which dominant regional identities may or may not develop.

**Discursive Landscape and Economical Constraints**

Regional newspapers certainly maintain and construct these above mentioned identities – but regional newspapers are commercial enterprises as well. How these economical constraints effect the content of the newspapers; what kind is the relation between local journalism and the scales of identities constructed in newspapers?

There is a common academic myth of an impersonal macro economy working either at an ethereal level or a base level. As Bonden (1994, 20) pointedly writes, this usually refers to the fact that academics have forgotten that “society does not happen at different levels, research does” The social character of economy, as represented in the discourse of regional newspapers, can be defined more as a diachronic than synchronic category, especially since the many social practices in the end are intertwined with financial constraints. When analysing journalistic ‘landscapes’ and different features of regional economic structures (fiscal and monetary issues, regional subsidies, state interventions as landowners or state’s commercial and trade policy) the close relation between region and state (centre-periphery nexus) and also the economical structure of the region and its newspaper readers has to be reflected.

In traditional analysis of regional media economical factors are usually taken in mainly as structural or institutional variables and treated autonomously without reflecting their impact on content, besides the share of advertising in the annual turnover. This is understandable, because usually the journalistic content of the newspaper and the newspaper as business has been seen as separate phenomena for analysis. This assumption leans on a traditional justification of journalism, where newspapers are seen as serving a democratic function, independently investigating their subject matters in order to provide full information to the public – or even take the citizens along as some public journalism -projects have done- without implicit commercial intentions at first hand.

But if we look at the rather simple example of Finnish regional press from the view of declining revenue sources, these above mentioned constraints can be seen as linked with national, not only regional economy. Earlier, the trend of newspaper economy (measured
as the common turnover of advertising) has been found to follow the development of the GNP (measured at a national level) with a slight delay. During the recession period this causal link proved to be false. Looked upon from a regional point of view, in some cases the decline of advertising was even more closely linked with the development of regional GNPs, whereas in other cases interesting deviance from this trend could be found.

Table 1. The Decline of Advertisement/Revenue Share and Regional GNP 1989-1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Decline of advertising (%)</th>
<th>Decline of GNP (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Finland</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kainuu</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapland</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Karelia</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Ostrobothnia</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Löytyniemi 1997, 120.

During the recession, the state supported export industry. Regions where there existed export firms and enterprises dominated the economy. Due to that, GNP developed more positively within regions where the economical structure favored state support for export. State intervention, however, failed in the attempt to reduce unemployment during the time-span.

Consequently the economy of households remained narrow, affecting both the distribution and revenue sources of the newspapers. For example in Kainuu, dominated by the forest industry, the decline of GNP was relatively smaller than in other regions. The high unemployment rate of the region, however, reduced the turnover of the regional newspaper dramatically. The decline was second fastest in comparison to the other regional newspapers studied.

At a macro level, the Finnish press was affected by the recession, which could be seen in a fall in circulation and coverage as well as in the overall share of newspapers in media business. Several newspapers closed down altogether and the total circulation began to decline for the first time since World War II. Between 1990 and 1996 the total circulation dropped by 17 per cent.

There are some simple sociological explanations for the decline in circulation, like the economically narrowing conditions of the households due to the unemployment. But the strategies of the newspapers were at least as important. Calculating their trade-off within their circulation area, many papers soon figured out the geographical space that was optimal to cover. That led to a trend of ‘turning inward’, at least concerning the regional material and local news agenda. The agenda covered spatially narrower territory, but more than ever the newspaper was married with the economy of its area.

It is true, that the finding that newspapers are consumer products by no means is a novelty. In general it might be said that journalism also in a Finnish context has aimed at the reader as a consumer as much as a voter or a citizen. The decline in newspaper circulation, however, seems to have triggered off a development that increased market economy values in newspaper publishing. Apparently, this trend is more or less similar in other Western countries (Leather 1998). If culturally the most powerful or preferable values of the culture can be read from the newspapers, this may only be because journal-
ists tend to gang up with political, commercial and cultural elite (Mancini 1992; Jacubowiz 1991.) Newspapers are textual sites, constructed landscapes that displayed the most ideologically preferable categories of common sense - in this case economical categories.

Newspapers as textual sites, however, reflect many types of communities of the geographical regions: not only economical, but political and cultural as well. Newspapers as commercial enterprises also create their own communities as employers of the journalists and other staff of the media industry: producing, printing and distributing the newspapers daily. The newspapers also create a discursive system, or formation, as a background for discursive landscapes, as defined above. Discursive formation is neither defined by a particular object, nor by style. It is thematic, a play of permanent concepts or persistence of a theme, but it must be grasped in the form of a system of regular dispersion of statements (Foucault 1980, 63). There is not, of course, only one system at a time. We should therefore talk of systems. In this analysis, journalism is seen as a system or a discursive formation capable of dispersion of statements.

These discursive systems are constructed with the help of a professional codex and ideology of everyday practice (Thrift 1996, 176). These practices as ideologies differ partly also regionally, i.e., they are connected to the social space(s) and place(s). When we analyze these textually and historically changing cultural practices, we are dealing with processes operating at different spatio-temporal scales. And it is clear that there is a social reality to each of these levels. The social reality of each region is constructed in the matrix of scales and historically contained images of identity of the region. These constructions can include different sets of relations (centre-periphery; urban – rural; agriculture-industry; historical and symbolical event – future visions and predictions).

**Discursive Landscapes of the Region**

In the following part, the theoretical ideas presented above are discussed in the context of the region of Northern Karelia and its newspaper Karjalainen. The nature of this part
is more descriptive than analytical. More detailed statistical analysis is left out in this article. On the basis of a descriptive account of the lines of discussion in the editorials, I will propose some answers to the questions I have formulated earlier; how are different geographical scales used in the editorials of Karjalainen when constructing ‘us’?

Northern Karelia is in focus because of its blend of distinctive cultural features on one hand, and the heavy transformations the region has faced during the last ten years on the other. It has remained a culturally original ‘borderland between east and west. It has a common history with the Lake Ladoga region that after WWII became Russian territory, and has throughout history constructed a ‘borderland’ identity. Northern Karelia is the eastern part of Western Europe – and the economic setbacks of the crisis effected the region profoundly turning it to one of the poorest regions in Finland. Northern Karelia can be seen also as a reflexive space for societal transformations – at macro-, meso- and micro- scales. These transformations (EU-membership, the break down of the Soviet Union, the question of rights to the former Finnish parts of Eastern Karelia, heavy migration to Southern Finland) were displayed in detail during the last ten years on the pages of Karjalainen.

During the time studied, Northern Karelia formed a distinct functional unit in an administrative sense, but it presents disparate pictures culturally. This was reflected in the regional newspaper that displayed both elements inherited from the area of old Karelia on the Russian side of the border and elements typical to the East of Finland. The strong emphasis on agriculture and forest industry are playing crucial parts both politically and as an element of self-understanding of the region (Paasi 1986).

Table 3. Variation in Themes and Number of Editorials in the Newspapers Studied 1988-1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Southern Finland, Lahti region, ESS (N=118)</th>
<th>Southern Ostrobothnia Ilkka (N=147)</th>
<th>Lapin Kansa (N=230)</th>
<th>Northern Karelia Karelia (N=474)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional industry and commerce</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and forest industry</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of the region and comparisons at national level</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional subsidies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and the regions nearby</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statements in regional politics</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional identity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center-periphery axis</td>
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The focus of the editorials 1988-1997 of local and regional issues highlights some features of this above mentioned fragmented cultural landscape. Editorials can be analyzed in order to interpret the development of textual landscapes through time and the diffu-
sion of culture - the spread of ideas, techniques and practice. Editorials can also be analyzed periodically in a longitudinal setting that enables ‘sociological gaze’ to spot formative disjunctures and ruptures in the transformation of the ‘politicality of space’

In light of the quantitative content analysis, Karjalainen has the strongest provincial spirit, at least if we make this interpretation on the basis of the amount of editorials addressing the local and regional issues. In the editorials, the surrounding region is fairly consistently presented as a province. And the internal images of the region are stemming already from the historical rise of provincial activities. The regional economical structure comes through clearly as well. Agriculture and forest industry, regional development and centre-periphery -nexus define the main poles of this discursive landscape.

**Temporal Transformation of Karelian Identity**

**Who Are We? What Is Going On?**

The different newspapers do not have the same interpretation of the ‘crisis’. Also the economical depression itself entered some discursive landscapes earlier than other, and it also left those landscapes later. The newspaper Karjalainen lived in a state of ‘textual recession’ a relatively short period. The discourse on the recession had two temporal parts in the editorials; first one from 1988-1993 (the darkening years) and the second 1994-1997 (slowly evolving economical growth). The overall atmosphere was not totally pessimistic (or aggressive towards rule or policy implementing institutions or actors, i.e. the government, the president, the party elite etc.) either. As a region, perceived to have a strong provincial spirit, in the editorials this spirit was in the first years of the crisis extremely weak historically or culturally but stronger in clearly administrative and policy questions.

One explanation to this could be that strong historical provincial spirit often was expressed in combination with old stereotypes of ‘karelianism’. A more realistic explanation could be that the economical conditions never fully enjoyed the ‘boost’ in this region. The so called casino economy that was seen in other parts and especially in Southern Finland never reached Northern Karelia.

**Where Is the Boost? The Years 1988-1990**

The recession, or the first signs of it, were seen in Karjalainen during the summer of 1988. Discussion revolved around the declining population (migration to Southern Finland) and the failing generations shift in the farms. Although the Helsinki area still enjoyed wide and flourishing expansion, the peripheral regions and provinces had entered a time of threatening economical visions. North, East, West and South were living their own social realities. The difference between Karelia and other areas was basically seen as a threat against the Northern Karelian way of life: agriculture in villages, a lively cultural landscape and the maintenance of ‘Man and Nature’, i.e., the balance of an agricultural way of life and a rustic peasantry. Agriculture in rural areas and the farmer population in Northern Karelia has enjoyed support from the state and have been valued culturally and historically, maintaining the core assets of Finnishness in spite of its peripheral geographical position.

The societal transformation that began 1988 turned values (the importance of population and unfunctioning infrastructure all over the country) from geographical democracy to the right of the (economically) fittest (the Helsinki area). During the ‘boost’ era of the
late 80s different values, like urbanization, westernisation, yuppification and commo-
dification were highly valued. Rural or peripheral romanticism did not arouse the feel-
ings of sympathy that it did some years later, in during the mid-90s.

In 1989 the theme of the East border question was activated in Karjalainen. When the
Soviet Union collapsed the geopolitical situation changed, effecting the border areas of
Finland as well. The bigger change, however, was the growth of the new mentality that
this transformed power-balance nourished. The end of Finlandisation triggered off many
topics of discussion that had been banned earlier. The Karelia question was one of them.
That kind of new openness in discussing the eastern border had not been possible in
Finnish newspapers before.

The sentiments in Northern Karelia were largely patriotic. Incidents, speaking of
xenophobic sentiments in the region were widely discussed. Karjalainen was balancing
the regional insecurity by creating visions of Great Karelia, e.g. connecting geographi-
cally ceded areas (The Soviet Republic of Karelia) back to the Finnish nation-state. The
discussion faded as the economical consequences of an incorporation with Finland of the
poor Russian Karelia and its mainly Russian speaking population became clear. The in-
terest faded even more as the economic situation also on the Finnish side grew worse.

For the first time in Finnish post war history let the public discourse open for state-
ments concerning the eastern border. Karjalainen was nourishing the spirit of Winter
War and keeping up the discussion concerning the ceded areas. At a national level, the
political elite tried to downplay the discussion and it hardly at all expanded to other me-
dia. In those few cases that this happened, arguments of the economically catastrophical
state of the Republic of Karelia (non-existing infrastructure or services) were put front
referring to ‘Realpolitik’.

Karjalainen’s attitude towards the State was not hostile, however. Here it differed
from some other regional newspapers. The social reality of Northern Karelia was
linked more to the changed situation in the Soviet Union than was the case in other re-
gions. In other newspapers the upheavals of the Soviet Union were documented as for-
ign news, not as domestic issues.

In Karjalainen, EU was not an issue at all in 1990 whereas, for example, other dailies
in Finland entered already in EU -era. Karjalainen still, was scaling the Northern
Karelia region as a rural area inside the nation. This area was assessed in relation to other
areas in Finland. The area was fading when economical expansion and employment
could not be secured for the people. Agriculture production and forest industry were
seen generally as backwardness and low-productive enterprises compared to hi-tech,
tourism and the service-sector. The politicality of space of Northern Karelia was evident
- the economic recession were interpreted with the help of changing geopolitical situa-
tion.

**Recession Inhabits the Mentality. The Years 1991-1993**

In Karjalainen, 1991 was the turning point where the regional newspaper began to reas-
ssess the development and planning concerning the area. A feeling of disparity and un-
democratic regional policy could be read from the editorials. An interesting transfor-
mation was the change from purely economical crisis to mental ‘crisis’.

This meant a mental turning point. The emphasis was laid on hope, visions, plan-
ing, re-evaluation of the situation mixed with concrete concern of the financial prob-
lems communities and municipalities faced due to the scanty trade and declining subsi-
dies. An interesting detail during the year 1991, was that the scale of looking at things
got smaller in the newspaper Karjalainen. The urge to keep up the spirit was a crucial part of the mentality in Karjalainen. This spirit was largely coupled with rural and countryside ‘free peasant’ connotations. At a regional level the double link to addressees was easily read. Editorials were addressed to the subscribes, e.g. to the geographically limited main distribution area – but as well to the political elite situated in the country’s capital, Helsinki.

Economically, the year was a hard setback to the nation. Budget cuts concerning regional infrastructure, diminishing regional subsidies, a darkening horizon in regional business – all those were variables that helped this journalistic ‘turning inward’ process. Even the overall share of local materials and news items decreased (also Moring 1999). The biggest concern was the economy of the municipalities (communes) and the developmental backlash the recession had created to the rural development.

The national economy was purely financially entering an era where the earlier regional policy had become too costly and unaffordable to the state. That was seen also in other regions. Regional or provincial values were not in fashion as such – sympathisers were rare, although the Centre Party with its agrarian roots was in power. The Centre Party dominated national politics faced severe difficulties that certainly did not help to keep up the empathy towards expansive regionalism. Karjalainen was – textually and metaphorically – treating the recession as a disease or a natural catastrophe that could be ‘cured’ if just right ‘cures’ could be found within the region. The economic crises and the region were mixed when symbolic meaning and interpretations of the economic crisis intertwined in a way that juxtaposed economical events with overall mentality. The region turned inwards in terms of regional comparisons.

Statistically speaking, year 1992 was the darkest period in the national economy. The regions tried to manage with narrowing subsidies as well as with less sympathy towards the agriculture. Partly also the regional discussions revolved around bigger questions and depression was for the first time seen also as ‘national’ crisis, not only economical. Discussions on how to administrate regions was one of the topics. This may seem paradoxical, but it was linked with economy of the state. The regional system of governing administrative provinces changed, partly because the older one was seen as too ineffective.

During 1992 Finland was preparing its application for an EU – membership, as well. The discussion of the transformation to a ‘Europeanised’ nation was raised in all regional as well as national newspapers. This discussion got different co-ordinates in different Finnish regions whereas the national daily, Helsingin Sanomat flagged in favor of the membership almost without journalistic criticism (see Möörä 1999). In Karjalainen, EU was seen as giving hope to transform the political space between east and west, and once again the border question was activated.14

A difference, when comparing to the other regions, was that for Karjalainen EU, depression and the Karelia question were linked. Moving to the west gave new justification to statements in this direction after a long period of Finlandisation. The East and West within Finland also reflected the threats and possibilities of EU differently. Karjalainen in the East was strongly in favour, linking older foreign political questions to the EU option. In 1992 Karjalainen leaned on a national scale once again – but from the patriotic vantage-point. To these nationalistic statements were mixed hopes, visions and fears concerning the European Union.

In 1993 there was a little rise in the national economy. The discussion of the EU – membership gave boost to lightening visions. Northern Karelia and Karjalainen were
filled with developmental strategic openings in various areas. Dismantling the welfare state had had its consequences that were easily seen in the area. Closing down schools, post offices and stores in the villages caused images of the rural areas being deserted. Karjalainen was returning from the national scale to the regional scale, bringing problems of periphery into the discussion. EU was still seen positively, in terms of Europeanisation, strengthening western connections.

A distinct feature in Karjalainen was the turn inwards – cures and tools were sought inside or within the area. During the year 1993 the fact that the support from the state will not keep the economy of the municipalities in balance became quite clear. Also the establishing of new administrative provinces and the planning for cutting expenses in administration of (historical) provinces created insecurity. The historical provinces had deeper roots in the Finnish mentality than the national bureaucracy (i.e., the government) understood. In most newspapers questions of administration were among the top issues.

Karelia Goes Europe. The Years 1994-1997

1994 was the year of presidential election in Finland. The new president, Martti Ahtisaari, was considered to be free of the burdens of more politically involved candidates. Though the Centre Party generally had an advantage in the periphery, in Karelia the social democrat Ahtisaari collected a relatively good support. The scale of national got even more ingredients from the EU-membership discussion. The regions were reflecting themselves as part of the state, but also as part of the larger geographical community with their own specific needs and strengths.

In Karjalainen, the new European scale gave hope to regional discussion – it was seen as facilitating a stronger economy for the national economy but also as a supra-national tool to maintain the balance between urban centres and rural areas. Compared to other dailies, Karjalainen saw European Union as an option, not as dystopia. The European scale fitted the strong patriotic and provincial spirit, giving new credibility to the old vision of a border land linking western countries and the East. Finland was more than ever part of the West. The state had earlier patronised Northern Karelia and due to that the regional support in ‘Europe of the Regions’ was highly welcomed. EU was seen also purely in economical terms – giving perhaps more support to this specific area.

After a referendum in the autumn 1994, Finland became a member of EU in 1995. After that, the regional discursive landscape tuned into interpretations of the future within the larger scale dominated by the European Union. Northern Karelia was part of the nation but more than that, a region that could get backup from other regions in Europe. More than a national question, the question of the life in rural areas was framed in the dichotomy between the core areas of political elite and decision-makers, and peasant people in peripheries rural areas. In Karjalainen, the opposition against budget cuts rose as well. The nation as an organic super-metaphor was now economical, not cultural in its nature. The editorials in Karjalainen were framing problems more as ‘Finnish’ and ‘national’ scale – and regional issues as developmental questions. Paradoxically, in Karjalainen it strengthened the expressions of patriotic nationalism.

The relation between the region and the state (in regional policy and centre-periphery issues) activated in Karjalainen and the state was seen in a negative light. Financial support to the areas that were dominated by export companies and firms was stronger than to Northern Karelia that was dominated by the forest industry and farming. Forests, that had been historically the backbone of Finnish trade were losing importance and facing the transformation the new technology (for example Nokia) caused to the
economical structure of Finland. New technology was becoming the flagship of Finnish industry and manufacturing instead of pulp, cellulose and paper.

During the year 1996 the national economy recovered. Expenses in administration in municipalities and welfare state services had, however, been cut and the fact that there was no way back to the golden years before recession was quite clear. Uneven regional economical structure had, anyway, created the feeling of regional disparity that national policy would not take into an account. Discontent addressed to decision-makers was aired in Karjalainen and stronger political opposition could be seen.19

Karjalainen was strongly questioning the value-basis of the nation-state after the recession. Rusticity had publicly gained more sympathy and traditional and historical values were more in fashion than before. Rusticity was seen also for the first time at a European scale. That strengthened the regional self-esteem and also loosened the stigmatized image of rural backwardness of the Finnish countryside. Finnish film industry, for example, was using the countryside and rural life for the first time after the 50s as material for domestic production. The romantic rediscovery of folk culture, which again was mobilized in the interest of creation of national identity and nationalism in Finland was, however, hardly seen in the regional newspapers. The regional newspapers, especially Karjalainen, were again constructing and framing the geographical area politically more than culturally. This meant that regional identity was intertwined with the questions of provincial administration and European Union more than with the people or the preservation of ‘regional culture’. Popular culture, however, used recovering nostalgia and folk culture in TV-serials and films.

Economically, the sun was rising during the year 1997. GNP showed fast growing numbers of the import and employment. Declined areas of industry (trade of wood products) were also recovering. During the last year of the time-span studied Karjalainen voiced a new kind of sense of (regional) autonomy in Northern Karelia. Issues in the editorials were framed from inside (within the region) as well as from outside (looking at the area in a broader perspective).20

In other dailies, the tone towards the state was often quite harsh, whereas in Karjalainen the approach was co-operative, understanding, framing things both nationally and regionally, but not in adversarial terms. The framework was not exclusive but inclusive. Karjalainen was taking positions in region-nation; region-Europe and region-region questions. The patronizing power of the state was not felt so strong anymore. Also future visions were quite positive.

The territorial and symbolical (conceptual) vision transformed clearly from a history-bound agricultural region to a more active actor in national politics. The scale of constructing regional identity changed but this transformation did, however, not go through a hostile period between the state and the region.

Karelia - the Nearest Siberia of Brussels?

So what happened in Karelia? As a region Northern Karelia went through the economic recession for sure. But was it economical, political or cultural transformation from the journalistic point of view? Was the economical change, for example, a disembedded sphere in Giddensian terms? Or did the economy or money get sociological, cultural and political meanings?

The newspaper Karjalainen created its own political space during the time-span researched. The official regional policy in the editorials of Karjalainen was in favor of rural and agricultural ways of life. The territorial image has altered over time from focus-
ing on national periphery towards emphasizing Northern Karelia’s character as a European scale region. Economical change was linked to the foreign policy and regional identity. Discursive landscape of Karjalainen had very strong inertia in terms of activating historical interpretations of ‘what is really going on and where are ‘we’ heading? Compared to the mainstream nation wide publicity, the regional media socially as well as culturally reflected economical issues from the local vantage point, of course. As an opposite in Giddensian terms, the news of regional economy was not a disembedded sphere but a very embedded practice of everyday life of the region. It is in this perspective ‘crisis’ in national economy can be considered an overall social fact – but as a social fact it differed from region to region. The implication of this development is not simply a descriptive or empirical matter, but necessarily implicates theoretical problems, as well.

The dynamics of local-national-global interests and identities and their problematic constructions of the local ‘we’, regional ‘us’ and national Finns in the closer analysis cannot be seen as distinct constructions, but are rather intertwined in spatio-temporal processes with epistemes and regimes that are distinct to the area studied. The imagined public within given distribution areas and the addressees of editorials did not always overlap. In this case, however, the changing ecology of the editorials responding to wider socio-cultural shifts was quite fast. The editorials of Karjalainen were perhaps political backwaters of the national discussion – but more than that, they were a reflexive space for transformation and diffusion that took place in the specific discursive landscape. The center of value and meaning production emancipated from the local constraints (‘localizing’ processes) that was political and ideological, but not aggressive or hostile.

To incorporate other spatial dimensions, not only ‘regional’ or ‘local’ into the analysis changes a lot in the evaluation of the landscape and the local culture. People are not banks of cultural memories, although analyzing newspapers as cultural documents could lead us to assume so. As a consequence of that, the analysis of cultural practices may replace the one of cultures in the future. Also ‘identity practices’ may replace the defining of national or regional identities. But these practices, however skillfully defining the stories stemming from cultural studies, will and still have spatial constraints.

Although I’m claiming that economical structures have impact upon the spatial ‘life-worlds’ I am not seeing places only or solely as palimpsests of capital. Regional analysis should not imply base – super structure models, though historical materialism continues to shape ‘discursive landscapes’. In my analysis, also the cultural field within which the concept of ‘cultural’ identity has operated, has become more than just a spatial metaphor. Regional cultures are literally embedded in the web of signification of ‘politicality of space’ that is bound to territorial identity structures. I am not claiming that these constructed regional identities as discursive landscapes have ontological essence as such – but I do claim that these discursive landscapes do differ. And even more, they are textual and historical containers. They are socio-spatial codes used implicitly to ideological purposes when giving hermeneutical devices for the habitat.

As Friese and Wagner (1999, 144) pointed out, the relation between political and intellectual positions is never stable. Thirty years ago the term structure had a rather critical and emancipatory flavor and ‘culture’ a conservative one. Now this relation has almost been reversed. Current studies of cultural cartographies foreground the state of affairs, that then very concepts of homogenous national cultures, are in a profound state of redefinition (Bhabha 1994, 5) It strengthens the argument of Appadurai in the sense that
cultures are not holistic ways of life – but instead are composed by ‘people assembling and reassembling fragments from around them’ – the different scapes around them. (in Cragg 1998, 175.) There is always different scales, as well, in use for understanding what is going on – around us.

Northern Karelia perhaps is not the most interesting spot in the world – most of the readers don’t probably even know where it is. But as an example of the specific time-space it raises bigger questions on identity practices; If interpretations of economical situation can vary within one nation-state as much as described – how common issues concerning for example an larger scale are addressed differently when comparing nations? Is it possible to gain mutual understanding if we’re living on different discursive cartographies? What is the most dominant story of geopolitics or history we face in the next millennium? When just starting counting Finlands – I find myself wondering how many Europes there might be?

**Notes**

1. The concept of discursive landscape originates in human geography and the work of the Finnish geographer Jouni Håkli (1998) although he has used the concept referring to the national ideoscape (Appadurai 1996) as historical container.

2. In 1997 the Board of the Academy of Finland launched a multidisciplinary, problem-oriented, and applied research programme, ‘The economic crisis of the 1990: reasons, events and consequences’ dealing with the socio-economic crisis. The Academy channelled FIM 25 million (equivalent to 4.2 million ecus) to the programme. It is the largest research programme ever in social sciences in Finland.

   The programme contains a research project of media, ‘Media coverage versus citizens experiences in the crisis’. The aim of this project is to analyse the public discussion on the economic crises and the experiences of different population groups. The object of the project is to find out what kind of challenges the economic crisis created to democratic system, to the ability to political elite to discuss in an understandable way, to the ability to the media to reflect different views, and to the capability of ordinary citizens to participate and influence discussions concerning themselves. This article has been written as part of this research project.

3. The quantitative coded material consisted of four regional newspaper’s local news, editorials, columns and letters-to-the-editor. Within the research period 1988-1997 every second newspaper was coded. In the code schema ‘local’ material was defined as articles reporting issues concerning the distribution area of the newspaper. National and international news were excluded but only if they did not have any link to localities within the region, i.e. a local perspective. Totally the body of coded material consists of 36,093 observations. The number of observations divided between newspapers is: Etelä-Suomen Sanomat 6,927, Lapin Kansa 8,324, Ilkka 8,860, Karjalainen 11,982. The code schema was constructed of nine variables (year, month, date, newspaper, genre, temporal form of the headline, theme, development (scale-positive, neutral, negative) presented in article, headline in written form. The number of themes were almost 90 (the most descriptive themes reported below). In addition, qualitative material (articles, editorials etc.) were collected from the newspapers. The amount of articles for qualitative study is around 500. A detailed analysis of this material was not available at the time this article was finalized.

4. Structural and political implications, however, can not be left totally unstudied either. Recent research concerning unemployment rates and their regional implications (Böckermann 1998, Peltola 1997) in Finland show that geographical areas differ more strongly after the recession than before. The present and continuing growth of national economy will probably increase these regional differences with an accelerating speed.

5. Palimpsest is a term originally deriving from medieval writing. It meant a writing tablet that could be reused many times and every time for a new set of material. However, the tablet could never be rubbed totally clean. Over time, layers of prior scripts would build up over which the current one was written. The term has been taken as a metaphor for landscape change, where current uses do not completely erase the marks of the history. (Cragg 1998, 192)

6. In his book ‘The Diary of an Opportunist’ the Finnish poet Paavo Haukkko polemically claims that the Eastern Finns were conquered by the Western Finns. The method of this cultural pilgrimage was astute, and based on the method of cultural standardization by symbolic elements like literature, myths, tales,
etc. The Finnish nation was united by establishing internal differences. The regional landscape formation was grounded on the myth of a Finnish identity and its subcategories. The most important contribution for nation building was the work of Z. Topelius’s, Mammee kirja (The Book of Our Land) published in 1875. The strength of the cultural power of the book was partly due to the need to create and unite state and nation also in a literary style. At the same time, the book described the land and landscape in such a way that the people could identify with it easily, but also displayed regional differences praising different folkloristic codes inventing the regions culturally – as a part of a whole nation. (Häkli 1998)

7. The nature of the symbiotic reality of the local and regional journalists and members of the local business community is also easily explained. Industry sources provide revenue for the action via advertisements, sometimes even content to the section via press releases and legitimacy through quotes. Market-oriented journalism is one layer of the ideological practice of everyday journalistic work – although not the whole picture. When looking at the national daily, Helsingin Sanomat – or almost any other big European daily – their tone is backing the supplements of travel, computers, personal finance, car and motoring sections. The transformation of newspapers to increasing market-orientation or commodification is becoming even clearer. News-value has a different meaning and is more or less defined by the business-friendliness. Stories can rather be judged in terms of their ‘audience-friendliness and advertiser attractiveness’ than in terms of the information value aimed at the informed citizen. (Leather 1998, 251) The scale and the region of textual production are defined with the help of consumer’s society.

8. ‘The declining (agricultural) productivity effects employment’ (15.7.1988). ‘Agricultural production has to be prepared for difficult years’ (18.11.1988). Next summer the editorial statement suggested an other type of solution to narrowed regional conditions, ‘Big publicity as a (regional) resource’ (4.7.1989).

9. The discussion of migration had clear historical roots. One part of the state’s military policy had been to keep border areas populated on the Finnish side, whereas the Soviet Union had treated Karelia as a military buffer area and because of that the area had been kept largely unpopulated. The emigration from Northern Karelia was compared to the transformation of the 70’s, when approximately 400,000 people were emigrating to Sweden in search for jobs.

10. ESS: ‘The state is eating from your table’, (30.10.1989); Ilkka: The development program within the province of Vaasa should be started immediately (19.3.1989).


12. ‘The amount of the development share of the province should be re-evaluated’ (8.4. 1991), ‘The dimensions of the development strategy of the province’ (3.6.1991), ‘Communities in deep debts, where do we get help?’ (3.6.1991).

13. ‘The belief in entrepreneurship can be let broken’ (15.7.1991). In some cases the tone was even more pessimistic: ‘Empty hopes should not be nourished’ (31.8.1991). But by the end of the year, a more hopeful tone won terrain: ‘Dismantling the welfare state: No specific reason to Doomsday visions’ (12.9.1991), ‘There are natural cures for the recession’ (26.10.1991); ‘Towards the life after recession’ (26.10.1991); ‘More boost to regional politics’ (15.11.1991).


15. ‘The recession of tourism should be cured by marketing’ (9.2.1993), ‘Northern Karelia now needs long-term strategy’ (26.6.1993); ‘Closing the schools have various effects’ (15.8.1993), ‘Provincial cure for the depression should be sought from the private forests’ (15.8.1993), ‘Co-operation (in regional development) gives us power’ (2.3.1993).

16. ‘The options of EU-membership should be benefited in Northern Karelia’ (3.3.1994), ‘Spring lights in the Northern Karelia’ (3.3.1994), ‘Finland is entering the new period of growth’ (16.4.1994), ‘The signs of springing growth should be nourished in Northern Karelia’ (1.5.1994), ‘Border regions have difficulties to find empathy in budget negotiations’ (7.9.1994), ‘Regional differences will diminish only with production and export’ (20.10.1994), ‘The public discussion should be guided to the contemplation of the Finnish policy in European Union’ (5.1.1994).

17. The difference between, for example, Ilkka and Karjalainen, though both of them are to a great extent provincial – is in the scale of looking at things. Southern Ostrobothnia has not been a geopolitically sensitive territory. Thus, EU was seen only as the end of the agriculture that could not produce enough
effectively. Northern Karelia was ready to mentally open a door to Europe, and the autonomous position of the Karelian farmer was never put into question.

18. ‘Rural areas are fading if decision-makers do not get acquainted with the research results’ (13.1.1995); ‘The economy of municipalities is getting better, tolerance for the cuts not’ (2.3.1995); ‘Northern Karelia has to build a positive atmosphere to the development’ (13.12.1995); ‘Precise account keeping is the savior also for the Finnish agriculture’ (21.12.1995).


20. ‘The welfare of the country is not solely a transfer of income’ (8.3.1997), ‘Northern Karelia rises only with the help of positive activity’ (11.7.1997), ‘The State does not longer administrate Northern Karelia’ (1.9.1997), ‘Saving operations solves the heritage of the welfare state’ (9.19.1997), ‘The rise of the national economy should be trusted also in Northern Karelia’ (7.11.1997).

References


Since the end of the bipolar world, academic interest in globalisation and issues of identity has literally exploded. The avalanche of literature on the subject of identity has, for the most part, not been empirically oriented, but remains on a more theoretical plane. This chapter represents an empirical approach to one identity issue, namely how national identity mechanisms can be articulated and discerned in Swedish television news in a changing national and international environment. Implicit in this approach is the assumption that the media play a key role in the production and sustenance of the cultural, social and political spheres where identities are constructed. Through news narratives that construct certain realities, utilise certain symbols and reiterate certain stereotypes, the media co-produce and sustain not simply people’s understandings of who ‘Others’ are, but perhaps even more clearly, who they themselves are. This is arguably most evident in foreign news reporting. Here, the audience has the opportunity to become one with the nation as Australia or Sweden acts and reacts to the international environment. It is also in international affairs that the government becomes synonymous with the nation, acting in the ‘nation’s best interests’, something governments have not been averse to using for their own purposes. Furthermore, foreign news coverage is often about conflict and thus becomes a natural framework for contrasting Us to Them.

The task at hand will be characterise the key mechanisms through which identity, and national identity in particular, is constructed and legitimised, and to locate the role of television news narratives in this process. These insights will be used as methodological tools to study the Swedish television news programme Aktuell’s coverage of Latvia’s mini-crisis with Russia in April 1998. The analysis focuses on the evolving structure and characters in the Latvia crisis episode, and where and how the boundaries are drawn between Latvia, Russia, Sweden, the West and the East. Finally, a comparison will be made with a previous study of Swedish television coverage of the Baltic states in order to generate discussion about change and stability in news portrayals of the Other.

Clearly, there are different types of identities, both personal and collective, the latter including professional, regional and ethnic, but the focus here will be on a specific type of collective identity, national identity. This is because the dominant form of television news on events outside national borders defines its audience to be national and its task to report on national and international affairs. This is not to deny that we live in an age
of global communication, media convergence and audience fragmentation, but to argue that national television news, continues to be a key site where people “imagine themselves a nation”, as Benedict Anderson has so often been quoted as saying. Collective identity can be characterised as those qualities in the self-perception of a group whereby said group members recognise, describe or identify themselves. To do this, a distinction must be made between qualities associated with the group in contrast to Others outside it. It is thus through the distinction between Us and Them and the relations between these two groups, that We not only define Them, we also delineate who We are. Morley and Robins argue that identity, like language, is constituted through categories of similarity and difference. “/.../European culture’ is seen to be constituted precisely through its distinctions from and oppositions to American culture, Asian culture, Islamic culture, etc”. Thus, an important mechanism in the construction of collective identities involves both the way a group defines itself, as well as how the group defines those who they are not.

There are two aspects of this identity mechanism that scholars take note of. First, it is not the existence per se of Us and Them that should be the focus of analysis, but the implications of where and how the boundary is drawn between groups or nations. By studying television news of different types of Others and whether these evolve over time, I submit that we are studying narratives which articulate and legitimise the boundaries between Us and Them. Secondly, although identity formation may be tenacious, it is essentially a dynamic process, not something once and for all given and immutable. Schlesinger stresses the continual “construction and reconstruction of a sense of themselves by self-identifying communities”, involving “active strategies of inclusion and exclusion” by which the boundaries of the community are “policed”. This ongoing process of self-definition and simultaneous definition of Others may be especially observable in times of upheaval and change, where redefinitions and shifts in perceptions of the Other are responses to the disintegration of multi-ethnic states, civil unrest, European integration or changes in the global economic order. On the other hand, certain types of Enemy perceptions are tenacious, some perhaps more than others, as Huntington’s controversial book Clash of Civilisations demonstrates. Thus, when opening the Pandora’s box of identity, one needs to be specific: this analysis attempts to study the articulation of certain types of national identity mechanisms in relation to certain types of Others during a specific time period.

National identity, says Hedetoft, is a unique type of collective identity since it constructs a congruence between polity, culture and territorial boundaries. In other words, the nation-state has become the locus of identification through its ability to be a vehicle for political ideology and notions of citizenship; encompassing competing domestic interest groups, defending the ‘homeland’ against outsiders and formulating “national politics in the best interests of electorates and in harmony with the nationalist ideal”. At the same time, the nation-state is identified with “common patterns of communication, shared myths and practices, social and cultural institutions and an albeit constructed but nonetheless very real ‘collective memory’”. As De Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak have described it, national identity encompasses both the notions of Staatsnation and Kulturnation.

Secondly, national identity construction is reinforced by a global system of nation-states in which each state depends on recognition by other states for its status. In this world order, the nation-state subsumes those “citizens” within its borders as We, leaving “foreigners” and entities outside its borders as Them. The Other need not necessar-
ily be the Enemy, but can be involved in a range of relationships with Us, as in Billig’s example of the banal discourse of national identity.

‘We’ are not confined to simply differentiating stereotypes, which downgrade the foreign as the mysterious Other. Foreign nations are like ‘ours’, but never completely alike. ‘We’ can recognise ‘ourselves’ in ‘them’... ‘We’ can become allies, ‘they’ becoming ‘you’ and ‘we’ can become enemies. And ‘we’ can debate amongst ‘ourselves’ about the value of ‘our’ allies. ‘We’ can accuse ‘them’ of threatening ‘our’ particularity or of failing to act like proper, responsible nations like ‘we’ do.14

This quote points to the uses and flexibility in the roles of Others for the purpose of reinforcing and legitimising the “national” Us. That national identity needs be legitimised, mobilised and sustained is demonstrated by the multitude of examples Billig provides of ingrained habits of nationalist discourse used by politicians, schools, and the media on a daily basis.15 Thus, a key mechanism in the discourse of national identity involves defining who We are as part of a nation-state, while the Other can consist of a range of distances from Us: Friends, Dependents, Allies, Enemies, Mystical Others, etc.

This brings us to a second integral mechanism of national identity formation: so-called “collective memory” that is used to evoke identification of group members with a unique, and highly selective past, posited to be shared by the group as a whole. In national identity discourse, these historical experiences are often associated with certain key events and figures that are told and retold in political, social and cultural discourse, by politicians, in school and through the media in both fictional and non-fictional genres. National collective memory serves to give meaning to traditions, social organisation, cultural institutions, the national “way of life”, but also to political arguments that justify decisions and courses of action. Edy argues that the media, particularly television, are central to the construction and maintenance of national collective memory in this century: partly due to television’s visceral quality, evoking “personal and emotional connections with the past”, but also due its pervasiveness and the “speeding up” of history, leaving the media responsible for recounting recent events.16 Edy focuses on collective memory in the news media since journalists not only claim to provide “factual accounts of what ‘really’ happened”, but also because the past is used as “shorthand” for providing explanations, as analogies or as a yardstick against which to judge later events. These then become recycled and reused, part of a stock of situations that can be pegged to new stories, which, ultimately can construct a different reading of the past.17

The news media are central to the co-production and sustenance of collective memory, and thus also to the discourse of national identity. In general, the news constructs a certain kind of world through its address, the choice of events, images, people, and explanations.18 News stories privilege certain interpretations by referring to what has been reported previously, building a shared understanding of a certain reality, on familiar storylines and ways of seeing the Other. This is reinforced by the episodic, repetitive nature of television news over time. Fiske compares the news genre to soap opera, regarding “the lack of final closure, multiplicity of plots and characters, repetition and familiarity.”19 Indeed, the structural similarities are striking: the news also incorporates previous conflicts into ongoing plots, uses flashbacks and repetitious dialogue (which allows viewers to resume watching whenever possible), and gives a sense of things happening in “real time”.20 One important difference between them, according to Fiske, has to do with the greater attempts in the news genre to “control meaning”: “News stories impose closure upon the openness of ongoing events: recency must be tempered by com-
pletion. Thus, television news can mobilise and sustain national identity due not only to its status of co-producing collective memory, but also to its episodic, repetitive storytelling which promotes identification and reinforces perceptions of Us and Them.

Studying Storylines and Episodes

Given the serial-like nature of the news, a close reading of Aktuellt’s coverage of Latvia’s conflict with Russia over its citizenship law will look at identification mechanisms using the concept of storyline to analyse the Us/Them problematic. A storyline can be thought of as an overarching story containing relatively constant characters and recurring conflicts, with episodes characterised by different authors, allowing the characters some freedom of movement. Since only a longitudinal study could determine the way episodes are constructed and how they fit into the overall storyline, it will suffice to conceive of this particular conflict as one episode in a larger Baltic neighbour storyline.

The existence of a Baltic neighbour storyline is related to historical and cultural ties between Sweden as a former power in the Baltic region, the resurgence of the Baltic independence movements and subsequent applications to the EU and Sweden’s active support to and substantial financial aid and investment in the Baltic states after independence. It is also possible that an aspect of Swedish collective memory may be relevant in Baltic neighbour storylines: what has been called Sweden’s ‘bad conscience’ due to its passive policy towards the Baltic states between 1945 and the late 1980s. One much-publicised and politically contentious issue which epitomises this is the so-called Baltic extradition (trans. “baltutlämnningen”) – a catch-word used to describe some 146 Baltic soldiers who arrived in Sweden several days after World War II wearing German uniforms. After months in internment camps, despite hunger strikes and suicide attempts, the soldiers were turned over to the Soviet Union. It was a contentious issue in which the press, the non-Socialist parties, the Church and the King got involved. In 1989, the government’s passive post-war policy towards the Baltic states shifted and Sweden became one of the most active supporters of those countries’ “right to self-determination”. But the issue of the so-called “Baltic extradition” in 1945-6 has continually resurfaced in public debate throughout the 1990s. The trauma of the extradition for Sweden lay in the moral dilemma of returning individuals to a country where they are considered treasonous, also a contentious issue hotly debated in relation to asylum-seekers today. Thus, the incident strikes at the heart of the Swedish self-image of being able to take moral stances on international issues. It is likely that some of these aspects of Swedish national identity will not only be evident in Baltic neighbour storylines but also in the specific episode analysed below.

The Latvia episode under scrutiny here was chosen with the aid of the Sveriges Televisions (SVT) database. All telegrams, voice-overs or items in Aktuellt which contained the words “Baltikum”, “the Baltic states”, “Estonia”, “Latvia” and “Lithuania” were searched between January-June 1998. In April, almost all of the “hits” dealt with Latvia and its “mini-crisis” with Russia; the unfolding story of Latvia’s deteriorating relations with Russia over the status of ethnic Russians was deemed more appropriate for an initial study than disparate news items about different Baltic states. The entire Aktuellt news programme was viewed every day between 30 March and 30 April, but those dealing with Latvia were concentrated between 30 March and 15 April.

The analysis below includes all telegrams, items and commentary mentioning Latvia in this period. There were 7 telegrams, items and commentary. Including anchor lead-
ins and one headline, this amounted to 12.56 minutes of Latvia news concentrated in the 16 days between 30 March-15 April. This episode was characterised in Aktuellt as a “war of words” and by the Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson as a “mini-crisis”. It included bomb attacks, demonstrations, and the threat of international economic sanctions.

The Latvia episode is analysed in terms of the plot and in terms of the characters and their interrelations. The plot is conceived as the overall structure and development of news coverage on Latvia, i.e. what is the story about and how does the image of Latvia unfold chronologically in the flow of news during the coverage? Secondly, who are the cast of characters and how are they discursively constructed? What are they seen to be doing and how are they related to each other? The news stories and images were analysed according to the following categories, posed as questions:

1) Who are the Latvians and how are they characterised? Are they government authorities, politicians, protestors, nationalists or civilians? What do they want/what do they do?

2) Who are the Russians and how are they characterised? Are they government authorities, economic elites, nationalists, politicians, protestors or civilians? What do they want/what do they do?

3) Who are the Swedes? What do they want? What is the Swedish role in the conflict?

4) Who is the “East”? What do they want?

5) Who is the “West”? What do they want? What is the role of the West in this conflict?

The answers to these questions included both journalists’ descriptions of the character categories, what they are said to be doing, what was said about them by others in the news text, what they themselves say, and what image they try to present of themselves. The Aktuellt programmes were transcribed and categorised according to whether the character category was the subject, i.e. their actions, statements, what they are thinking or feeling, or according to the way others describe them. Thus, the first part of this analysis of the Latvia crisis episode looks at structure of the coverage, and the overall story as it unfolds through its chronology. This will also serve to set the story in context for the reader. The second part takes the point of view of the implied viewer and looks at the cast of characters following the above-mentioned five questions.28

**The Evolving Story**

The overall structure of Aktuellt’s coverage during this period is one in which increasing priority is given to events in Latvia, its conflict with Russia and Sweden’s role. This is seen in the way news of Latvia is first moved up in the programme’s running order, followed by an in-depth look at the problem, finally culminating as a top story about the Swedish Prime Minister’s visit to Latvia. As in the soap opera, the Latvia narrative builds on the technique of flashback. The run-up to the conflict is explained by references to and video footage of previous incidents, some of which (two bombing incidents) had not been covered in the broadcast. These incidents are discursively collected under the heading “provocations” and presented as causes of the increased tension between Latvia and Russia.

The Latvia episode is also characterised by a type of narrative closure, meaning simply that the story is “wrapped up”, the conflict has reached a new equilibrium, and the
episode ends. The coverage of the conflict between Latvia and Russia stops abruptly on 15 April when, according to Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson, the root of the conflict is “resolved”. This brings us to the third noticeable aspect in the structure of the coverage: the dominating presence of the Swedish government, which is mentioned in the majority of items, telegrams and voice-overs dealing with Latvia. It is with the Swedish Prime Minister’s visit to Latvia that a change in the Latvian position is said to have taken place, thus giving the impression that the crisis with Russia is over.

The following chronology of Aktuellt’s coverage sets out the context of the plot development of Latvia news. Latvia appears first on 30 March, when Aktuellt carries an item concerning the initiation of EU enlargement procedures: who the candidate members are, what the EU is offering/demanding and what the mostly Eastern countries have to do in order to become members. The Swedish government has persuaded the EU that those not in the “fast lane” for membership should have the chance to initiate negotiations once a year. Latvia is used as an example of the success of this policy.

The next report dealing with Latvia on 3 April is a 30-second voice-over, with the news anchor reading to full-frame news footage of the two incidents described. The Latvian President Guntis Ulmanis and Prime Minister Krasts have announced that they want to fire the Army Commander and the National Police Commissioner. The Army Commander had taken part in a 500-man march to mark the 55th anniversary of a Latvian SS brigade two weeks earlier. The National Police Commissioner was given responsibility for lax security enforcement when a Jewish synagogue in Riga was bombed a 2nd time on 2 April.

On 8 April, Latvian news is moving up in the programme; this telegram is third in the running order. To the left of the newsreader is a Latvian flag with the words: ‘Latvia under pressure’. Russia is considering economic measures to get Latvia to stop discriminating against its Russian minority. The Swedish Foreign Minister calls “Yeltsin’s measures deeply disturbing”. A day later, Aktuellt takes an in-depth look at the Russia-Latvia crisis: there are two items devoted to Latvia, one of which is a live interview with a studio guest. The anchor opens by saying that President Yeltsin’s spokesman has recanted the Russian “threat” of sanctions, but relations between the two countries are still tense and the Latvian government coalition is in “crisis”. Reporter Hans Cederberg’s item uses flashbacks to frame the background to the crisis. Video footage shows soldiers cleaning up after a bomb that was said to have gone off “two nights ago” in front of the Russian embassy (not previously mentioned in Aktuellt), this is followed by a description of the “protest storm” resulting from the Latvian SS brigade march three weeks before, along with previously shown footage of the SS march, where the camera zooms in on an older, presumably Russian, man whose shouting from the sidelines is now translated (‘Murderers!’). Following this is WWII documentary footage of soldiers dragging away civilians and civilians being marched off. “Yet another provocation” was the bomb attack on the synagogue last week, along with the previously shown footage of a Jewish candelabra lying in broken glass. These incidents precede a description of the ethnic Russian minority in Latvia, who “demonstrate for human rights”. Now, says Cederberg, Russia threatens economic sanctions which, if carried out, would be a “stranglehold” on the Latvian economy.

The item following consists of studio guest, Elisabeth Hedborg, presented as freelance journalist and Russia expert. According to Hedborg, there are extremists on both sides who would like to exploit this situation and it is the Latvian economy that will suffer the consequences. In particular, she describes the Russian extremists as including


nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky, who is said to have united the Russian Duma behind demands for economic sanctions. Although Yeltsin has backed down on the threat of sanctions, the situation is still serious, according to Hedborg.

On 14 April, Aktuellt’s anchor announces in a telegram early on in the programme, that the Swedish Prime Minister is going to Riga to “discuss the crisis between Latvia and Russia”. The Russian position on Latvian discrimination is repeated and the Swedish position is modified: Latvia should follow the OSSE’s recommendations on treatment of minorities. On 15 April, Aktuellt’s top story is headlined: “Swedish Support Eases the Crisis in Latvia: Language Laws Liberalised”. The “controversial language laws” are identified as the crux of the problem, i.e. the reason for the “crisis” with Russia and the reason why ethnic Russians cannot become citizens. The item is based around an interview with Prime Minister Göran Persson. Aktuellt’s correspondent says that both the EU and the US want Latvia to liberalise its citizenship law. Persson connects Sweden with this stance and says that the Latvian government has now made a decision which implies that they will meet the recommendations of the OSSE.

What can inferred by the (in)consistency of coverage and its abrupt end is that the bomb attacks in Latvia were not considered particularly newsworthy in and of themselves, and may not have been more than a common “telegraphed” foreign news story, had not the Russians reacted so strongly or the Swedes become involved. It took the Russian reaction and the Swedish involvement to move the story up in the running order. The plot also shifts in focus from the bombing incidents and SS march (“provocations”), which lead up to the crisis with Russia, to the citizenship law which is identified not only by the Russians, but by the “West” (the US, the EU, Sweden, the OSSE) as being unfairly exclusive towards the Russian ethnic minority. The bombings and the actions of the extremists are thus implied to be connected with the citizenship issue, and although it is a conflict between Russia and Latvia, the problem as defined here, lies with the latter.

The Cast of Characters

Moving from the overall structure of the news coverage of Latvia to the cast of characters, the attempt here is analyse how the main groups of characters emerge in the text and what they do. This analysis follows the aforementioned five questions; the main groups of characters are first deconstructed and then the relations between them examined.

Who are the Latvians?

The Latvians can be divided into three categories in Aktuellt’s coverage: a) the government, b) the extremists and, c) “Latvia” the country name used in the first person singular, as if the country did things and felt things as an individual rather than a diverse entity. The latter is far more common than the first two categories and through its usage we can deduce that it means more than just the government, it includes the country as a whole.

The government includes individuals like President Guntis Ulmanis, Prime Minister Guntar Krasts, the Foreign Minister Valdis Birkavs and also what is called the “Latvian government”. The individuals are seen as responsible and ‘westward-looking’ whereas the government is having a crisis which it then wisely ‘resolves’. Above all President Ulmanis, but also the Prime Minister, “call on” parliament to approve the dismissal of
the Army Commander and the Police Commissioner, due to their responsibility for the SS demonstration and the synagogue bomb. President Ulmanis appears most concerned about the situation since he later invites the Swedish Prime Minister to come to Latvia. The Latvian Foreign Minister, Valdis Birkavs, seen speaking at the EU enlargement meeting on 30 March, is said to be “optimistic”. The determination to become part of the West is seen through phrases such as, “Latvia is prepared to fight hard in order to get to the negotiating table by December”. Latvia’s goal of starting bilateral negotiations with the EU is aided by Sweden’s persuasive powers on Latvia’s behalf. The Swedish foreign minister, indeed, Latvia itself, is depicted as Sweden’s protégé.

The “Latvian government” is characterised as “having a crisis”; this is exemplified by the “Democratic Party Leader Jurkans” accusing the Prime Minister of “ineptitude which could seriously damage the country’s democratic development”. The Democratic Party, described as the largest party in the governing coalition, is said to have left the government “to protest anti-Russian policy”. Later in the coverage, the “government” comes to a decision to change the Latvian citizenship law so that it will be “compatible with the norms that apply in Europe generally”.

The Latvian extremists are the 500 SS veterans and the “extremist forces” who carry out bombing attacks. The Latvian SS are:

/.../parading through the streets of Riga. During World War II they marched with the Germans, now they performed a ceremony to commemorate their SS brigade.

The Russian population was deeply offended. Those who experienced the Nazi terror first-hand. This was too much; this was a direct insult.

This quote is accompanied by sequences, described in the previous section, of the Latvian SS march followed by WWII footage of the Nazi regime in Latvia in the 1940s. This leads directly into a repeat of images from the preceding week of the bomb attack on the synagogue and the Jewish candelabra surrounded by broken glass. The connection we make between the first two sequences is that of soldiers victimising civilians both then and now: they were German and Latvian then and they are Latvian now. These are then connected to the synagogue bombing footage from the previous week, reinforcing a connection between now and the victimisation of Jews in the past. In the sequence immediately following this, the actions of these extremists are transferred to the Russian ethnic minority’s claims that they are being discriminated against. This implies that the same anti-Semitic extremists are also anti-Russianists. This leads, chronologically, into mention of Latvia’s human rights obligations and, later in the coverage, to its citizenship law.

The extremists are personified only by two individuals: the Latvian Army Commander and the Police Commissioner. Otherwise they are mainly anonymous “forces” (trans. “krafter”) who stage so-called “provocations” such as the bomb attacks against the synagogue and the Russian embassy. These forces are described as wanting to “use the situation for their own political ends”, or who “would like to see matters brought to a head.” Their provocations are characterised as “a series of setbacks in Latvia’s attempts to approach the European Union.” Thus the extremist forces that provoke confrontation with Russia are holding the country back from its aspiration to join the West. The complicity of the Army Commander and the Police Commissioner give the impression that extremist forces may also be found in responsible positions in Latvia, but since this is left unclear, they could just as well be scapegoats. It should be noted that the metaphor “forces”, depersonalises those responsible for the attacks, connoting some-
thing unknown, some kind of nature-related force, whose inevitable, threatening and murky elements man can do nothing to stop.

What and who is “Latvia”? Latvia in the first person singular is used in Aktuell’s coverage most often to refer to the country as a whole, rather than simply the government. While the first person singular is used as the acting subject in the description of the three character groups analysed here, “Russia” and “Sweden” almost always describe their respective governments, whereas “Latvia” is used more often to denote the country as a whole. This usage can be exemplified by the characterisation of Latvia as getting “a bad reputation” or “a country that still identifies Jews in their passports.” Latvia’s “controversial language laws” or “citizenship law”, which keep the large Russian minority from becoming citizens, is often referred to in the context of the norms of the Council of Europe, the requirements of the EU or the “recommendations” of the OSSE. On the other hand, “Latvia” is “extremely” vulnerable economically to Russian sanctions and “extremely dependent” on Russian (and Swedish) trade for its economic well-being. The political consequences of the conflict are also Latvia’s problem, since it could “only have a negative effect” on the development of Latvia’s relationship with the EU.

Thus, the individuals and the government are seen as responsible and ‘westward-looking’, while “Latvia” risks a bad reputation and economic ruin due the “provocations” of the extremists. This hides the responsibility of the Latvian parliament for the citizenship law, and focuses anti-Russian sentiment on the extremist nationalists. It is with the Swedish characterisation of its view of the problem that this becomes clear (see below).

Who are the Russians?
The Russians are seen in the following three roles: a) the ethnic Russians in Latvia, b) President Boris Yeltsin, the Russian government and its representatives, “Russia” in first person singular, and c) extremist, ultra-nationalist forces. Regarding the ethnic Russians in Latvia, they are clearly the victims in the coverage of Latvia. They are “a third of the population who are Russian-speaking and therefore barred from real citizenship”. The Latvian SS veteran’s march provoked a “storm of protest”. The ethnic Russians want “human rights”: we see footage of protest signs saying ‘human rights’ (in English), while Hans Cederberg explains, “The Russian minority is demonstrating for human rights. There is a large Russian-speaking minority here, about 700,000 people. Many feel discriminated against...” As noted above, Aktuell legitimises their complaints through its references to different Western norms and standards.

Who is the Russian government? The references vary from the “Russian government”, to President Boris Yeltsin and his spokespersons, to Moscow and, in a reversion to the Cold War label, “Kremlin leaders”. When the Russian government or spokespeople are mentioned, it is always in the context of receiving orders from Boris Yeltsin. It is Yeltsin who is calling the shots. The Russian leadership emerges with two messages: a) the Russian minority in Latvia “is discriminated against,” “opposed”, and “unfairly treated”, b) and economic steps, called “pin-pricks of economic measures designed to influence Latvia”, or “sanctions” are either under consideration, are threatened, or are being implemented. President Yeltsin has “given the order” to redirect Russian exports to other ports than Latvian ones. Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov appears once to confirm that oil shipments to Latvia have been “drastically reduced and that almost all Russian oil companies have reacted to the situation in Latvia”. These
are described by Aktuellt as “threats” of “punishment” and continue to be used as a handle to describe the conflict even after 9 April, when “President Yeltsin let it be known that he would not like to implement sanctions, and that there is still room for dialogue.”

Russia in first person singular is synonymous with the Russian leadership. Hans Cederberg opens his story on 9 April by saying “The Russian Bear Roars”, accompanied by footage of Boris Yeltsin in discussion with his young Prime Minister candidate Sergei Kiriyenko, where the former looks like he is giving the latter some kind of lecture. This is particularly interesting considering the disclosure, by Aktuellt’s studio guest, Elisabeth Hedborg, that Russia itself has no official government in place. In the event, the Russian government, its leadership and “Russia” are unified and interchangeable words, personified by images of Yeltsin. This entity is then associated with threats, punishment, protests and criticism vis-à-vis Latvia.

Who are the Russian extremists? The extremists are identified by names such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky or Mayor Lushkov of Moscow. The former is described as the “politician setting the tone on the Russian side” and the one who led the Russian Duma in its calls for sanctions. Here again we encounter the use of the term “forces” (here in the Russian Duma), who would “like to use this for their own political purposes”. Indeed, it is in this context that commentator Elisabeth Hedborg characterises the conflict as “serious”. Granted that the Russian extremists and the “vulnerable Russian domestic situation” are found only in the item with Hedborg, if compared to the “sanctions” or “pinpricks of economic influence” later recanted by Boris Yeltsin, the extremist “forces” appear more ominous than the Russian government. This impression is reinforced by the standard footage of Yeltsin, taken from the context of his repeated attempts to persuade the Duma to accept his prime ministerial candidate. Thus, the Russian “threat” appears to come from the weakness of Yeltsin, and the strength of unseen ultra-nationalists. The democratic credibility of the Russian standpoint on its countrymen in Latvia is not connected to any intrinsic Russian democracy, but gains legitimacy from the fact that it coincides with the victim’s (ethnic Russian) complaints as well as those of the West.

Who are the Swedes?
Aktuellt’s Swedes consist of the Foreign Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallén, the Prime Minister Göran Persson and Sweden first person singular. The latter category is synonymous with the government, with the exception of rather vague references to the negative consequences of the Russia-Latvia conflict for the Baltic region.

".../It is extremely important for us in Sweden that we have a stable situation in the region, since we believe that the Baltic region has the ability to develop in a very positive way. And so this type of conflict should be put on the backburner."

While it appears that Persson is here talking about the government’s view of the importance of the Baltic region, Aktuellt’s anchor, as well as reporter Hans Cederberg inquire as to the risk of the conflict “spreading to the region”. This appears to be a standard journalistic query aimed at legitimising the conflict as a concern for Sweden as a whole, rather than the government in particular.

Regarding the Swedish individuals in government, Foreign Minister Hjelm-Wallén emerges a staunch supporter of Latvia in the 30 March item on EU enlargement. Sweden is given the credit for persuading the EU to allow candidate countries who didn’t
make the “fast lane” for membership a chance to negotiate every year. The Swedish Foreign Minister describes, with poorly concealed pride, what an “enormous incentive this is” for Latvia to carry through with “difficult reforms”. Sweden is here Latvia’s doting patron, personalised as an optimistic Hjelm-Wallén. Hjelm-Wallén is also seen supporting Latvia in a telegram on 8 April where she rebukes Russia’s “veiled or open threats” and calls for “dialogue” as the only means of solving “Latvia’s problems.”

Prime Minister Göran Persson’s support for Latvia is more cautious. He first appears late in the conflict, taking the role of ‘Judicious Mediator’ who journeys abroad to bring home a “solution” to the conflict. When it is reported that Persson is going to Latvia to discuss the crisis with President Ulmanis, the Swedish position on the conflict is modified, “Sweden does not condone the Russian threats, but at the same time supports the OSSE’s demands that Latvia follow international norms and treat minorities well”.

Thus, a change occurs if compared to the Foreign Minister’s previous rebuke of Russia. The following day, 15 April, Aktuellt’s top story announces that it was “Swedish support” that alleviated the “crisis in Latvia”. Sweden, actually the Prime Minister, appears to have persuaded Latvia to “liberalise its language laws”, to follow OSSE representative Max van der Stoel’s recommendations and this, it is implied, will help Russia and Latvia “put the conflict behind them”. The decision by the Latvian government is clearly sourced by the Prime Minister’s statement in the item itself, since no other source is mentioned. What then does this Swedish “support” consist of? Aktuellt’s reporter Hans Cederberg asks: “How can Sweden help”? Göran Persson answers, “Partly, naturally, by supporting the Latvians in their struggle to change their legislation. That is important.” In an effort to get Göran Persson to clarify, Cederberg asks, “Is it the citizenship laws that need to be liberalised”? To which Persson answers, “Yes, they need to be compatible with the norms that apply in Europe generally and that is the process Latvia is going through right now.”

Two things can be noted about Persson’s answers. The first thing is that the Swedish Prime Minister connects Sweden’s (modified) position on Latvia’s citizenship law to norms “in Europe”, to “EU requirements” and to the international community as represented by the OSSE, in other words, to the West. The second and more instructive thing to notice is that, far from criticising the Russian “threats”, Swedish “support” centres on Latvia’s “struggle to change its legislation”[sic.]. But this begs the question, who is Latvia struggling against? Certainly not the Russians. The viewer is left hanging. Although one is tempted to connect this struggle with the “provocations”, i.e. the bomb attacks and SS marches, it cannot be the extremists “Latvia is struggling against, since bomb attacks are by definition marginal to politics. In Russia, the extremists are identified in the Russian Duma, while in Latvia, they are not. It is only through implication – by way of the coverage of the Army Commander and the Police Commissioner, and the protest by the Democratic Party leader Jurkans of the government’s anti-Russian policies – that the viewer can infer that there are nationalists, perhaps in the government, perhaps in the Latvian parliament, that oppose a liberalisation of the citizenship laws.

Yet, this central aspect, the “why” of the existence of the citizenship law and the longer term cause of inter-ethnic conflict, is practically invisible in Aktuellt’s coverage. Those in the Latvian constituency and parliament who are against citizenship for the Russian minority, who disagree with the “human rights norms” and “European standards”, are shielded.

In summary, the Swedes are mainly the government, which criticises Russian “threats”, but later emerges as “supportive” of Latvia, although it is in essence agreeing
with the Russian position that Latvia's citizenship laws are too exclusive. Its rationale is that of "EU membership and "European" standards. Those forces in Latvia that oppose change in the citizenship law, are here, by Swedish implication (not explicit in the characterisation of Latvians) something more than a few extremist incidents, yet they are invisible in the coverage. In the guise of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, Sweden is Big Brother instructing Little Brother on the ways of the West. Foreign Minister Hjelm-Wallen is like an optimistic mother encouraging her child’s aspirations, while Prime Minister Persson is like a father teaching Latvia the "manners" of the West.

Who is the East/Who is the West?
Not surprisingly, the East/West problematic emerges most explicitly in the March 30th item on EU enlargement, which is set in the context of "the problems encountered" (by the West) in negotiations with the East. The East is exemplified by Polish farmers whose milk is banned by the EU due to hygiene standards. The images accompanying this open in a dingy barn with one cow and perhaps two chickens, with the camera following a farmer as he moves into the kitchen where his kerchiefed wife wrings out the washing. This is said to be just one of "hundreds of examples" of areas where Eastern countries do not live up to "West European" standards. While the first candidate country could become an EU member around the year 2003, it will take "many more years" for the Polish farmer to "reach the standards of the West European farmer". The East is also the Latvian Foreign Minister, who didn’t make it into the "fast lane" of candidate countries, but who is given the chance to try for negotiations every year, thanks to the efforts of Sweden.

The West is represented by the "EU farmers" or "West European farmers" who "live under strict controls regarding hygiene, the environment, animal protection, labour laws, etc.". The West is also the EU bureaucracy which "offers carrots and sticks" to the Eastern countries. The EU offers money, but "makes demands" that Eastern countries "reform at a certain pace". The West is the EU that Latvia is attempting join. It is the "surrounding world" as Hans Cederberg puts it on 15 April, reporting from in front of a building with an EU flag in Riga. This "surrounding world" is referred to variously as the Council of Europe, the EU, the US, the OSSE and Sweden who all put pressure on Latvia to liberalise its citizenship law.

Us and Them in Aktuellt 1998
The analysis of the cast of characters in Aktuellt’s Latvia crisis episode demonstrates that Sweden and the EU are the Western “We” and both Latvia and Russia are “Them”. As in Billig’s example, however, the Other is defined by its distance from Us, and clearly, there are also two versions of Us. The Swedish “We” is the benevolent Big Brother helping Latvia to become more like Us in the West. The Swedish We differs from the West by virtue of its strong support for Latvia, and its self-proclaimed “mediator” role in communicating demands to Latvia. The EU, the Council of Europe, “Europe” and the OSSE are variously and interchangeably used to describe the “West” and its standards and norms, although little explanation is given of what these norms and recommendations actually consist of. The audience only knows that Latvia is not abiding by them and the implication is that this has to do with democracy. Thus the West stands for democratic standards, “human rights” norms and economic demands and
Sweden is its messenger, charged with the task of seeing to it that Latvia complies. On a structural level, the Swedish government has a dominating presence, and this must be seen as one of the reasons for the coverage of Latvia in the first place.

Russia is the “bear” that “roars”, a beast one wouldn’t want to disturb or upset. Russian threats are accompanied by images of the famously unpredictable Boris Yeltsin, who is calling the shots. Russia appears, in other words, as an unstable and mercurial Other, a threat, due just as much to its own domestic disarray and its own extremists, as to economic sanctions against Latvia. Here it is interesting that the threat of an unstable, rather than a powerful, Russia is probably more prevalent in “Western” eyes than in Latvia. One need only to look back to 1990 to the use of Soviet oil and gas sanctions against Lithuania to imagine how easily Latvia could interpret this as a ‘typical’ example of Russian bullying of its weaker neighbour. But this is not how Russia emerges in Aktuell. The position of both Sweden and the West lends credence to the Russian position on the status of the ethnic Russians, although being the Other, there is no explicit connection made between the two. In other words, while We have the same interpretation of the Latvian (democracy) problem as They do, They are differentiated by the consequences of their threats and unpredictability.

Latvia is also the Other in Aktuell, but it is a closer Other than Russia. Latvia is a Dependent to Sweden, and a potential Ally to the West. Latvia is depicted as aspiring to become like Us, but not quite succeeding. Latvia has to “live up” to human rights standards, make difficult reforms and change its citizenship legislation, which carries the implication that Latvia is not fully democratic. Latvia is depicted as struggling against extremist forces and an anti-Semitic, anti-Russian past. Latvia’s extremists are however not placed in the parliament, as they are in Russia: they are anonymous, visible through bombing attacks and other “provocations”. We can infer by the status of the Latvian Army Commander that there are similar ultra-nationalists in responsible positions. Yet on the surface, Latvian nationalist forces are invisible and this plays up Latvia’s “Western” aspirations. Aktuell’s coverage implies that if Latvia would only allow the ethnic Russian minority to become citizens and conform to Western norms, then Latvia can become like “Us”. Russia, despite the “democratic” character of its criticism of Latvia is given no similar possibility.

**Baltic Neighbour Storylines in the 90s: Recycling Collective Memory?**

In the initial discussion it was noted that one way of analysing expressions of national identity is to focus on the boundary between Us and Them in foreign news. Journalistic constructions of foreign actors can often say more about the reporting country than the country reported on. It was also noted that national identity, as any type of identity, is not static, but must continually be re-legitimated and reconstituted. In view of the changes taking place in the world, particularly in Europe with the reconstitution of Central and Eastern European countries and the accelerated integration of the European Union, not to mention changes which undermine the very foundations of the nation-state, it would be interesting if there were any shift in the boundaries between Us and Them over time.

One way to understand the Latvia crisis episode is to compare it with previous coverage of the Baltic states. One such study of the Swedish coverage of the Soviet crackdown in the Baltic states in January 1991 has been done by the author (Riegert, 1998). Briefly, this crisis was a confrontation between Soviet troops and the elected Baltic nationalist governments along with the civilian populations of Lithuania and Latvia. The
tension between the Baltic states and the Soviet Union had been considerable since the preceding spring, when the Baltic nationalist parliaments passed independence declarations. The increased military activity in the region and President Gorbachev’s threats to institute direct presidential rule were direct precursors to the crisis. In Sweden, the events of the Soviet crack-down were closely monitored by both the government and the news media. While news programmes in other countries were dominated by the impending Gulf War, Sweden’s most popular news programme Rapport was headlining its stories and extending its running time to cover the dramatic events in the Baltics. The Lithuanian and Latvian nationalist movements had mobilised civilians to build barricades and to form “human shields” to protect the parliaments and press buildings from attacks by the Soviet military. The death of some 19 civilians resulted in huge funeral processions, which were called “political demonstrations for democracy and freedom” by the Swedish correspondents who covered them.

Rapport set the Baltic crisis in the context of deep divisions in Soviet society which could evolve into a civil war, and what this would mean for the Baltic region (i.e. Sweden) and East-West relations. Swedish government support could be seen through the much publicised attempts to internationalise the conflict, news coverage of the visits by representatives of the Baltic national governments to Sweden and the presence of observers such as diplomats and parliamentary delegations in the Baltic states during the crisis. Rapport provided a dramatic portrayal of the physical threat to civilians in favour of Baltic independence and a disproportionate amount of attention to the statements of the Baltic nationalists and demonstrators compared to those representing the Soviet government’s position. Rapport’s language use framed the position of the Baltic nationalist movements sympathetically: these were the underdogs who had a moral right to independence. President Gorbachev was implied to have betrayed his own ideals and thrown in with the “hard-liners” to keep the Soviet Union together.

Compared to the Latvia episode, the Baltic crisis of 1991 was clearly a “proper” crisis, including civilian deaths, the element of surprise and the perception of the need for quick decisions, whereas the 1998 “mini-crisis” between Russia and Latvia involved no loss of life and developed slowly over a period of two months. However, as a vantage point from which to generate hypotheses about changes in journalistic constructions over time, there are interesting parallels. Both conflicts between the Latvian government and the Soviet (later) Russian governments prompted concern and reactions from other countries, especially from Sweden. In both cases, the Swedish government was anxious to show its support for the Baltic countries and Latvia, not least through references to international bodies. In both, the consequences of the conflicts were said to be serious, especially for Latvia, but also for regional stability.

How then does Swedish news coverage of Latvia in 1998 compare to coverage of the Latvia and Lithuania crisis in 1991 regarding storylines constructing Us and Them? As was noted initially, the Baltic nationalist governments in 1991 were given the moral upper-hand, described as wanting “only freedom and democracy” and supported by Russian and Baltic civilians “on the barricades” together. In other words, they wanted to be, and they were, just like Us. To be a nationalist, to want self-determination, was per definition anti-Communist. Like other former East bloc countries, however, the term nationalism has now shifted implication for the West. Nationalism now connotes antidemocratic tendencies and ethnic hatred (i.e. denying citizenship for ethnic Russians in Latvia). In 1998, Latvia’s extremists and the country’s acquiescence to Hitler Germany are coupled to Russian demands for “human rights”. Now it is the nationalists that are
not quite democratic and their number is hidden behind a facade of extremist incidents. Thus, while Latvia was the underdog and the victim of oppression in 1991, it may now be, the Oppressor with a Past.

What this means in terms of the Latvia episode examined above, is that there is a dualism in the Swedish coverage of 1998 compared to 1991. In 1998, while it is clear that Aktuellt buys into the Swedish Prime Minister’s attempt to portray himself as Judicious Mediator whose efforts help to bring the conflict to a close, also shielding the responsibility of the Latvian parliament and constituency for the citizenship law, it also graphically depicts Latvia’s “murky” past and present extremist incidents. It would be in the Swedish government’s interests to smooth over these problems in Latvian society, and the difficulty of identifying other nationalist elements than the extremists illustrates this. But due to the fact that the EU and the OSSE concur on the interpretation of Latvia’s citizenship law, the viewer is left with a residue of suspicion regarding Latvian democracy and the strength of nationalist sentiment. Thus, the Swedish government’s interpretation is not the only one available for events taking place, as was the case in 1991.

What could the trauma of the Baltic extradition and Sweden’s ‘bad conscience’ mean for Baltic neighbour storylines in the 1990s? One suggestion is that there may have been few journalists in 1991 who would look into the ethnic make-up of Latvia, Latvia’s past or its future agreements with the Soviet Union. In 1998, the ethnic tensions have become troublesome and the Swedish government’s staunch political and economic support makes it possible for the media to reassess the past. The uncertain extent of Latvian collaboration with Nazi Germany (there was difficulty determining the extent to which the Baltic soldiers were collaborators or drafted in 1946) resurfaces again in Aktuellt’s images of present-day Latvian nationalism. Thus we see an interaction between the political and media spheres of discourse; the media recycling the non-too flattering memory of the Baltic states during WWII and the government attempting to ‘forget’, to start fresh in 1991 by sponsoring the Baltic countries’ in their entry to the West.

Another interesting element in the comparison between 1991 and 1998 are the similarities in the portrayal of the Russian Other. Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin are the personification of power in their respective countries, yet we are not quite certain if they really are in control of unruly opponents. In 1991 the opponents were democrats clamouring for change and hard-liners fighting against it and Gorbachev had “gone with the hard-liners”. The opponents in 1998 are the ultra-nationalists in the Russian Duma, which Yeltsin appears to be battling more for his own purposes than for democracy. In 1991, Swedish news covered the forces for democracy in the Soviet Union whereas in 1998, they are nowhere to be seen in Russia. The Soviet and Russian threat against Us, both then and now lies in the country’s instability and possible “retreat” back to an “Eastern” traditionalism and repression.

Using the 1991 Baltic crisis as a vantage point, it is clear that something called a “mini-crisis” was not really covered like a crisis by Aktuellt in 1998. The 1998 mini-crisis was covered inconsistently and ended abruptly with the impression that the conflict “was solved”. While this closure may appear to contradict the aforementioned serial character of news, it could also be interpreted as a new equilibrium in a continuing story of the “trials and tribulations” of Latvia’s attempts to become one of Us.
Notes

1. See Bloom (1990), Chapter 4.
2. The Swedish public service news programmes, Rapport and Aktuellt, are the two main evening news bulletins. The difference between the two is that the latter should not only summarise important news of the day, but also develop in-depth news coverage. In practice this means that one or two subjects are treated in-depth every evening. Up until 1997, the two were supposed to compete with each other, whereas now they are seen as complimentary programmes.
3. For a discussion of Anderson and the concept of national identity, see Barker (1999: 65-68). Despite the plethora of satellite channels, the majority of European news viewers still prefer national news programmes.
7. It should be noted that delineating Us and Them also involves suppressing differences within the group. Drawing from Stuart Hall, Barker (1999: 68) sees national identity as unifying cultural diversity under a certain set of “symbols and practices”; and thus an expression of the cultural power of some groups over others.
9. Huntington (1996) forecasts international conflict along broad lines of “civilisations”. The Islamic Other replaces the Soviet Union as a major threat to the “West”.
12. De Cillia, Reislig & Wodak (1999: 169). These authors as well as Hedetoft (1997) and Billig (1995) all eschew the traditional division in nationalism theory between “civic” nationalism and “ethnic” nationalism, exemplified in Smith (1991). Rather, national identity gains strength from drawing in both of these types.
13. Balibar (1996: 358) notes that citizenship, indeed the community and its politics, is defined by the “principle of exclusion” dividing the citizens from the foreigners.
15. Although a more common strategy for analysing national identity discourse has been to look at celebrations (Dayan & Katz, 1995) and the mobilisation of Others in times of war and crisis. Redefinitions of the Enemy, for example, are clearest when a country goes to war and efforts are directed to mobilise national identity to legitimise why people are asked to face death for their nation. Literature on the Gulf War exemplify this. See Bennett & Paletz (1994).
20. While Cantor & Pingree (1983) do not compare soap operas to news, these aspects of soap opera are clearly applicable to news. In particular, the use of aspects of one story to launch new and associated stories.
22. This notion is taken from Olsson (forthcoming).
23. See the introduction in Silamikelis (1997) by Dr. Curt Ekholm, whose dissertation on this subject is an authoritative account. See also Zalcmanis (1983).
24. See Ahlander (1992) for some of the reasons for this.
25. Ekholm (1997: 9) calls it one of the most publicised and discussed issues in modern Swedish history. A simple word search in the Presstext archives for the word “baltutlämnningen,” which houses the largest Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter and the tabloid Expressen, for articles between 1990-99 reveals some 80 articles. Many of the headlines of these articles carry the words “guilt” and “shame”.
27. The stories relating to the Baltic region in January 1998 were the “Östersjö” meeting of the leaders of states bordering the Baltic Sea, the new Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, and the conclusion of a bilateral cooperation agreement between the United States and the Baltic states.
28. According to Chatman (1995: 478), “...the story is the what in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the how “. The analysis here does not make this traditional distinction in narrative theory.
29. Interestingly enough, it was Elisabeth Hedborg who reported on the 1991 Baltic crisis from Latvia for the rival news programme Rapport. For coverage of that crisis, see below.
30. This was however not the case. Aktuellt’s own current affairs programme 8 dagar reported on 28 May 1998 that the “Latvian parliament voted to keep its restrictive citizenship law”. In the Swedish daily Dagens Ny-
heter from October 1998, 53% of Latvians voted in a referendum for a liberalisation of the citizenship laws. This was interpreted as meeting the criteria of the OSSE and the EU. See Winiarski (1998).


34. Aktuellt, 9 April.

35. Both journalists and Prime Minister Persson refer to the human rights norms of Western institutions. Elisabeth Hedborg says, “As a member of the Council of Europe, the country is bound to follow the human rights norms that are set out there.” Aktuellt, 9 April 1998, 8th item.


41. Aktuellt, 14 April 1998.


45. Both journalists and Prime Minister Persson refer to the human rights norms of Western institutions. Elisabeth Hedborg says, “As a member of the Council of Europe, the country is bound to follow the human rights norms that are set out there.” Aktuellt, 9 April 1998, 8th item.


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Hypernews and Coherence

MARTIN ENGBRETSEN

This article focuses on a mass medial text genre scarcely found today, but which might assume considerable importance within a few years. It looks at hypernews, ie news written, structured and distributed as hypertexts. Over the past few years, the Internet-based hypertext system World Wide Web has become a news channel of great significance, in Norway as in other parts of the world. Despite these recent developments, hypernews are still largely non-existent. One important reason for the absence of hypernews is related to the question of coherence, the inner system of logical relations expected in a text-based representation of an issue. Textual coherence is normally associated with a linear sequentialisation of text elements. If a news item is to be redefined for a medium inviting a non-linear text structure, how can the reader’s need for a logical thread through the material be met?

My answer is based on the view that coherence is not primarily a text-immanent entity, but the result of an interplay between textual and cognitive factors. Whether the reader finds the text coherent or not is dependent on his/her understanding of the tasks involved in the reading process; what are the tasks assigned to the reader, and what to the text? In hypertextual contexts, the tasks are changed, and the change is related to the transition from an interpretative to an explorative reading process (see Aarseth 1997:64).

Before we deal with this theme in greater depth, it might be useful to take a closer look at certain aspects of the technological and linguistic framework of our discussion.

Technology and Linguistic Representation

Traditionally, news have been communicated through channels that mediate information linearly, ie with information elements arranged in a fixed sequence. This applies in particular to radio and TV, but newspapers are also mainly linear on the article level. Even though paratextual elements such as leads, subheadings, bold-faced quotations, etc. often make news items look like collages, articles are mainly written in accordance with certain textlinguistic requirements such as continuity and wholeness. Therefore, the reader will normally profit from a linear reading. In other words: even though the genre allows the reader to choose different paths through the material, one path will normally be dominant, namely the one appearing when the text is read line by line (see Bolter 1992).

Thus, the printed press functions within the framework of a script culture developed on the basis of the principle common to all graphical technology: imprinting symbols on a two-dimensional surface. When this technology is applied to produce a lasting repre-
sentation of human verbal language, a linear sequence of words and sentences is a natural consequence. “Frozen speech” is produced (see Ricoeur 1993).

The technology employed to produce and distribute electronic newspapers is different from that applied to printed papers. The contents of web newspapers are produced by means of digital editing and design tools, coded in accordance with the HTML protocol (Hypertext Markup Language), which facilitates distribution over the global computer network, the Internet. Consequently, the technological bounds of news mediation through electronic newspapers are not defined by what is possible to imprint graphically on a paper surface, but by what is possible to code in HTML (and the successors of this protocol, for instance XML). This change will affect the ways in which linguistic elements can be represented. The most important effect is the possibility of hypertextuality; establishing a linguistic level above the text level.

**Hypertext**

Hypertext as a text and information concept was developed by pioneers such as Ted Nelson and Douglas Engelbart as early as the 1960s. However, a technological basis for general realisation and use was not provided until 1991 when Tim Berners-Lee and his colleagues at CERN, Switzerland, launched the Internet-based hypertext system known as the World Wide Web.

Over the past few years, hypertext has been the object of comprehensive studies and discussion. Literary scholars, authors, critics, communication theorists, linguists and psychologists alike have, parallel with programmers and system designers, tried to arrive at the deepest understanding possible of hypertext as a concept and tool.

We shall not dwell on this debate here. In our context, it is sufficient to establish that hypertext is texts or text elements interconnected by means of electronic links.

From a linguistic point of view, it may be argued that hypertext represents a potential extension of the language system as we know it from the media of speech and writing. In these two media, language is realised through a process of selection and chaining: sounds/letters are chained to form words, words are chained to form sentences, and sentences are chained to form texts. Hypertext introduces a linguistic level above the text level: texts may be combined into hypertexts. And this combination need not – as on the other levels – have the characteristics of chaining. Other, new combinatory principles may be employed to interconnect text elements. Thus, other linguistic structural principles than the principle of linearity may be developed, also on the surface level of the text. (On the semantic-hermeneutic level, linearity has never been dominant in the same way.)

Hypertexts have, then, firstly a text level – where the rules for combining and chaining are largely identical with the rules for paper-based writing – and secondly a hypertext level where completely different rules apply (although exactly which is still unclear).

The relationship between these two linguistic levels represents a potential for new types of linguistic dynamics; the text units provide each other with meaning-creating contexts by the way they are structured and interconnected.

In order to point out two fundamental aspects of hypertextual functionality, the following definition may be used as an open, pragmatic, technology-oriented version:

Hypertext is a concept for organising and accessing information, based on a technology which offers the possibility of interconnecting text elements by means of electronic links. The elements can be independent documents (nodes) or different
sequences of one and the same document. The concept may also be used non-generically ("a hypertext"), about a specific group of text elements interconnected as described above.

The central element in the above definition (based on Nelson1993 and McKnight et al. 1991, among others) is that hypertext can provide both organisational and presentational structure to a given text material (for instance a news material) and access to information (for instance related news articles) – in both cases by means of electronic linking.

It should be noted, however, that what is usually regarded as the main feature of hypertext, namely the electronic link, is not necessarily represented as a visible mark in the text surface. Certain hypertext systems let the reader navigate by means of a graphical representation of the entire node system, a type of "map". This kind of spatial hypertext system utilizes the spatial dimensions of the screen to signal textual relations, semantic or pragmatic. In order to access the nodes, readers click directly on a selected area of the map instead of clicking on a link in the text itself. (Illustration 3 below is an example of a hypertext without explicit links between the nodes. The nodes are interconnected through the interface of the map.)

In current electronic newspapers, the second function mentioned in the definition – hypertext providing access to information – is tentatively utilized. Links are established between today’s article and other relevant articles or web sites. Primarily, this means that the article content is connected to the paper’s own news archive. However, this type of hyperlinkage does not affect the form of the individual news articles. Articles in electronic newspapers are by and large identical to news articles in the printed press; they are usually collected directly from an article database shared with a paper-based newspaper.

The second function, hypertext as structure, has so far been very little used. However, this function has the largest potential of change in terms of forms and functions of news on the WWW.

**Hypertext as Structure**

Hypertext does not imply organisational chaos, but offers an opportunity of establishing a new type of linguistic order. The hypertext designer will have to select the text elements to be interconnected by electronic links. Normally, this selection will also involve choosing a global structure for the system of nodes and links. It is this system that will determine how the text material can be read.

**Figure 1.**

[Diagram showing two types of hyperstructure: axial (or hierarchical) structure and network structure.]

Structure: Figure 1 shows two fundamental types of hyperstructure, axial (or hierarchical) structure and network structure.
Mainly two categories contribute to polarising the wide range of structural possibilities, namely the axial – or hierarchical – structure and the network structure.

The axial structure has a “trunk” consisting of a simple “main node” or a sequence of central nodes indicating a recommended reading strategy. This trunk may have varying numbers of “branches” with additional information which readers may choose to click on.

The network structure is basically characterised by the absence of such a centring “trunk”. The nodes are linked together criss-cross on the basis of semantic criteria – or other criteria which the hypertext designer might want to apply.

It hardly serves any purpose to maintain that hypertext structures must be either axial or networked, as suggested by some hypertext theorists (see ia Landow 1994). A hypertext with an apparent hierarchical structure may well have a link system that at the same time gives the text a network structure. We might say that different hypertexts can have varying degrees of openness in their structure, but one of the two principles will usually dominate the individual hypertext presentation.

When discussing theoretical issues relating to hypertext, it is usually an advantage to base the discussion on a particular type of application (adapted genre), and preferably on concrete models. Let us therefore concretise the somewhat vague concept of “hyperm-news” by outlining two prototypes. Illustrations 1-3 show screen dumps of three demonstration texts, where the first represents traditional narrative structure, and the two latter axial and network hyperstructure respectively. (Illustrations 1, 2 and 3 are translations of Norwegian prototypes developed in collaboration with the editorial staff of Stavanger Aftenblad’s electronic newspaper. The original presentations may be viewed on http://home.hia.no/~martine/proto.htm)

Illustration 1 shows a news item presented by means of traditional narrative structure, as it appeared on the web site of the major Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten on 17 November 1997. The article is about a false imprisonment: A person has been awarded a considerable amount in compensatory damages after having served a five-year sentence

Illustration 1.

![Illustration 1](http://home.hia.no/~martine/proto.htm)
Despite his innocence in a drug case. The text is long and rather complex. A large number of extracts from various source discourses (primarily interviews) are combined with the journalist's own description of current events to make a continuous and logical news story.

In illustration 2, the content is reorganised to form an axial hypertext. The screen is divided into three frames. At the top is a static frame with brief information on the core facts of the case. Below is a wide frame on the left and a narrower frame on the right. The wide frame contains the main text, which is a relatively thorough summary of the matter based on the original news story and supplemented by elements from other reports on the case. The summary is relatively brief, with a continuous presentation of the main elements of the material. All instances of concretisation, exemplification, elaboration, discussion, etc. have been removed and organised in separate text nodes. These nodes are connected to the main text by means of hyperlinks, and the links are anchored at those points in the main text where the node theme is of interest. If the reader chooses to click on such a link, the supplementary node in question will appear in the narrow frame on the right, while the main text in the left frame remains unaffected. (In this clipping, the reader has clicked on the word "heroin case" in the main text to the left, and the text "Convicted of carrying drug money" has appeared in the area on the right).

In illustration 3, the content is organised in a more networked structure. This presentation gives the reader a greater degree of control. On the left side of the screen is a graphical representation of all the information elements in the news item. We might call it a news map. The reader must click on each "box" to view the various text files (and possibly also picture files, graphic files, etc). This news map remains stable on the left side of the screen independent of how the texts changes in other screen areas. The various elements in the news map are organised according to an imagined subjective/objective axis. Text elements of a personal, subjective character are placed furthest to the left (statements made by witnesses, comments, etc), facts of the case are placed in the middle.

Illustration 2.

Axial: The illustration shows a prototype of a news item presented by means of an axial hyperstructure. A short and stable introduction is placed at the top, the main text in the frame on the left and various types of additional information in the frame on the right.
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Illustration 3.

Network: Here the news item is presented by means of a network structure. The user gets access to the information by clicking on the boxes in the “news map” on the upper left side of the screen.

(main events, background information, etc), and documentation-like elements are placed on the right hand side of the news map (grounds for judgement, previous cases of a similar nature, etc). Any multimedia elements (photos, graphics, video bits, sound files, etc) can be placed where they belong in the structure. At the top of the map is a box containing a brief presentation of the news event. This file appears automatically as opening screen (see the illustration).

All the demonstration texts can of course be supplemented with links to various types of “secondary” information: articles from one’s own archive or the archives of others, relevant web sites in addition to e-mail programs, etc. It will probably also be possible to present the structures by means of other design principles, for instance without the use of “frames”. The purpose of these prototypes is merely to show that there are other possible ways to present a collection of news elements than writing a closed and continuous news story. The various hyperstructures distribute both responsibility and power in various ways between the editor and the reader.

Obviously, the usefulness of the most open presentation structures will vary according to the type of news – and the type of reader. In consequence, hypernews should not be regarded as a final replacement of the news story, but rather as an alternative. Finn Bostad (1998:290) states: “Writing with a hypertext writing tool is a way of structuring and categorizing the ‘surrounding world’”. Generally, one might say that hypernews are best suited for mediation of complex news events consisting of a large number of elements and relations: election campaigns, catastrophes, big court cases, etc.

Hypertextual presentation forms as shown in illustrations 2 and 3 comprise several communicative aspects which invite linguistic and text-pragmatic research. Many of these aspects may be arranged by means of the simple triangle on which Karl Buhler’s function-oriented language model is based.

Here, the text functions as a connection between a sender (I), a receiver (YOU) and a mediated world (IT). From the sender’s point of view, we might say that the main func-
tions of the text are connected to an epistemological and a communicative axis respectively: how does the text function as a representation of a real or possible world, and how does it function communicatively for a receiver?

If we concentrate on the communicative axis, two fundamental questions arise: how is the reader motivated to read, and how is the reader’s understanding and memory of the contents supported? My dealing with the issue of coherence focuses on the latter of these points.

**Coherence in Hypertext**

What is coherence? Or rather: what kind of coherence concept is the most appropriate to apply in a hypertextual context?

In one branch of text linguistics, coherence is understood as the total of the mechanisms which make a text a logical unit. Coherence corresponds, then, to the system of explicit and implicit connective elements of the text, and is regarded as a text-immanent entity. In this perspective, it will hardly be possible for a text which invites different, individual reading strategies to have as strong coherence as a text with a fixed, linear structure.

According to a more cognitively oriented branch of text linguistics, coherence is a result of mental work and is consequently tied to the reading process rather than to the text itself. The reader assigns coherence to the text, or, as van Dijk (1988:62) says:

... empirically speaking, discourse does not have coherence, but is assigned coherence by language users.

Whether the reader assigns coherence to the text or not is determined by whether he/she feels that the units of meaning activated by the text are mutually relevant within the text’s universe of meaning. Beaugrande & Dressler (1996:84) state:

A text “makes sense” because there is a CONTINUITY OF SENSES among the knowledge activated by the expressions of the text... We would define this continuity of senses as the foundation of COHERENCE, being the mutual access and relevance within a configuration of CONCEPTS and RELATIONS. (Capitalized by the author.)

In Sperber & Wilson’s relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), the issue of coherence is even closer connected to the inner activity of the participants in the communication process. When reading a text, or in other ways participating in communicative acts, one is, according to this theory, constantly searching for relevance, which ia consists of a logical relation between the unit of meaning activated at the moment and those activated earlier in the discourse. (For a more thorough treatment of relevant coherence theory, see Leraand 1998.)
Coherence as Reading

Even though, as van Dijk and the relevance theorists point out, it is the reader that assigns coherence to the text, it is, as Beaugrande & Dressler emphasize, the text material that triggers the meaning-creating activity in the reader. Coherence should therefore be understood as a result of an interplay between textual and cognitive factors, where the text is assigned certain tasks and the reader other tasks. Thus, the text-oriented and the cognitive approaches to the concept of coherence only represent different perspectives of this procedural collaboration. In our context, we might unite the two perspectives by saying that coherence is an entity related to reading.

This view corresponds with Sperber & Wilson’s view of communication as an ostensive-inferential process. The ostention rests with the sender, and implies that the sender draws the attention of the receiver through an act with a communicative purpose. This act may be to hold out an empty coffee cup to get it filled up, or it might be to make a paragraph in a text to indicate that the following sentence belongs to a new semantic unit. The inference lies with the receiver, and implies carrying out sufficiently comprehensive mental work so that the material presented (for instance the text) is perceived as coherent and contextually relevant. Beaugrande & Dressler (1966:6) relate the inference process explicitly to the encounter between the knowledge of the receiver and the universe of meaning of the text itself: “The adding of ones own knowledge to bring a textual world together, is called inferencing.”

Coherence at Various Text Levels

The explicatory force of the textual and cognitive perspectives respectively will depend on the text level studied. The coherence connected to the actual sequence of sentences is usually called cohesion (cf the classic work by Halliday and Hazan (1978): Cohesion in English). Cohesion is achieved by connective mechanisms more or less explicitly manifested in the text surface, the aim of which is to establish continuity between old and new information in the text. In this area, a comprehensive analytic concept apparatus, a “text grammar”, has been developed where a distinction is made between referent couplings (individual words with identical or related references in two subsequent sentences), sentence couplings (conjunctions or adverbs showing causal, temporal or other relations between two sentences), and mixed couplings (individual words which summarize the contents of a previous sentence in order to relate it to new information, for instance “this” or “that”. For further details, see for instance Vagle, Sandvik and Svennevig, 1992). Cohesion belongs to that part of the language competence which is more or less automated in mature language users. In other words, decoding at this level constitutes only a minor part of the mental work carried out during the interpretation of the text. In the discussion of hypertextual coherence, sentence cohesion is of little interest as it remains largely unaffected by the degree of linearity in the global text structure.

The cognitive perspective becomes all the more important when studying coherence at a higher text level, where larger or smaller text sequences constitute units of meaning of varying complexity. These semantic units must have a form of logical relatedness for the reader to find the text coherent, and this relatedness may be either explicitly manifested on the text surface or completely entrusted to the reader’s inferencing activity. The relationship between two neighbouring units may be called local coherence, while the logic that defines the place of individual units in the hierarchical structure of main themes and subthemes is called global coherence. (This use of concepts is not quite conventional, but it is logical and serves our purpose.)
In our context, both these forms of coherence are interesting. As we shall see, both local and global coherence will be challenged by a non-linear text structure. At the same time, hypertext technology offers opportunities for strengthening and developing both categories.

Three Levels of Coherence in Hypertext

In order to describe the text-immanent apparatus which might contribute to strengthening coherence in hypertext reading, it might be useful to outline a three-level model. These levels are not primarily motivated by the textlinguistic division into cohesion, local coherence and global coherence, but by the linguistic levels of hypertexts. In our model, we distinguish between three types of coherence: a) intratextual coherence; b) intertextual coherence; and c) hypertextual coherence.

Intratextual coherence is limited to the node level of the hypertext and comprises all types of coherence at this level. It follows that intratextual coherence corresponds to the traditional textlinguistic notion of coherence, and the reader’s expectations with respect to relatedness at this level presumably correspond to the expectations of a traditional, linear text.

Intertextual coherence denotes the relationship between two text nodes read in a sequence. Even though hypertexts usually have a non-linear structure, each separate reading will always be linear. This means that the reader will expect a type of “local coherence” between two nodes which are linked together or which the system otherwise allows to be read in a sequence. In this way, the link functions as an ostensive signal of mutual relevance.

Hypertextual coherence denotes the logic reflected through the structure that governs the whole system of links and nodes. This logic also defines the place of each node in the system as a whole. Consequently, hypertextual coherence is related to the textlinguistic notion of “global coherence”, but since hypertexts have both a text level and a hypertext level, we will limit the application of the textlinguistic coherence categories to the level for which they are designed, which in our context corresponds to the node level.

Macro- and Superstructures

In order to explain the function of intertextual and hypertextual coherence, van Dijk’s theory of macro- and superstructures may form a useful basis (see van Dijk 1980 and 1988). His theory was developed to describe certain patterns and structures of conventional texts, but it appears to be highly relevant also when applied to hypertexts.

The term macrostructure denotes both a textual and a cognitive entity. The macrostructure has a semantic representation in the text, and in the encounter with the reader’s interpretive framework (cf the “mental schemas” of the cognitivists), a corresponding macrostructure is established in the mind of the reader. Cognitive macrostructures are partly subjective, partly intersubjective, depending on whether the reader’s interpretive framework is of a conventional or unconventional nature.

Textual macrostructures constitute a content category comprising the hierarchical system of propositions (assertions) on various text levels. Thus, a macroproposition is an assertion comprising several assertions on a lower level. The main content of a paragraph may be expressed in an assertion on a higher level than the main content of one individual sentence within the same paragraph, several paragraphs may be summarised
in a macroproposition on an even higher level, while the text as a whole may be summarised in a macroproposition that constitutes the top level of the macrostructure.

The macropropositions at the various levels will, in a well organised text, partly be explicitly expressed in the text. For instance, the first or the last sentence in a paragraph often summarizes the entire paragraph. Nevertheless, the reader must infer the macrostructure of the text when reading. Macrostructures appear as a result of a reducing, summarizing cognitive activity. When retelling a text or constructing a text based on an event, the language user will follow what van Dijk calls the three macrorules to extract the most important information. These three rules are deletion, generalization and construction (see van Dijk 1988:32).

While (textual) macrostructures constitute a semantic category, superstructures constitute a syntactic one. The superstructure indicates how various types of macropropositions may be arranged and distributed in the text surface, just as the sentence syntax provides corresponding guidelines on the sentence level. Generalized and standardized superstructures (or text schemas, as they also are called) are form categories which contribute to defining various text genres or types of discourse. Traditional (e.g. mythological) stories are often constructed according to a schema which includes harmony (The Garden of Eden) – conflict (Fall and Expulsion) – battle (life outside Eden) – new harmony (Covenant, Salvation) (see ia Todorov 1971:39). Conversations have their schemas, scientific discourses have theirs.

Generally, one might say that superstructures are a “system of drawers” which indicates the theme and subtheme of the text, while macrostructures indicate the contents of the drawers, ie the propositions of the text on the various levels in the semantic hierarchy. The relationship between superstructures, macrostructures, propositions and sentences is by van Dijk illustrated by the following hierarchical figure:

**Figur 2.**

![Hierarchical figure](image)

Structural Relations: S represents superstructure elements, M represents macrostructure elements (ie macropropositions), p represents propositions, and s represents sentences.

**Intratextual Coherence**

Intratextual coherence can generally be strengthened on both local and global levels as each individual node can be made thematically homogenous, so that all subelements will have strong relevance both to their neighbouring elements and to the macropropositions at the top of the node.
This strengthening of coherence will, however, have different effects on axial and networked hypertexts. In axial hypertexts, high thematic homogeneity and consequently high intratextual coherence may be achieved in all "branch nodes", while the themes and sentences of the summarizing main node (or the main path) easily will be more "fragmented". By dividing the main path into several nodes, coherence may be strengthened in each main node, but the advantage of having a complete summary in one separate node will be lost.

Networked hypertexts have, in principle, no summarizing main node or main path, and consequently all nodes can be made optimally coherent through thematic homogeneity.

(It should be noted that we here deal with a possibility, a potential. The intratextual coherence will of course not be automatically strengthened when a matter is presented by means of several text nodes linked together.)

Intertextual Coherence

A link between two nodes is a strong signal of coherence between two units of meaning. Links may be manifested in three ways: a) through text-internal markings (marked phrases in the text); b) through text-external markings (often a separate list of titles or key words leading to other nodes); or c) they may be hidden for each individual node, but made accessible by means of a visual, clickable presentation of the entire node system. Thus, we can make a distinction between text-internal, text-external and implicit linking.

These types of links signal relations at various levels in the internal macrostructure of the nodes. Text-internal linking signals a relation connected with that level of the macrostructure which is manifested through marked text phrases, so-called departure and destination phrases. (What is defined as departure and what as destination depends on the directions in which the producer has allowed the reader to move in the system.) Whether the link signals a relation relevant to a central or a more peripheral/subordinate thematic point of the node will thus depend on the significance of the departure phrase in the macrostructure of the node. Correspondingly, the choice of destination phrase will be determined by whether the whole destination node is relevant in relation to the departure phrase, or only a certain sequence. The destination phrase is rarely explicitly marked in the destination node. However, it is possible (in certain hypertext systems) to choose whether the click shall lead to the top of the destination node or to a selected sequence of it.

The indexical quality of the link - the fact that the link in itself signals coherence - makes it a demanding, but potent tool: demanding because it may easily cause frustration if it fails to fulfil what the reader perceives as promised; potent because it may contribute to giving prominence to and shaping the semantic dynamics of the text material. In some hypertext systems, it is possible to "label" the links, or the designer may choose to have "mute" coherence markers. Link information may be of both a relative and a qualitative nature. It may indicate whether the destination node is an elaboration, a counter-argument, additional information, etc. in relation to the departure node/phrase. In addition, it may provide information on the size of the destination node, type of medium (picture, text, sound), file format, etc. This kind of information will normally appear in a specific place on the screen when the marker touches the departure phrase, but before any clicking takes place.
This choice implies that the intertextual coherence can be a very flexible entity. It is possible to mark coherence without specifying the exact kind of coherence. This practice might be useful in a news context when it is desirable to leave this part of the interpretation to the reader. Or relations might be specified in various directions (not only to two selected neighbouring sequences!) by assigning separate information to the links. In this way, the reader might be spared the frustration of spending time clicking without retrieving desired information.

In axial hypertexts, the intertextual coherence will be influenced by the fact that the departure phrase constitutes a macroproposition in relation to the propositions of the destination node; it is a result of macrorules applied to the text in the destination node. (This is a consequence of the fact that axial hypertexts are structured in a semantic hierarchy, as we shall see in the following section, which will focus on the issue of hypertextual coherence.)

**Connective vs Associative Link Relations**

The relationship between “main node” and “branch node” also implies that a node relation in an axial hypertext normally may be categorised as connective, according to Thierry Bardini’s distinction between connective and associative link relations (see Bardini 1997). Connective relations presuppose an objectively recognizable semantic relationship. Even though Bardini fails to specify this category any further, we can assume that it is more or less equivalent to the list of possible sentence couplings that we find (with small variations) in text linguistic theory: alternative, adversative, specifying, and causal (see Fossestøl 1983). The additive relation, however, has a debatable place on a list of connective relations. When lifted from sentence level to a higher level, it probably belongs among the associative relations in Bardini’s dichotomy. Associative relations represent couplings of less definable types; they may be of an occasional, idiosyncratic nature, or they may be based on a semantic relationship which makes the units mutually relevant within certain discourse contexts. Bardini establishes a continuum of relation types by defining connections and associations as opposites, and places both text types and hypertext theorists in different positions in this continuum.

While connective relations always will be perceived as relevant to those who want more information on a theme, the relevance of the associative relations may be of a more variable quality. Here we must again refer to the two types of structure in order to demonstrate the differences. As mentioned, axial hypertexts will normally be dominated by connective link relations. Network structures might, in principle, have link relations covering the entire spectrum, but in practice the choice of this type of structure will often reflect certain structural properties of the material to be presented. Certain types of material invite, so to speak, links of the associative type.

The two prototypes presented earlier in this article, will illustrate this point. While each individual link in the axial presentation (illustration 2) reflects a more or less clear semantic relation (most often the specifying type), the news map in illustration 3 has a link structure based on various types of associative relations. This is of course also attributable to the fact that text-external and implicit links more often reflect co-ordinating (additive) than subordinating relations.

From this we may infer that networked hypertexts are more exposed to weakened intertextual coherence than axial hypertexts. The reason why many experience frustration when reading hypertexts might be that commercial hypertexts often are based on a loose, associative linking. This is the case, for instance, when names of enterprises or
organisations in a news article are linked to the official web site of the enterprise and not to additional information on the enterprise adapted by the editorial staff. The anchor node and the target node have a common theme, but the approach in the target node has no obvious relevance to the macrostructure of the anchor node.

At the same time, it is important to stress that cognitive coherence is more important than textual coherence. When reading networked hypertexts, the reader is usually more willing to perform cognitive work of a different and more comprehensive nature than when reading linear texts. From the point of view of the reader, the requirements for intertextual coherence will thus be different from the corresponding requirements for local coherence in a linear text. These requirements may be related to Espen Aarseth’s (Aarseth 1997:64) categorisation of linear texts as interpretative (texts to be interpreted, that is a disclosing a logical line; cf the expression “to follow the text”) and hypertexts as both interpretative and explorative (texts to be explored).

**Autonomous vs Fragmentary Nodes**

Since the intertextual coherence is associated with the relationship between known and new information, different requirements should be made to the design of the node texts in the two types of hypertext mentioned. In axial hypertexts, each node on a secondary or lower level will be connected with (a specific position in) a text on a higher level. Consequently, one can presume that certain units of information are known when the node text is read. With networked hypertexts, however, it will be more difficult to predict which node sequence the reader will choose, and each node will have to be formulated as an independent text. This means that a distinction can be made between autonomous and fragmentary nodes. Fragmentary nodes give the impression of being fragments of a greater whole. The importance of node autonomy will increase proportionally with the degree of openness in the hypertext structure. (Spatial hypertexts with implicit linking are more open than axial hypertexts with intratextual linking.)

On the basis of illustrations 2 and 3, we might say that readers more readily will accept a subordinate text node beginning with a nominal in the definite form (for instance “The compensation...”) in the axial presentation (illustration 2) than in the networked presentation (illustration 3). In the axial hypertext, objects introduced in the main text are naturally treated as known in the node text. In the networked prototype, only the information in the brief introductory text (representing the highest level of macropropositions) can be presumed known in each text node.

**Hypertextual Coherence**

We have defined global coherence as the relationship of individual elements to an overall theme. This means that such a theme must be recognized before it will be possible to see whether or how each element is related to the text as a whole. Correspondingly, with reference to the upper linguistic level of the hypertext, we might say that hypertextual coherence is closely related to the question of hyperstructure.

Reading hypertext, people normally read the structure parallel to reading the text. Information is made accessible in a non-linear structure which compels the reader to make conscious choices during the reading process. Consequently, the problem of structure is a permanently focused theme for the reader. We might argue that hypertexts thematise global structures more distinctly than linear texts do.

This might affect hypertextual coherence in various ways, depending on the distinctive character of the hyperstructure and the expectations of the reader.
Making Superstructures and Macrostructures Distinct

Let us first look at axial, hierarchically organised hyperstructures. Such structures are particularly well suited for making macrostructures distinct since the contents of the main node(s) function as summaries of the contents of the branch nodes. However, superstructures too may be given prominence in axial hypertexts. Superstructures in van Dijk’s terminology are understood as determined by genre, as hierarchical “drawer systems”. Conventional text competence is, for the writer, the ability to convert this abstract hierarchy to a linear sequence of sentences, and, for the reader, the ability to disclose the hierarchy on the basis of the sentence sequence.

In axial hypertexts, the system of nodes and links itself implies that the hierarchical structure is realised as an explicit text category, which makes possible both a horizontal (the “branches”) and vertical (the “trunk”) reading of the structure. The various subthemes may be pursued in depth (by clicking on links to “additional information”), or an overview of all important subthemes may be obtained without the reader having to go into detail on any of them. The superstructure could become even clearer if the structure is visualised by means of a graphic figure in which the themes for each branch are marked (cf the “news map” in illustration 3).

Van Dijk’s proposed superstructure of news (van Dijk 1988:55) may serve as an example (note that the hierarchy here is represented with the detail levels vertically and the superior themes horizontally.)

Figure 3.

Superstructure: van Dijk’s representation of the superstructure of news.

In this representation, only the lowest level in the structure is meant to be explicitly represented in the text surface, in a sequence from left to right. In axial hypertexts, on the other hand, each level in the hierarchy may be given a verbal representation so that the upper levels function as summaries of the lower levels. This means that the reader can get a brief version containing episode, background and verbal reactions, without having to go into the “details” on the lower levels of the superstructure.
The prototype in illustration 2 is an example of such a solution. The horizontal plane in van Dijk’s superstructure could here have appeared more clearly if the main node had been divided into several elements so that episode, background and verbal reactions were separated. However, it is - as mentioned earlier - uncertain whether such a division would have made the text more communicative, since it would involve somewhat harder physical and cognitive work for the reader.

**Superstructures and Linearity**

Van Dijk’s superstructures are based on current established genres of writing and consequently they relate to linear textuality. A text should have a course of events - a progression - and various types of content should find their proper places in this progression according to the type of text. Therefore, this news schema is naturally defined on the basis of a conventional news structure with strong narrative features. A news item contains a “story”, and this story consists of one or several episodes, of background information and of evaluations - all ordered in a sequence determined by the genre.

Axial hypertexts might, as mentioned, make such superstructures clear. This is hardly possible for networked hypertexts as they are neither linearly nor hierarchically organised. In order to discover the superstructural potential of the network structure, current established news genres must be disregarded and new criteria established for defining the elements of the news schema. Here the prototype in illustration 3 may serve as an example. This prototype is not a “pure” network structure since it organises the material according to certain pragmatic criteria (subjective/objective perspectives). Nevertheless, it bears the characteristics of a network structure insofar as no particular reading sequence is given prominence.

This prototype, too, reflects a form of “superstructure” and represents an alternative “news schema”. However, this superstructure does not invite reading from left to right, nor does any of the three columns constitute hierarchical macrostructures where the upper levels appear by summarising the lower levels. Here additive, associative relations dominate, while the superstructure of the axial prototype (ill. 2) was constructed by means of connective relations. The entries under “facts” represent an exception. In this column, the various contextual factors are subordinate to the main event. The superstructure of networked news may thus be outlined as follows:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Versions of the parties involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative evaluations (according to ethical/social values)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various background documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumstances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```
Global macrostructures (which are always hierarchical) can hardly be supported in “pure” network structures. If it is desirable to strengthen the hypertextual coherence by making macrostructural relations clear, the node network should be supplemented by an introductory node. Here a selection of high-level macropropositions is gathered to support the reader in relating each node to the overall theme. A mixed structure then appears, where the introductory node is assigned the role of a centring axis. Such combined solutions might be useful when the material can be organised in certain main categories, while the internal relations and structures in each category have a more open character. A simplified version of the above structure may look like this:

Possibilities and Risks
The possibility of choosing different hypertextual structures and different graphical representations of these structures implies that superstructures as well as macrostructures can be established and made visible in new ways compared with traditional linear texts. However, the wide range of possibilities also entails considerable risks as regards the issue of coherence because the schematic predictability of the genres will decline with increasing variations in structure and design. In order to achieve the greatest predictability possible, it is important to stabilise as many factors of the presentation form as possible; for instance size and location of windows, principles for the construction of hyperstructures, principles for navigation in the information material, etc. If the mental work required to establish necessary relevance between local and global units of meaning is too demanding compared to the cognitive benefit of the reading, only the most motivated reader will choose to devote time to the text. In a prose context, the reading process will normally be controlled by the requirement of “the greatest benefit with the least amount of work”, and in a news market characterized by so-called “information overload”, this rule has particular relevance. In the production of hypernews, it is therefore essential that the cognitive costs associated with the lack of linearity are minimised, and that the cognitive advantages offered by structuring and visualisation technologies are optimised. (See ia Thüring et al.1996 on cognitive overhead.)

Summary
This article seeks to illuminate certain fundamental aspects of textual and cognitive coherence in the production and reading of hypertexts in general and hypernews in particular. A division into intratextual, intertextual and hypertextual coherence might help to clarify concepts and also seems to reflect certain distinctive features of hypertext as a concept representing a linguistic level above the text level. Thus, these categories may be an important contribution to the development of hypertext linguistics.

We have seen that van Dijk’s conceptual distinction between macro- and superstructures might be useful for demonstrating how axial and networked hyperstructures may maintain, strengthen or weaken various forms of textual coherence. At the same time, we have pointed out that cognitive coherence is of greater importance than textual co-
herence, and since hypertexts represent a presentation form that explicitly invites active exploration, the requirement of textual coherence is probably not the same in hypertextual mediation as in traditional text mediation.

This change of premises is highly significant to all genres developed for hypermedial communication, Internet-based news included.

Translation: Sissel Rike

Notes

1. The first Norwegian electronic newspaper appeared on 7 March 1995. In April 1999, the web edition of the Norwegian newspaper Verdens Gang was read by more than 400,000 people every week. Verdens Gang’s paper version has the highest daily circulation in Norway with approximately 350,000 copies.

2. I here regard electronic newspapers as an independent medium like radio, TV and printed newspapers, and include all text-based news services which are regularly updated on a separate web site (URL).

3. The term textual unfortunately denotes several different entities in the account. In the differentiation between textual (or text-immanent) and cognitive coherence, text denotes a type of linguistic realisation of cognitive structures. In the threefold division of intra- inter- and hypertextual coherence, text denotes a certain linguistic level between sentence level and hypertext level. Here text is equivalent to the units of meaning framed by the node. (Alternatively, the three coherence levels may be termed intranodal, internodal and structural coherence.)

4. Consequently, text sequences with a typical linear semantic structure, as we find in the argumentation and the traditional narrative, will function best on the node level in such hypertexts.

Literature


A Matter of Attitude
Reflections on Phenomenology and Media Culture

ANDRÉ JANSSON

Time has showed that one of the most pertinent concepts emanating from the phenomenological works of Edmund Husserl is the ‘natural attitude’, theoretically developed in his first magnum opus Ideas (1913/1982). Along with the concept of the ‘lifeworld’, which became the leading theme of the first part of Husserl’s second major work The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (1970), first appearing in 1936 in the journal Philosophy, the natural attitude stands out as a key word to the understanding of his philosophy of everyday life. Additionally, the conceptualizations of Husserl have been central not only in subsequent phenomenological theories of followers such as Schutz, but also within several associated scientific areas, like philosophical anthropology, philosophy of science, psychology and the social sciences (cf. Kockelmans, 1986). As one says, good concepts travel well.

Within media and cultural studies, however, the original phenomenological conceptual framework has rarely been picked up, despite the prevailing focus on practices and perceptions of everyday life. This condition, I believe, is not a result of deliberate neglect or ignorance, but must be traced to the theoretical roots of cultural studies – primarily found in Marxism and semiotics. Hence, taking its point of departure in the classical works of Husserl, this article has the aim of stressing how phenomenological thought can help us better understand and describe the implications of contemporary media culture in everyday life. Above all, the article can be seen as an attempt to outline a framework for the application of phenomenology in the study of cultural consumption. Using two ethnographic interviews about media habits as empirical illustrations, the possibilities of linking phenomenological concepts to prevailing sociological notions of lifestyle and identity will be explored. Such linkages may help us overcome the gap between micro and macro perspectives in audience studies, as well as the more general gap between theoretical philosophy and the cultural sciences.

The Natural Attitude and Its Dynamics
The natural attitude can be defined as a particular mode of consciousness, in which the individual approaches his or her surrounding world as a world of taken for granted phenomena – phenomena whose existence is not put into question, because they are always there (as they always are), in the particular order that the individual has got used to through lived experience. To be in the natural attitude, hence, is to be in a state of non-reflexivity, co-ordinating one’s actions on the basis of routines which in their turn are the outcomes of initial reflexive adjustments to the circumstances of the surrounding world.
The qualities and the very existence of new, unfamiliar objects must be evaluated and incorporated as aspects of the individual’s routinized schemes of interpretation before they can be approached in the natural attitude, that is, before they can become part of the taken for granted reality, the lifeworld. The way these objects appear to the individual in the natural attitude, due to their specific qualities and position among other objects, is the way they are actually considered to be. They are there, taken for granted, in their pure essence as phenomena.

However, the lifeworld cannot be restricted to the immediate, surrounding world of touchable physical things, what Husserl in Ideas refers to as the ‘natural world’; this domain had not been taken for granted if it had unveiled itself in isolation, disconnected from the individual’s previous experiences. Accompanying all social and physical activities are actualities not directly in the field of perception, but existing merely as phenomena inside people’s heads. These phenomena constitute what Husserl (ibid.: 52) describes as an ‘infinite, misty and never fully determinable horizon’ – an accumulated stock of knowledge, in itself taken for granted, composed according to individually appropriated views of the world. Without this experientially derived horizon of interpretation it should not be possible to make sense of the world ‘on hand’, nor face it as something pregiven.

Nor is the lifeworld a stable entity. As new phenomena are encountered and eventually taken up as parts of the taken for granted stock of knowledge its composition is gradually altered, although it still remains one and the same. This transitory process goes on constantly as people proceed their lives; sometimes without their notice, sometimes involving great psychosocial turbulence, as in occasions of major shifts or ruptures in life. New components are brought in all the time, while others are eroding or put into question, forming a double movement of inclusion and exclusion, through which the scope of the interpretative horizon is reworked. Discussing the first matter – what may be called the problem of inclusion – Husserl (ibid.: 54-5) stresses that even entire new worlds, fields totally separated from the world of ‘real actuality’, can be appropriated. Taking the knowledge of arithmetic as an illuminating example, he points out that if the skills necessary to master the rules of this world are obtained, it can be approached in a mode of consciousness congruent to the natural attitude. The individual can then fully engage his or her thoughts in the ‘arithmetical world’, surrounded by a ‘partly indeterminate arithmetical horizon’, being in the ‘arithmetical attitude’. In this way it is possible to shift focus of attention, altering between different attitudes – always returning to the natural attitude:

If my cogito is moving only in the worlds pertaining to these new attitudes, the natural world remains outside consideration; it is a background for my act-consciousness, but it is not a horizon within which an arithmetical world finds a place.

Thus, in this example – chosen for the sake of its clarity – there is no connection between the natural world and the new, appropriated world; their horizons have nothing in common. Or, to put it in yet one equivalent way; the stock of knowledge required to interact with the natural world is of no use in the arithmetical world, and vice versa. Nonetheless, as I will shortly return to, there are several domains of life where such an interpretative independence is not present.

The question of exclusion involves a rather precarious philosophical consideration, based on the fact that the individual cannot eliminate, or erase, a phenomenon that is at the same time taken for granted. Of course, as pointed out above, certain phenomena, which in a particular life stage are taken for granted, may naturally be brought to the
more misty regions of the interpretative horizon; they actually cease to exist, or are lost out of sight and simply forgotten. For example, the individual cannot fully take the position of the child he or she once was, although still being in the same world. But a deliberate phenomenological elimination can never take place, even if there may be instances in life when certain facts are repressed. The nearest one can get a conscious erasure of something that is already taken for granted, according to Husserl (ibid.: 59-60), is to doubt it, or, rather, ‘attempt to doubt’ it (since its existence one cannot deny in the first place). What one actually does, is doubting its qualities as a phenomenon, or modifying its position among other phenomena; excluding, or parenthesizing, it. The phenomenon is still there, existing, but appears ‘like the parenthesized in the parentheses, like the excluded outside the context of inclusion’. As will be demonstrated below, a central feature of media culture is people’s desire to limit the amount of taken for granted media phenomena.

The Perception of Media Products as Phenomena

In the beginning of the century, when Husserl first advanced his ideas of the natural attitude, it did hardly exist any media to take for granted; even the magnitude of print media was limited, primarily consumed among the educated strata of society. The natural surrounding of people’s everyday lives did not include TV sets, VCRs, radio clocks, stereo systems, walk-mans, computers and so on – things that most people in the contemporary modern world consider as customary. Hence, the media development is a significant example of how the lifeworld is constantly reworked. In this case the transitory force is primarily structural, linked to technological progress, changing the life circumstances for millions of people.

Although the appearance of new communication technology is not the only way in which the lifeworld has got transformed during the last century, it might be the most interesting one. People have not only refurbished the physical domains of everyday life, acquired new objects to the domestic sphere, but have also got access to new cultural worlds and thereby changed their perception of time and space (cf. Harvey, 1989; Meyrowitz, 1985; Thompson, 1995). The vast range of different media content have made visible unfamiliar places and events, spatially and/or temporally distant, as well as entirely imaginary, fictive realities. What is more, following the phenomenology of Husserl, since the interpretation of, or the mere being in these new worlds, requires particular patterns of knowledge, their appropriation must also involve the appropriation of a whole set of new media related attitudes – modes of consciousness similar to the natural attitude, but to a certain extent following their own rules. This, in turn, implies that the concept of media phenomenon, as a type, must be designated to two different levels of perception; that of the natural attitude and that of the more confined and focused media attitude. How a particular medium and its content are experienced in a particular moment is not determined by the media characteristics alone, but follows also from the attitude in which the reader, listener or viewer approach it.

When perceived in the natural attitude, the essence of the media phenomenon comes forth merely as one component among others in the natural world ‘on hand’. People take for granted that media products, both in shape of physical objects, or technologies, and as texts (using the term in its broadest sense), surround them almost wherever they are. In the domestic sphere media products are included in the furniture, occupying spaces corresponding to the functions assigned to them. The colour TV in the corner of the living room, the transistor radio in the kitchen, the computer on the desk; they are all natu-
ralized objects of the lifeworld, though their typical locations may vary according to the spatial conditions of the home, and between different groups (cf. Moores, 1988; Silverstone et al., 1992). Additionally, since the practical use of mass media often has the character of a secondary activity, being part of people’s non-reflexive everyday rituals, or functioning as environmental resources (cf. Lull, 1990), the very content of mass media can also be perceived in the natural attitude. This especially holds true for radio, which is often heard, rather than listened to (Larsen, 1997). In these instances the media text becomes a part of the natural world.

In a similar manner, in many domains of the public sphere people expect themselves to be surrounded by various media products. The music they hear (but hardly notice) in the department store, the free newspapers they get when boarding the airplane, and the advertising signs they pass by in the city on their way home from work are just a few examples. The existence of these media phenomena is not made the object of hermeneutic reflection (unless it is someone’s first encounter with a department store, an airplane or a modern city landscape). But if they were taken away – something should be missing.

The distinction between the natural attitude and the particular media attitude corresponds to the distinction between ‘hearing’ an ‘listening to’ the radio. When someone shifts his or her mode of consciousness from the first to the latter, it signifies a shift from a mode in which the media product is just one phenomenon among others in the direct physical surrounding, to a mode in which the individual becomes a reader (in semiotic terms). This happens when someone starts paying attention to what is actually presented on TV, or what they are actually saying on the radio – when the product becomes meaningful not only as an environmental background to other practices, but also as a text in its own right. The media consumer enters into the discursive world of the particular media text. However, this does not mean that he or she has to give up all other activities that may be conducted at the same time. It is perfectly possible to wash the dishes while also listening to a discussion on the radio. Analytically speaking, in such a case radio listening (as opposed to hearing) ought to be called a ‘primary activity’ rather than a ‘secondary activity’. The latter concept has often been bluntly used to simply denote a situation in which a person is ‘doing two things at the same time’ – whatever that may be.

Moreover, being in the media attitude is not the same thing as simply being attentive to a particular text; it connotes that the audience member enters a symbolic world with a particular structure, whose characteristics are taken for granted. Just as the pregiven stock of knowledge about the natural world enables people to act in that world, being focused on the particular action that may be performed, the interaction with the world of media texts cannot be meaningful without a certain cultural, or, rather, media particular competence. The reader can focus on the evolution of the text (e.g. the narrative of a film) while being non-reflexive regarding the discursive conventions through which the text speaks itself. This is a central point, making the media attitude an analytical correlate of the natural attitude.

But what exactly is it that a media consumer take for granted when being in the media attitude? Clearly, there are a multitude of different conventions that do not need to be reinterpreted every time someone encounters a particular media product. And precisely because such conventions are not often reflected upon, they may be tricky to crystallize. Roughly, however, they can be traced to three main levels: First, there are conventions linked to the medium as cultural form. Watching television is not the same thing as reading a newspaper. The audience does not expect to see moving images or hear sounds from the newspaper, to make a trivial statement. Each medium has its own particular
characteristics, which are fundamentally based in, or limited by, its physical properties — and all these standards are well known to the accustomed audience. This is not to say that they are stable or entirely independent from one another; although the technical features of a medium remain basically the same, the limits of the means of using them are continually contested by the producers. As for example Williams (1974) pointed out in his essay on television, the characteristic segmentation of early broadcasting, which separated programmes by distinctive breaks, was eventually reworked. In order to keep the viewers stuck by their TV sets, essentially for commercial reasons, the programming was successively arranged more like a flow, eliminating the ‘dead’ time between the programme spots by smooth audio-visual bridges, like announcements, trailers and commercials.

Second, the media attitude involves a knowledge about generic conventions. When encountering a particular text, for example an episode of a soap opera, the audience has certain expectations as to what that text will contain (the narrative) and how it will be structured (the discourse). In the case of the soap opera the viewer expect there to be (however he or she is not fully aware of it) a certain melodramatic atmosphere, a certain rhythm of sequences, a certain use of camera close-ups, a certain use of background music, etc. (cf. Ang, 1985; Geraghty, 1991) — generic conventions that he or she does not reflect upon, but which all the same govern the sense making of the text. In the same manner people employ particular horizons of expectation when reading the business pages, listening to a radio newscast, or entering a fanzine site on the Internet. All these generic competences are created from previous experiences of media use, and can thus be reworked as the genres themselves are reworked. As stated in literary and film theory, the genre is not a stable category, but relies fundamentally on intersubjective agreements between the author and the reader of the text (cf. Todorov, 1978/1990; Neale, 1990).

Third, being in the media attitude implies a taken for grantedness of different text specific characteristics. When watching a news spot on CNN, or the latest episode of Seinfeld, the sense making is not only dependent upon the viewer’s knowledge about TV news or sitcoms in general, as genres, but also upon his or her experiences of CNN news and the Seinfeld sitcom in particular. For example, it is taken for granted what the news room looks like and who the news presenters are, and, likewise, there is a familiarity with the settings and the particular funny characters of Seinfeld. Serialized media products like these (the same thing can be argued for newspapers, magazines, etc.) build a great deal of their popularity upon the audience’s recognition of familiar symbolic patterns — patterns that are unique for the particular text, distinguishing it from other texts within the same genre, while still remaining in that very genre.

The demarcation lines between these three levels are not easy to figure out, not even on a strictly theoretical level. And when reading a media text, being in the media attitude, knowledge about the conventions of all three levels are applied at the same time. The TV viewer cannot turn off his or her knowledge about television as cultural form when watching a TV programme, as little as it is possible to turn off the knowledge about grocery stores in general (‘the grocery store as genre’) when visiting the particular Konsum grocery store across the street. To use Husserl’s vocabulary, the individual’s accumulated media competences surround him or her as an infinite, misty and never fully determinable horizon of interpretation, and normally one does not bother about how this horizon is actually composed. Just as Goffman and the ethnomethodologists have showed regarding the norms of different social arenas (cf. Garfinkel, 1967/1984; Goffman, 1974), people do not recognize media conventions until someone is breaking
the rules. The day when the weather girl on TV starts picking her nose people will be as surprised as the day when Konsum starts giving away vegetables.

**Cultural Leakage**

Although the world of media texts is a world separated from the natural world, it would be wrong to consider it as entirely autonomous (like the arithmetic world discussed by Husserl). As has already been pointed out, although there are significant rules and conventions, these are not absolute or stable, but flexible and negotiable, founded upon the intersubjectivity between producer and audience. Additionally, and more important, there is a certain mutual influence, or a ‘cultural leakage’, between the stock of knowledge framing the natural attitude and the corresponding stock of knowledge framing the media attitude. On the one hand, people do always bring some of their common sense knowledge about the natural world with them into the world of media texts, which implies that the text does not unfold itself in an isolated symbolic sphere, referring to nothing but itself and the generic structures in which it is positioned. Indeed, even in science fiction movies there are cultural categories - such as gender patterns, themes of love and hate, good and evil, and so forth - that most people can associate to the world as they know it from their lived experience. And since people may have different experiences of such categories, this also indicates that the meanings they create from media texts rely on interpretations that are culturally conditioned, that is, relative to the unique composition of cultural experiences that individuals have from an array of different arenas. As has been thoroughly investigated within the field of media reception analysis, different cultural groups, and, ultimately, different individuals, interpret one and the same text in culturally specific ways (cf. Morley, 1980; Hobson, 1982; Liebes and Katz, 1990).

On the other hand, there is also a range of symbolic elements emanating from the world of media texts, leaking into the cultural horizon of the natural world - an emanation that must be advanced as one of the most significant features of modern media culture. Living in a media saturated world, in which the consumption of media texts takes place within the physical settings of everyday life, media phenomena tend to be appropriated not only within the framework of the media attitude, but also as parts of the cultural knowledge governing people’s day-to-day activities, their lifestyles. For example, in social life people continuously, and to an increasing extent, encounter phenomena that can be associated to the world of media texts; they are discussing TV programmes at work, they start incorporating catch phrases from TV ads in their manner of speech, and so forth. In this way people are constantly, indirectly perceiving elements of media products when being in the natural attitude - in addition to the direct experiences described above. Accordingly, the cultural categories that can be learned from mass media shape a good deal of people’s understanding of the natural world, and contribute to the creation of cultural identity. The symbolic goods distributed by mass media may even function as the common denominators holding together cultural communities that are uncoupled from the spatial-physical restrictions of direct social interaction - a particular form of ‘imagined communities’ (cf. Anderson, 1983). This is exactly what media culture is about; it is a culture in which a significant share of the people’s perception of themselves and their lifeworld, as well as the relationship between themselves and their lifeworld - the relationship through which an individual identity is defined - is influenced by the symbolic world of mass media (cf. Kellner, 1995: 1).
How, then, does this discussion relate to Husserl’s original conceptualization of the lifeworld? To what extent is the world of media texts to be considered as a part of the lifeworld? Answering this question, one must bear in mind that Husserl did not fully develop the concept of the lifeworld until The Crisis (1936/1970), and that the concept, even as it is presented in that major work, contains certain contradictions. For example, Carr (1977) argues that Husserl never really succeeded in relating the world of culture, the world of our immediate experiences, and the world of science – precisely the kind of association apprehended in the above question. Yet, as Bidney (1973) points out, the lifeworld concept is precisely the concept that carries the potential of reconciling phenomenology and the cultural sciences. As the lifeworld is described in The Crisis, and later on by Schutz (1962; see also Schutz and Luckman, 1973), it does not only comprise the naturally selected environment, the ‘natural world’, but also the social and cultural world of human society – what may be referred to as the cultural lifeworld, that is, ‘an intersubjective system of meaningful experiences, institutions, activities, symbolic expressions of ritual and art, together with their products’ (Bidney, 1973: 133-4). The cultural lifeworld can be defined as the composite of an individual’s hermeneutic skills, derived both from actions and interactions in the natural world, and from engagement in the world of media texts (or other texts). It includes the meaningful experiences from everyday life employed when reading a particular text, as well as the mediated experiences employed when interpreting the natural world. Thus, the interdependence I have outlined between the natural attitude and the media attitude involves some of the processes through which the cultural lifeworld evolves – spanning, or blurring, the boundaries between the natural world and the world of media texts. One may even consider the extent to which the interpretative horizon framing the media attitude fuses with the interpretative horizon framing the natural attitude as a hypothetical measure of the mediatization of everyday life.

However, the fact that elements from the world of media texts continually leak into people’s everyday lifeworld can sometimes be considered as problematic. In a study of young adults’ experiences of advertising in everyday life, O’Donohoe (1997) found that many of the respondents thought it was difficult, not to say impossible, to escape the non-desirable presence of commercial messages. Advertising was experienced as ‘omnipresent, seeping into the fabric of their everyday lives’ (ibid.: 272) – a fact that to a certain extent could be traced to advertising’s intertextual relationship to other media texts, that is, its indirect presence in for example TV programmes and newspaper articles; being a common sphere of reference. O’Donohoe’s results provide a good illustration of a problem that can not be restricted to the domain of advertising, but is representative for contemporary media culture as such. It illustrates the condition that people often would prefer not to take for granted the things they actually do take for granted – their desire to reject certain phenomena from being incorporated within the horizons of the lifeworld, or exclude phenomena that are already there.

Coping with Media Culture: The Lifestyle-Lifeworld Relationship

Today it is possible for anyone to take part of the media flow 24 hours a day – destining himself or herself to become a non-stop media consumer, absorbed into the world of media texts. But still, although a ‘media addict’ eliminating his or her social life, that person would just consume a microscopic share of the total available output of media products. Hence, in order to cope with the gigantic overproduction of symbolic goods, people need to design their lives in a manner through which they habitually can keep
non-wanted objects out of their lifeworld. Every person must reject the media flow through the establishment of a routinized lifestyle. Applying the social psychological perspective of Giddens (1991), the lifestyle can be considered as a coping mechanism, through which the individual manages to keep up a sense of personal autonomy and continuity, a sense of ontological security, in a dynamic and pluralized world. It is through the maintenance of a coherent lifestyle, a certain formula for the composition of everyday practices, that people incorporate and establish new meaningful elements in their lifeworlds, adjusting their cultural horizons. Thus, Giddens' notion of ontological security is congruent to the idea of the lifeworld: both concepts point at the individual need for a controllable life environment. However, as showed in O'Donohoe's study, in relation to the contemporary bombardment of media products routines are not always enough; fragments of non-wanted media products often leak into everyday life somehow indirectly. One may then experience a sense of frustration as to one's own incapability of fully governing the processes through which the lifeworld is composed.

This section presents an empirically grounded account of how people in different social contexts through their lifestyles cope with media culture in everyday life, and how they do not cope with it. My aim is not to give a generalized picture of the broad sociocultural patterns of contemporary society, but to demonstrate how the phenomenological conceptualizations presented above can provide the framework for a concrete empirical investigation of the processes of everyday culture. Accordingly, to make my point clear, I will use only two qualitative interviews as distinct examples. These are chosen among a total of 42 qualitative interviews that are part of the research project Cultural Identities in Transition (CIT), conducted at the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Gothenburg. The interviews, about one hour each, were carried out in 1997 and 1998, addressing a broad range of questions focusing on lifestyle and media use.

The two respondents I have chosen as examples, Petra and Felicia, do not have very much in common: Petra is 24 years old and has lived most of her life in the working class suburbs of Gothenburg. She has had various occupations during the last five years, mainly working as a nurse and as a shop assistant in a grocery store. One year ago she lost her job, so now she is back in school to improve her education. She has also been engaged, but is currently single, living in a typical suburban apartment about 30 minutes from the city of Gothenburg. Felicia, on the other hand, is a university lecturer in her 50s, living in an old apartment in one of the culturally prestigious areas of the inner city. Previously she lived in a house by the sea with her husband and their four children, but now she is divorced, living together with her youngest daughter. In other words, the comparison introduces two women in different stages of life, occupying very different positions in social space.

Routinized Modes of Perception
One central aspect of how people compose their cultural lifeworld is the mode of consciousness in which they prefer to approach mass media products; whether they want to be in the natural attitude or in the media attitude when perceiving them. In general terms, the ways in which people use mass media change successively as new media technologies are introduced. For example, when television was naturalized in the domestic sphere, people started using the radio in new ways, notably as a background medium. But there are also considerable variations between individuals according to age/genera-
tion, life situation, social position and living conditions – factors that determine the overall lifestyle (cf. Andersson and Jansson, 1998).

Felicia represents both a generation and a social group for whom mass media are rarely conceived of as an environmental resource. She says that she prefers to be concentrated on what she is doing, and assigns the habits of zapping between TV channels and using TV as an audio-visual wallpaper to the younger generation. In other words, she feels distracted when encountering media products (apart from the physical objects) in the natural attitude; media sounds are considered as disturbances, because they actually bring her out of the natural attitude. So far, she has not even used the radio as a background medium, although she is willing to modify her lifestyle in that respect – planning to buy a radio, so she can listen to the cultural programmes of P1 (one of the four national public broadcasting channels). However, this is something very different from just hearing the radio:

F: I think I will buy a transistor radio quite soon, so I can listen more to the radio. I don’t do that very often, I haven’t got used to it. But now when I’m getting closer to retirement, I think I will get more free time, and then I will listen more to the radio. There are lots of programmes that attract me [mentioneing a couple of philosophical and cultural programmes on P1].

I: [...] How come you haven’t had a radio before? Because you could actually have one now...

F: Yes, I could. But I’m not used to that. Some people have the radio turned on all the time. But I haven’t got used to that. When I have listened, then I have listened, you know. I have been concentrated on what I’ve been doing... I’ve never taken up those other habits. And it’s nothing I strive for either, having some constant buzz turned on... But perhaps when I do certain things, like the dishes or so, then I could have the radio turned on in the background.

The concern to keep the natural world free from disturbances, like the buzz of the radio and the TV, is underlined by her media preferences. She reads the local newspaper very carefully in the morning, and sometimes several more papers at the university. Her TV preferences attain a focus on cultural programmes, films and news – categories that demand a certain degree of concentration from their viewers. Since Felicia is also a regular visitor of art galleries, theatres and the cinemas offering ‘quality films’, her lifestyle represents the classical embodiment of cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu, 1979/1984).

For Petra the world of media texts is appropriated in a more dualistic way. On the one hand, it is a world to which she can escape through TV series and films, ‘dreaming away’, leaving the troubles of everyday life behind. The drama of television make the natural world temporarily vanish from her field of perception; she is completely in the media attitude. She watches at least one soap opera a day (several more on Saturdays and Sundays) – almost exclusively American productions. On the other hand, when she is not absorbed by TV dramas, she allows the world of media texts, that is, in her case, only television, to embrace her everyday life, blending together with the natural world:

P: Since I’m alone here I want to have something turned on all the time, you know. So I have sound in the background. [...] I wouldn’t stand it alone if I hadn’t had TV. I mean, if you walk around in the flat, especially... this big flat I think... I should
walk around here like a ghost if hadn’t had something turned on... something talking, kind of. I would have gone mad. I’m glad I wasn’t born 200 years ago!

In Petra’s lifeworld television has completely superseded the social function of radio. Petra never listens to the radio at home, except for a short while in the morning when the radio clock wakes her up. As she explains it, ‘I must have colours, you know [...] I have always liked colours, shapes pictures’. Thus, television does not simply occupy the same function as radio, but something more. Its visual properties are essential, since they actively contribute to the aesthetic shape of her home environment, and at the same time provide a kind of company. Most of the time when the TV is on she does not engage in the text itself; the important thing is that it is there. The familiar sounds and pictures together create a taken for granted framework that makes her feel ontologically secure – a kind of confirmation of her own existence. As she says, ‘the home is my castle’.

The Cultural Horizon of the Lifeworld
Following the pattern of her preferences, Felicia’s cultural competences are mainly restricted to the world of newspapers and ‘high culture’. She also finds it of central concern to maintain and develop these competences, while having no interest in broadening her scope to the popular cultural field. The way she discusses for example movies indicates that she holds a great capacity of interpreting abstract symbolic themes and intertextual relationships within the field of art, and that such patterns of association are fundamental to the joy of cultural consumption. Thus, her frames of reference have much in common with the regular visitors of art museums, studied by Bourdieu and Darbel (1969/1991). When having the appropriate cultural skills, being able to position the particular object in relation to other objects within the same field or genre, the consumption of fine arts becomes a matter of natural pleasure, rather than a puzzling experience. However, it is only a minor group in society, people with large amounts of cultural capital (that is, socially legitimized cultural competences), who retain this ability to take artistic conventions for granted. Felicia can be counted as one of these ‘happy few’. Symptomatically, she takes the advice of the film critics of the newspapers – people who maintain a similar taste, and a similar cultural horizon as herself.

Comparing Felicia’s and Petra’s perception of Göteborgs-Posten (Gothenburg’s major daily newspaper) provides a good illustration of how the cultural horizons of their media attitudes are composed. While Felicia keeps herself constantly updated regarding the textual conventions of this newspaper (as well as other ones), Petra’s view is founded on experiences that she made several years ago, when reading the paper at work. And while Felicia previously has considered Göteborgs-Posten as a ‘rather silly newspaper’, Petra finds it ‘complicated’ and ‘boring’:

F: Previously I thought Göteborgs-Posten was a rather silly newspaper. And the interests I had in culture and so forth were not covered very much if you go back ten years. They were really bad at these parts, while Dagens Nyheter was following up the cultural situation very well, had good cultural articles. That’s why we had it. Now I have changed to GP mostly to get the local information. But I can notice that it has become much better, and the cultural coverage in GP... yes, it is as good as in Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet, I would say. And it’s also pleasant to read...
substantial, lots of material. That's how I am. I read the newspaper for one hour almost every morning before I go to work.

P: I read GP when I happen to have one... like when I was working at the hospital, you know, like on a Saturday morning break or something. Then I could have a look. But GP is so complicated...

I: Mmm...

P: It's so big, and there's so much advertising, and furthermore it's black and white. And it's so damn boring... Perhaps it has got some colour now, I think...

Notably, at the time when the interviews were conducted there had been colour pictures and illustrations in Göteborgs-Posten for several years already, indicating that Petra's perception of Göteborgs-Posten as a media phenomenon has been largely unchanged for a long time – perhaps even since childhood. In other words, the picture she recalls of Göteborgs-Posten when being in the natural attitude is related to her inability of approaching the same product in the media attitude. She is not currently familiar with the generic structure. An interesting parallel can be found in a theoretical example of Schutz and Luckman (1973: 70), discussing the character of social memories. Their point is that people while being in the natural attitude do not update their view of a phenomena that has disappeared from their immediate surrounding world, in this example a friend:

I also know that he must have become older, and, when I reflect on it, I also know that strictly speaking he must have changed with every new experience. But in the everyday natural attitude, without reflection I leave all this out of consideration and hold fast to the familiar representation of my fellow-man.

Accordingly, one can consider Petra's last sentence as an act of reflection, in which she modifies the taken for granted view she first expressed. Nonetheless, the first spontaneous account she gives of Göteborgs-Posten clearly represents the dominant picture inside her head, and is therefore the most interesting statement from a phenomenological point of view. Such a typified view reveals a great deal about how she positions various media phenomena in relation to one another – what they actually mean to her.

In a similar manner, Felicia has not updated her knowledge regarding television, which in Sweden has been the subject of considerable change during the 1980's and 1990's. A number of commercial TV channels (one terrestrial and several cable channels) have been added to the two national public service channels SVT1 and SVT2. However, Felicia has not put any effort into exploring these:

I: What's the reason for not watching the news at TV4?

F: Well, I think it's a matter of habit. I've got used to one and two [SVT1 and SVT2]. It's enough. [...] It's mostly a matter of habit. But then, also, I think I have seen it sometime [TV4 news]... and I think the style of one and two suits me better. I don't know... I don't really know what it's like there on TV4.

I: About the other channels outside the public service system... [...] Does it ever happen that you're watching the cable channels?

F: Which ones is it you call the cable channels?
Once more the interdependency between the media attitude and the natural attitude is illustrated, as well as the coping function of lifestyle habits. Felicia cannot approach the more recently launched TV channels in a non-reflexive mode of perception, since she does not ‘really know what it’s like there’. Entering the world of commercial television is almost like entering a city in a foreign culture. Consequently, the essence of these channels as taken for granted phenomena, when conceived of in the natural attitude, is defined as an unspecified number of new channels that she is not interested in anyway. She knows that they are there, but her lifestyle does not enable her to differentiate between them.

Conflicts and Frustrations
Sometimes Felicia watches a film on any of the commercial TV channels – ‘if there should be a very special film’. However, at these occasions she finds it very disturbing with the commercials that repeatedly interrupt the film. These are experienced as intruders in her cultural lifeworld, and she tries to avoid, or, rather, exclude them as much as she can:

F: I get very irritated when they interrupt a film, for example. You’re watching a film and it gets interrupted three times of commercials. Then I get irritated.
I: Does it happen that you turn off the TV?
F: Yes, I leave... I go out to do something else. Leaving the sofa...
I: To get away...
F: And also, since I often go to the movies I see a lot of advertising there. And... I don’t know what to say, but it’s so loud and the tempo is so high... It doesn’t suit me, it’s not my style. If there should be a commercial that is quiet and peaceful, I think I would take more notice of that.

Since the world of advertising to a great extent is an integral part of the he world of media texts, embedded in TV programmes, radio programmes, movies, newspapers and magazines, it is, just as O’Donohoe (1997) points out, omnipresent – as long as the individual does not choose to stand outside contemporary society completely. As described above, Felicia does not incorporate many cultural elements from the commercial sector of the television system, but in order to take part of the particular cultural events she is attracted by, she sometimes has to encounter the commercial messages. What must be noticed, though, is that she does not consider the ads of newspapers as disturbing elements. This fact can primarily be connected to the cultural form of print media, making it possible for the reader to simply skip the ads. The commercial break on TV, on the other hand, is precisely a break – a sudden interruption in the reading process, demanding a new set of generic competences to be put into work. Furthermore, Felicia has not yet naturalized the existence of televised advertising. While advertisements have always been a constituent part of newspapers and magazines, and are hence already taken for granted, TV commercials are a relatively new phenomenon. The new shape of television requires a reworking of the particular skills governing the viewer’s media attitude on the generic level.

Petra does not mention TV commercials as an instance of cultural intrusion. She almost exclusively watches the commercial TV channels, since these are the channels
where the series she likes are aired. Public service television, on the contrary, is consid-
ered as ‘disgustingly boring’; watching these channels is as boring as ‘trying to find out
the meaning of stones’. And since she is living alone, she is able to avoid these channels
as much as she wants. Previously, however, when living together with her ex-boyfriend,
who was a ‘dominant bastard’, she often experienced frustration, because she could not
see the programmes she wanted to see. Not that her boyfriend was interested in the pro-
grames of SVT – but he was interested in sports:

P: Well I don’t watch the same programmes anymore. Because what I wanted to see,
he didn’t want to see. He... it was a lot of sports, and I hate sports, you know. [...] But he loved Beverly Hills for some strange reason. So I watched it too... [...] He
was a rather dominant person, if we say... so he got things the way he wanted.

Petra also says that her ex-boyfriend had more than 300 video films, and was in constant
command of the remote control: ‘The remote control was his life.’ During this period, in
order to avoid serious conflicts, she had to watch several programmes that she was not
actually interested in. Thus, the composition of her lifestyle was compromised, which in
turn led to a modification of her cultural horizon that was not sought after. In the long
run, this sense of not being in control of the processes of inclusion and exclusion became
a source of social frustration. As has also been reported from several previous ethno-
graphic studies (cf. Morley, 1986; Lull, 1990), the domestic sphere is a field of continu-
ous negotiations between family members, while also very often a site of male domi-
nance. In other words, conflicts and frustrations may appear as to whose ideal lifeworld
shall become the dominating one. When living under the same roof, individuals have to
accept the influence of other people’s cultural preferences, taking for granted much of
the same things that they do. The sphere of domestic family life must therefore be re-
garded as one of the most complex sites of contemporary media culture – a site in which
the coping function of the lifestyle is challenged.

Concluding Remarks

I have in this article tried to advance the benefits of integrating phenomenological
conceptualizations within the field of cultural studies in general, and audience studies in
particular. Through the empirical application presented above, though being a very brief
example, I have also demonstrated the possibility of such an integration. While the
strength of phenomenological theory is its ability of structuring the cognitive complexity
of individual knowledge, experience and action, putting the living subject in the centre
of analysis, it is also compatible with the predominant ethnographic and cultural socio-
logical research traditions. Especially the concepts of the lifeworld and the natural atti-
dute enable cultural inquiry to approach processes of everyday life from new, subject-
ivistic angles, without turning its back on more contextual, or structural, questions.

To further integrate phenomenology into cultural research, there are a number of dif-
ferent ways to go. I have already showed how the sociology of for example Giddens and
Bourdieu are worth considering as complementary frameworks. Other theorists, like for
example Habermas (1987) and Berger et al. (1974), have already provided broad ac-
counts of how phenomenological concepts, in particular the lifeworld concept, can be
appropriated as analytical tools in a wider sociological context. Following the intellec-
tual path of Habermas, it would be interesting to develop a more culturalistic notion of
his thesis of the systems’ colonization of the lifeworld, and the exhaustion of communi-
cative rationality. Especially against the backdrop of people's scepticism towards advertising, demonstrated above, this theme ought to be more thoroughly investigated from within the lifeworld itself – focusing directly on people's experiences and potential strategies of cultural resistance.

In a similar manner, Berger's theory of the pluralization of lifeworlds could be developed in a culturalistic direction, focusing explicitly on the processes of cultural, rather than social, pluralization. As pointed out previously, the development of new communication technologies and the parallel expansion of popular culture have opened up new discursive worlds, which people may alternate between just like they alternate between different social arenas. The Internet, or cyber-space, is the latest, and also the most striking, example of this cultural pluralization process – a space in which the user can stroll around like the flâneur of modern city landscapes. Thus, phenomenology is a remarkably timeless business. Since the nature of human consciousness basically remains the same, phenomenology can, and ought to, be adopted in a wide range of research disciplines. And that must not be a matter of attitude.

References
The Aesthetics of the Television Talk Show

HANNE BRUUN

On stage there is a mother and her 17-year-old daughter. Today’s problem is mothers who can’t stand their children’s partners. Mother and daughter tell the studio host about the conflict, and the studio host and the studio audience ask questions and make comments. Finally, the apple of discord – the boyfriend – is let into the studio. There now follows an extremely violent verbal clash between the mother and the boyfriend. They scream and shout at each other, and the studio audience applauds, jeers, and shouts comments. The emotional climax is reached when the tearful daughter declares her love to both mother and boyfriend, and calls upon them to make a reconciliation. The studio host rounds off, and, in a close up shot, she praises the maturity of the daughter to the applause of the studio audience. A commercial break follows.

We are witnessing the American talk show, “Ricki Lake” and the sequence with the mother, daughter, and boyfriend is one of the day’s three stories. “Ricki Lake” is a talk show which is specially organised with the aim of capturing a segment of young, female viewers who, in marketing terms, are the most interesting in the American commercially based TV system. The series is a success in the USA, and it has made Ricki Lake one of the most highly paid talk show hosts in American television. The series is also broadcast on a number of TV stations across Europe. In Denmark, at the moment, we can see the series on TV3 and 3+.

As a TV genre, however, the talk show is neither exclusive to the nineties nor to commercial television. In the USA the genre is as old as the medium of television itself, and today, talk shows comprise no small percentage of available programmes on commercial as well as non-commercial TV stations. Talk shows are cheap to produce and popular among viewers, and the ability of this genre to attract viewers is no new phenomenon either. It is, of course, no new phenomenon in Danish public service television either. For example; at the end of the seventies the talk show “Kanal 22” (DR 1979 -82) was able to attract 36% of the population. This type of programme was developed into the series “Lørdagskanalen” (Saturday Channel- (DR 1982 -86) which had a viewer quota of 68% of the population. The programme type survived after the ending of the television monopoly in Denmark, in “Eleva2ren” (TV 2 1988 -96). In spite of viewers having a wider choice of channels, “Eleva2ren” was able to reach average ratings of 27% of the population.

In short, we are apparently dealing with a TV genre which has qualities attractive to viewers. I will offer an explanation of what these qualities are with an angle of approach in audience-oriented criticism. The reason why the talk show is a popular form of TV, and
generally becomes so with relative ease, can be explained theoretically by a closer examination of the special relationship that the talk show attempts to create with its viewers. We are, in other words, placed in a special position of experience, which makes the talk show different from other TV genres.

In addition, I will emphasise that the relationship of the genre to the viewers would seem to contain four dramaturgic models in which actual talk shows are staged. Finally, I will return to the subject of “Ricki Lake” and examine how this talk show can be discussed from the theoretical angle of approach to the genre.

Three Fundamental Characteristics

Although it may be difficult at first to see what traits “This is Your Life”, “Ricki Lake”, and the Danish, “Mors Hammer” (a talk show in which various moral and social issues are discussed) share with each other, the three shows do, in fact, have three elements in common. These are, the TV studio, the host, and the interview.

The TV Studio

In the talk show the TV studio is the space of the programme, and in this genre the unity of time and place are observed in the same way as in classical drama. If the unity is broken, it is only momentary. The role of the TV medium in the talk show is to be both the event in itself and to be the place of the event at one and the same time.

Consequently, the talk show becomes different from other TV genres, even at this stage. In this genre TV is not a reporting medium, in which the medium primarily tells of a reality outside the medium itself. Neither does it have the role of a transmitting medium in which the medium is a visitor and, in principle, is not responsible for that which is shown. Transmissions of national sporting events and concerts are examples of TV in this role.

The planning of a talk show in terms of time and space has the character of a “now and here” i.e. the aim is first of all to give viewers an experience of simultaneity between the time of the programme and its transmission. Secondly, the aim is to create an experience of mergence of space between the programme and the viewers, in such a way that the viewers feel as if they are participants in the programme as opposed to spectators. The scenographic arrangement of the studio is an important element in creating the experience of being a participant. As well as this the studio audience is able to function as a mental bridge between the place of the programme and the place of the viewers. The talk show is “now and here”, whereas the time and space of TV reporting is “there and then”, and the live transmission is “now and there”.

The Studio Host

What is offered by the “now and here” of the talk show is a form of togetherness. The studio host is the central dramaturgic element who functions as an intermediary between the programme and the viewers. For this reason, unlike the staging of an anchor person in a news broadcast, the talk show attaches great importance to the television personality of the host, as this is an essential part of the content of the talk show. On the other hand the anchor person in a news broadcast is, to a much greater extent, an institutional representative, partly for the TV station, and partly for the phenomenon “news”.
The talk show is, to a great extent, the studio host’s programme – and the programme is the host’s “world”. First of all the studio host has a variety of guests, depending on the nature of the programme. The guests are invited on to the host’s programme, they are welcomed, and the host expresses his gratitude to them for coming on the show. He also has other guests on the programme, however. They are present, but unseen and silent. These are the viewers. For this reason the talk show is punctuated with many vitally important remarks directly to the camera in which the viewer is addressed directly.

The talk show host is, therefore, performing on two scenes. One of the scenes is in the talk show itself, and the host performs to the participants of the show and the studio audience, if there is one. The other scene exists between the programme and the viewers, such that the viewers are given the impression that the show exists for their benefit. In this way the viewers are recognised as participants in the programme and are addressed as such, as opposed to the position of voyeurs in relation to what is being shown. The position of voyeur is where viewers are generally placed in the TV documentary and in TV fiction.

The Interview

The interview is an important method of creating the content in the talk show. It is also the way in which a great portion of the content of the genre is presented, and consequently the focus is on people and conversation between people. This is what is on offer to the viewers. Because of this focus on people and conversation, the talk show differs from the TV-quiz show and the TV game show in which the emphasis is on a game governed by a set of rules. The talk show is like the performance of a theatrical improvisation, and the way in which this performance is set up with regard to interview style, the role of the interviewer, and the role of the participants, has a vital significance for the viewers’ perception of actual talk shows.

The TV studio, the studio host, and the interview are the basic common elements in the various form of talk show. Other elements which are vital in deciding how each talk show is perceived and experienced, are the scenographic set-up, camera techniques, the use of sound and the entire audio-visual dimension. The fact that the talk show can attract viewers when what it has to offer is relatively minimalist, is due to the fact that the talk show embodies basic qualities of the TV medium itself. These features are to a very great degree so apparent, that they are considered natural for both producers of talk shows and viewers alike. That is why they are important.

Uncertainty and Sociability

Two basic qualities of the TV medium are central to the talk show. First of all the medium’s ability to broadcast live non-fictional pictures. It is this quality, which separates television from radio and cinema. Secondly, television is mass communication, addressing a mass audience, but it is broadcast directly into the private sphere of the viewer. The medium is a part of our everyday routines, but is a medium primarily used in our leisure time when we want to relax. This means that TV programmes must find a mode of address suitable for a situation which is both collective and individual – a situation which is at once public and private for the home viewer.

In the talk show these two qualities of the TV medium play a vital role resulting in textual features in the genre which I describe with the concepts the uncertainty factor and sociability.
The Uncertainty Factor

Television was born as a live medium, i.e. there is simultaneity between the spoken statement and its reception, and has its technological origins in radio. Broadcasts were live because in the early childhood of television, facilities for storage and editing were unavailable. If anything other than simultaneous editing was required, recordings were made on film. Not until the end of the 1950s – CBS in 1956 and the BBC in 1958 – was video tape used, (Tusa 1993:11) and in 1959 the Ampex video tape recorder was used for the first time in Denmark. In addition moving out of the studio, which Danish radio had begun doing as early as the mid-1930s, proved extremely difficult when applied to television.3 Although the BBC, as early as 1937, began using the first OB (Outside Broadcasting) unit, and thereby was able to broadcast live from the coronation of King George V1, both TV cameras and recording equipment were heavy and unreliable. For this reason pictures were limited to the area around Westminster Abbey.

If recording equipment were to be moved, it was necessary here too, to record events using film cameras with the consequential time lapse. It was not until the end of the 1970s that ENG (Electronic News Gathering) equipment began to be used in western Europe. (Hjarvard 1995:266)

Because of the technological circumstances, a great many television programmes in the early period were unmarked by the aesthetic norms of the film genre. Instead, television was, in terms of organisation, and to a certain extent aesthetically, considered as a visualisation of radio – radio with pictures. That television could show live pictures, and broadcast these as they happened, was considered the most important aspect of the new medium.

Live broadcasting and the limitations of Outside Broadcasting, combined with the lack of experience of production teams and unreliable technology, meant that programmes were often studio productions full of technical errors. It was impossible to edit out unsuitable remarks or behaviour, as the technology was non-existent. Anecdotes from this early phase are often characterised by an almost Monty Python-like eye for the farcical scenes these production conditions could produce. A good example of this is found in “Chronicle of Denmark”, (En danmarks.krønike) by the Danish journalist and author Paul Hammerich

A tour de force was the performance of Aladdin in 1952 with Henning Moritzen in the title role and Helle Virkner as Gulnare. An unintentional dramatic effect was achieved when the genie of the lamp appeared and Aladdin exclaimed: “Oh, how hungry I am, dear spirit! Were you to provide me with a meal, then I would gladly serve you at other time, should you need my help.” Then, just as the gastronomic wonder was about to appear, thanks to the magic of the genie, the camera caught a little stage manager crawling across the set with sweat on his brow and wearing a set of earphones. He placed Oehlenschläger’s favourite dishes on a silver platter at the feet of the astounded Moritzen. (Hammerich: vol.3 1976: 249)

Television’s take-over of many radio programme types and its organisation of transmission areas, combined with conditions of production, has undoubtedly acted as a socialisation factor for viewers and producers alike. “Real” television was live television, and still is for many people today, not just when the broadcast is news, sport or events, but also when it is studio production such as a talk show: that is to say, when topicality is not the reason for broadcasting live. An exemplary expression of this attitude among producers of television is to be found in the article by the Danish journalist...
Poul Trier Pedersen in “Levende Billeder” (Live Pictures), 1979 in which he writes the following based on the programme “Kanal 22”

A television genre had almost been forgotten, at any rate in Denmark, when “Kanal 22” made its appearance on our screens on Monday 5th February – the live talk show. Usually it is the case that a talk show with some degree of topicality, either with or without guests, and broadcast live, is indispensable and included as a matter of course in the repertory of every television company. It is something that just has to be there, to be included without the need for debate (...) Attached to the genre there are qualities which in some way make TV genuine, i.e. television that is itself and not merely an imitation of, or a substitute for other media. When a programme in this genre is a success, it contains an excitement factor of “here and now” which is also experienced by the viewers. (Trier Pedersen 1979: 23 and 25)

In spite of the development of technology, some of the qualities of production and the experiences connected with live production are still sought after as a normative point of departure. It is found desirable to maintain these qualities, either in the form of truly live productions, or in the form referred to as “live on tape”.

There would seem to be an overriding reason for maintaining a production form which is live or simulates a live production: The Uncertainty Factor, or TV without a safety net, in which one can get close to the qualities in face-to-face interaction of actual reality. The Danish TV producer and author John Carlsen describes the intensity of this adrenalin-producing live form in the following way:

The risk of a planned mini-interview developing into a boring exercise in futility, which you can do nothing to change, is ever-present. And the danger that an actor will freeze, the sound disappear, or that the camera will swing aimlessly around before capturing a picture is always lurking in the background. All these risks, of huge blunders and small cosmetic blemishes, could be removed. So what causes us to choose the live transmission? It is probably the same thing that causes a risk of errors, because the element of unpredictability which is built into the live transmission also creates the opportunity for the unexpected bonus. A participant in a discussion can suddenly get excited and say things that he had really intended to keep quiet about, a member of the audience might actively intervene, or an entertainer might begin to improvise, take over the programme, thereby breaching time limits, plans, and other arrangements. (Carlsen 1984: 120-21)

For John Carlsen, the possibility of the live experience, and thereby the possibility of a completely different experience than the cinema film can offer, is one of the principal reasons why the sequence, the pulse and the rhythm in television are crucial as opposed to the aesthetically perfect. Carlsen compares the possibility to edit television programmes with the effect the talking film had on the aesthetics of film. The heavy, unreliable recording equipment caused a setback in the development of film because it once again took on characteristics belonging to the theatre. For television this also meant the edited programme’s opportunity for perfection, which in some respects was a step backwards in relation to the live programme’s unpredictability, incalculability, and fortuitousness which has a certain amount in common with “life itself”. The sequence, by definition the element which carried the live transmission, has to be re-learned in the edited TV programme. (Carlsen 1984:126)
When the sender adheres to an actual or a narrative immediacy in the unit of space of the talk show, it means that this type of programme is situated on a fulcrum with the organised, tried and tested, and predictable on one side, and the uncontrollable on the other. The interaction is not scripted exactly (as opposed to theatre drama in which we are dealing with a fictive universe) and the chance of something going wrong, or taking an unexpected turn is always present. It is this degree of unpredictability which might conceivably be one of the talk show’s strong points in relation to viewers. This also applies to the live on tape form, where editing opportunities are limited, and the experience of unity in time and place can thereby be achieved. Re-taking all, or part, of an interview is a difficult task because the changes have to be contextualised into a unit, and at the same time the “nerve” of the live transmission has to be maintained for participants, host and audience alike.

In addition to this, real simultaneity can be utilised so that contact with viewers becomes an element in the programme by using different kind of phone-ins. This can, for example, be in the form of questions to the guest of a show from viewers, or in the form of a quiz in which viewers participate by phone. Thus the show depends on there being an empirical receiver in order to exist at all, but this also functions as a part of the unity of the programme for those viewers who do not participate directly, and is perhaps a decisive factor in the appeal of the genre.

Sociability

Immediacy as a priority in the production of the talk show, and the experiential qualities sought through it, for both the sender and receiver, should be seen in the context of the “here” which is created by the scenic character of the programme type. The programme type attempts to deny, with every means at its disposal, that television is dominated by one-way communication. Only in short sequences, and with a limited number of selected viewers, can television actually be two-way communication in which it is possible for a receiver to answer. The fact that this insistence of contact is such an emphatic trait of television is not merely the result of commercial TV’s anxiety about ratings, but is also, to a great extent, connected with the user situation that television is a part of. The reception of the TV mass medium takes place predominantly in the viewers’ private sphere, and what TV has to offer is a part of everyday life. Television is still, however, the leisure medium unlike radio which is increasingly becoming the medium of non-leisure time. Radio is heard as an accompaniment to work and in transition periods between work and leisure time. Radio “keeps the beat” in the part of our lives which is governed by the clock (Dahl 1991:13). The cross-field between public/formal and private/informal is, therefore, the basic communicative “area” of television. The many anonymous receivers must be “talked” to, but in the private surroundings and individual life of each. 5 This has consequences for the mode of address and the structure of broadcasting, which influences TV generally, and the talk show in particular.

John Ellis’ analysis (Ellis 1982) of the aesthetic form of television relative to that of cinema film is still the most extensive bid at a maximal description of the communicative characteristics of television in relation to the user situation. Ellis emphasises that the combination of reception situation, screen format, the audio-visual factors, and the daily presence of television, give it, its programmes and its personalities the tinge of everyday familiarity and intimacy which radio to a certain extent also achieved with the auditory form alone. Finding a form of communication which suits the cross-field between pub-
licit/ formal and private/ informal is an art which was not automatically mastered when television was born. It takes time to assimilate the legacy of other media forms as the British media researcher Paddy Scannell has shown in his examination of the historical changes in what he calls the BBC’s “communicative ethos”. In his micro-sociological, Goffman- inspired angle of approach to the analysis of media products, Scannell emphasises that awareness of the fact that the sender has no control over the reception situation, which takes place in the receiver’s private sphere, is increasingly evident in television’s mode of address in general. Intimacy, both in expression and content, the person-orientated, the schematised structure, and the focus on contact, should be seen as the sender’s attempt to motivate an interest on the part of the receiver by talking to him in a form that reflects reception in his private sphere and in everyday domestic situations. As an example Scannell uses the BBC’s Talks Department which recognised this at an early stage.

Quite quickly, older public models of speaking (the lecture, the sermon, the political speech) were rejected and replaced by more direct, intimate, personal styles of speech (Matheson 1933). In short, broadcasting learnt that its expressive idioms must, in form of content, approximate to the norms of ordinary, everyday, mundane conversations, or talk. In talk-as-conversation participants treat each other as particular persons, not as collective. So too with broadcasting. The hearable and seeable effect of radio and television is that, “I am addressed”. (Scannell 1995: 10)

In the book, Radio, Television and Modern Life (Scannell 1996:28) Scannell distinguishes between two form of contact-making which can be recognised in the talk show. According to Scannell these two forms could be observed as early as the 1930s in radio, and he uses two forms of entertainment programmes as analytical examples:

- In the first type the receiver is “invited in” to a studio which is the place of the event. Here the studio audience plays a crucial role as a stand-in for the absent audience who are at home. This is an attempt to establish the “invited in” element. The function of the studio audience, along with the host is to convey an experience of togetherness which includes the receiver.

- In the second type the studio audience is absent. With the help of the TV host’s verbal, and in the case of television, audio-visual planning, the receiver is addressed in his private sphere by a process in which the programme simulates a private sphere, thereby seeking to give an experience of spacial simultaneity between sender and receiver.

The classic entertainment programme, from this period, which deliberately sought to enter into the “fireside world” of listeners, and to invoke “the pleasures of privacy” was “Monday Night at Seven.” (Scannell: 1996:28)

According to Scannell, it is the contact itself between programme and listener which is the dominating feature in the content of these programmes. Here he uses the term sociability to describe intimacy-creating mode of address, and atmosphere of togetherness sought by both types of programme. The German sociologist Georg Simmel describes the phenomenon sociability as “a special sociological structure” that is a significant trait of living in society in general. It is based on people’s need to join together with other people for the sake of unity itself. (Simmel 1910:128) Sociability in its narrower sense -
being together with others as an activity in itself- emphasises form as opposed to content. Sociability, according to Simmel, is “the play form of association. It is related to the content- determined concreteness of association as art is related to reality.” (Simmel 1910:130) Thus, sociability is almost a ritual activity, has no aim apart from its own being, and is, at the same time, “oriented completely about personalities.” (Simmel 1910: 130) Sociability is created by personalities, which means that sociability emphasises human qualities.

There are, however, limits to the kind of human qualities allowed. In order to establish and maintain sociability it is necessary for participants to restrain certain aspects of their individuality. If too much emphasis is put on individuality the experience of sociability will disappear.

The most personal things – character, mood, and fate - have thus no place in it. It is tactless to bring in personal humor, good or ill, excitement and depression, the light and shadow of one’s inner life. (Simmell 1910:131)

This means that personality must be exhibited, but not private, personal things which can form the basis of strong emotional outbursts and serious confrontations, among other things.

Paddy Scannell considers sociability as a trait which is, or ought to be, common in the mode of address in the electronic media across the more manifest content, such as the wish to inform or convince. In the talk show the spacial insistence of a collective “here” – a virtual meeting place – combined with the talk show’s actual or narrative “now”, or immediacy, means that sociability is at the centre of the communicative relationship between the programme and the viewer. The roles and expectations associated with sociability are an indispensable part of the talk show’s substance. Individual programmes can, however, be produced with varying degrees of emphasis on sociability. The use of the studio audience is the decisive, definitive factor. By involving the studio audience in the production, sociability is emphasised as a dimension of the programme’s contents. Irrespective of the degree to which sociability is emphasised as a dimension of the contents, there will be consequences for the way in which communication takes place in the programme type, and what is possible in terms of contents, if sociability as a factor is to be maintained.

In the essay “Hosts and Guests”, (Arlen 1997) the American author Michael J. Arlen focuses on a particular form of role play which is characteristic of American television and the talk show in particular. He characterises the interaction between TV hosts, guests and viewers, with a point of entry in the original Latin root hospes in the notion “hospitality”, which contains an ambiguity of status in the term used for host, guest and strangers alike. Every instance of participant interaction has a double status of both host and guest, which Arlen illustrates with an example from “The Barbara Walters Special,” in which she visits a number of celebrities in their homes. This gives rise to a certain amount of turbulence in their roles and thereby making them more apparent.

(...) the programme opened with Ms. Walters standing in her New York apartment, all dressed up to receive company in the accepted manner of a television hostess, but informing us that she was going to take us out, so to speak, “into the private homes and private thoughts of two couples.” Then the Streisand-Peterses were shown acting as hosts to Ms. Walters. Then, there was an intermission of shots, during which Ms. Walters – transported back to her apartment and her original hostess role – proceeded
to take us, as her guests, on a tour of her various art objects and souvenirs. Then, we were off to Georgia, where the Carters were clearly now the hosts and took Ms. Walters through their house. In conclusion we returned to New York with Ms. Walters, who signed off by saying, "I’m so pleased you could join us in your homes. Good evening from mine." (Arlen 1997:309)

Arlen considers the host-guest dramaturgy in the talk show as a ritualised acting out of the hospitality that comprises a significant part of conversational structure of this type of programme. (Arlen 1977:310) The talk show must act out hospitality as a ritual in order to relieve or avert the hostility that viewers might have by being “invaded” by strangers in their private sphere. In other words the programme type is subject to certain communicative norms that exist in social, informal, face-to-face forms of interaction between people who do not know each other very well. In connection with this one might expect that in the talk show rules of politeness (Argyle & Henderson 1985, Drotner et al 1996) and the handling of others’ “face” (Drotner et al 1996, Goffman 1967) become particularly important, because they have influence on the interaction in the programme type and how the programme type is experienced “behind the back” of what is probably a more explicit aim of the communication.

**Dramatic Excitement**

The two dimensions – the uncertainty factor and sociability – mean that the unpredictable and the unplanned, become important in the talk show, and it means that form, rules of politeness, and the treatment of others’ “face”, become extremely important in the talk show. Both dimensions are essential elements of content in the genre. For that reason they are present no matter what the more manifest content of the show might be, e.g. a discussion of Danes’ attitude to immigrants and refugees, or people’s experiences of taboo subjects from the private sphere.

At the same time, however, the elements of uncertainty and sociability are incompatible qualities, and because of this a form of tension exists between the two dimensions in the genre. This tension exists between the tendency towards chaos, danger, unpleasantness, and loss of face found in the uncertainty factor, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the tendency towards impeccability, politeness, and pleasure of sociability. How this tension is administered depends on the actual use of the genre. In addition, the way in which this tension is administered by the individual programme will have experiential consequences for the viewers. Here one might expect too, that what constitutes the experience of uncertainty and sociability in actual programmes depends very much on who the viewers are. This means, for example, that if one wishes to produce a talk show directed towards young people, the production of the two dimensions must be thought out in relation to this specific target group. Therefore, the estimation of the individual talk show’s degree of success and the experiential consequences of the viewers is inseparable from considerations of whom the show is directed at.

Because of the accentuated textual features of the talk show, I believe that there is reason to consider the talk show as experientially different from other types of television programme. The talk show can be expected, theoretically, to be “closer” to the interactional and behavioural framework which is characteristic of informal face-to-face communication.
Anthropologist, Donald Horton, and sociologist, R. Richard Wohl, have defined the special communicative relationship between the programme type and its viewers as para-social interaction. (Horton & Wohl 1956.) It is precisely the non-fictive TV-personalities (“personae” Horton & Wohl 1956:216) who are focused on, whose existence, “is a function of the media themselves.” (Horton & Wohl 1956:216) Their ideas are based on the assumption that the viewers’ relationship to these personae, who act as both hosts and interviewers, can be described as a para-social relationship. According to the authors the relationship differs in degree but not in type from genuine personal relationships between people. It is the degree of reciprocity which is the decisive factor, but, on the other hand it gives the viewer the freedom to withdraw, to experience from a distance, and not to get involved, which face to face situations of this nature would otherwise render impossible. An important factor in establishing the para-social relationship is the stability of the TV-personality. Depending on how often the actual programmes are broadcast, these programmes can offer weekly, or often daily, “meetings” at an appointed time which can be integrated into the routines of daily life. In addition these programmes are to a great extent, representatives of security in a world which is insecure.

Unlike real associates, he has the particular virtue of being standardized according to the “formula” for his character and performance which he and his managers have worked out and embodied in an appropriate “production format” (...) The persona is ordinarily predictable, and gives his adherents no unpleasant surprises. (Horton & Wohl 1956:217)

Horton and Wohl describe, in addition, how the illusion of intimacy and participation is created in the talk show by means of four central devices:

1. The host duplicates the gestures of informal interaction, conversational style, and milieu.
2. The host attempts, verbally, to give the impression of camaraderie and personal knowledge of the production team, who are addressed and brought into the programme.
3. The host moves physically among the studio audience, and for short periods he can become a spectator to the performance of others, along with the studio audience.
4. Focus is put on the hosts method of communication, i.e. the medium itself and its technology.

The conclusion of Horton and Wohl is that stability and these four devices help to create and emphasise the main values of the programme type in relation to the viewers. These values are predominantly orientated around how this form of togetherness is characterised by sociability, courtesy, friendship and close contact. However, unlike theatre drama in which secondary identification is probably a relevant feature in the way the audience relates to what is shown, Horton and Wohl emphasise that the situation is different in personality-centred programmes.

The “personality program”, unlike the theatrical drama, does not demand or even permit the esthetic illusion – that loss of situational reference and self-consciousness in which the audience not only accepts the symbol as reality, but fully assimilates the symbolic role. (Horton & Wohl 1956: 218)
The role of the viewer in these programmes is fundamentally different and the psychological attitude must generally be assumed to be different too.

When the persona appears alone, in apparent face-to-face interaction with the home viewer, the latter is still more likely to maintain his own identity without interruption, for he is called upon to make appropriate responses which are complementary to those of the persona. This “answering” role is, to a degree, voluntary and independent. (Horton & Wohl 1956: 219)

Horton and Wohl consider viewers to be extremely competent players who have no difficulty in separating the various forms of symbolic universes from actual reality. Furthermore, the authors are particularly cautious in drawing conclusions of a socio-psychological and societal nature. This caution cannot be said to characterise Carsten Y. Hansen’s use of the theory. In his article from 1988 he uses the theory as the basis in examining the talk show in Danish public service television. The article points out that the talk show is the form of non-fictional television entertainment which began to appear on the Danish state television service, “DR” at the end of the 1980s. On the basis of a comparison of a number of Saturday entertainment programmes, Hansen draws conclusions which are far more radical with regard to the dangers of the para-social for viewers en masse.

It is the everyday, person-to-person conversation [which] makes these programmes popular because they fulfill one of the most important viewer needs of entertainment television: to purvey material to the para-social interaction process with which viewers substitute actual interpersonal relationships. (Hansen 1988:102)

Horton and Wohl, on the other hand, consider the para-social as a supplement, and only in the case of individuals who are already socially and psychologically isolated can it develop into a substitute for self-created relationships in reality. And only if the para-social in these cases becomes a substitute can it be considered pathological. Hansen concentrates exclusively on the part of the argumentation concerning the para-social theory of interaction, in which the general validity of the principles are illustrated with the support of extreme, and possibly pathological cases.

**Four Dramaturgic Models**

It is within the area of tension between the uncertainty factor and sociability, that the dramaturgic arrangement of the talk show would seem to revolve. The emphasis in the individual programme can therefore be placed differently in relation to the two dimensions, or each element can be given equal priority.

In my work with the talk show I have contrived four prototypical models of how the tension between the uncertainty factor and sociability is arranged. I have termed the four dramaturgic models the Debate, the Research, the Therapy, and the Consultation*. Each of these elements gives a particular type of progression in the programme as a whole, or in sections of the programme, and they give differing roles to the host and participants. Differences and similarities can be illustrated thus:
Figure 1. Four Dramaturgic Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dramaturgic model</th>
<th>Debate</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Therapy</th>
<th>Consultation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course of the programme</td>
<td>The possibility to take sides</td>
<td>Process of exposing different aspects/narratives</td>
<td>Insight making the personal narrative public</td>
<td>Solving a problem by giving advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Host: Provocateur &amp; moderator</td>
<td>Involved &amp; hero</td>
<td>Therapist and friend</td>
<td>Adviser and friend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant(s)</td>
<td>Conflict and confrontation between positions</td>
<td>Different aspects</td>
<td>Different aspects</td>
<td>People with problems and co-advisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 or more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Party in the case</td>
<td>A riddle to be solved</td>
<td>Narrator with a special story</td>
<td>Representative of the problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is therefore a question of how the individual model prioritises and arranges the chaos potential and the danger to sociability contained in the uncertainty factor. All four models have a potential for chaos, but it is especially prominent in the Debate, the Therapy, and in the Consultation. I will briefly describe the various characteristics of the individual models.

The course of the programme: The Debate model is characterised by a course of the programme that will focus on the possibility to form an opinion. The Research will, on the other hand, focus on the process of discussing in itself, and getting as many aspects/narratives as possible brought into the discussion in order to shed light on as many dimensions of an issue, or a person, as possible. The Therapy will aim for insight by making the personal narrative public, and finally, the Consultation will aim to solve a problem by giving advice.

The role or function of the host: In the Debate the role of the host is to be a provocateur, but also the moderator. In the Research the host’s role is to be personally involved, and the role is similar to the role of the hero in the fairy-tale. The host has to use all his/her personal and professional skills to get a topic or a guest’s personality described.

In the Therapy the host is staged in the role of something in between a therapist and a close friend. And in the Consultation the host’s role is, again, something in between an adviser and a best friend.

The role of the participant or the participants: In the Debate you can either have two or more participants and they will then be cast as opponents and confronted in the show. If there is only one participant/guest in the show, the host will act as the opponent, and this kind of model is rare in the talk show, because the host will have to be unpleasant towards his or her guest. It can be done, but the examples show that it takes a special kind of host, and the sympathy of the viewers will very easily turn in favour of the guest, who has been invited. The only exception is politicians, who are professionals, and therefore we do not feel sorry for them so easily!

In the Research, participants represent different aspects of a problem discussed. And with one participant the guest will be the riddle the host has to solve using all his or her skills. In the Therapy, participants have the same role as in the research, and if there is only one participant he or she is cast as narrator with a special story to tell. In the Con-
sultation, the participants are a mix of people with problems and co-advisers. If there is only one participant, he or she is cast as a representative of the problem.

As it can be imagined the Debate, the Therapy and the Consultation are dramaturgic models where the uncertainty factor has high priority, and these models will often go to the limits of sociability and beyond! In the Debate, the temperaments of the participants and the conflict between positions in the debate can boil over – even the host can get aggressive towards his or her guests.

In the Therapy and the Consultation the problems, the stories told, and the emotional disclosures, can result in emotional breakdowns by the participants and even the host. The Research is the most harmless, and this model is the dominating model in late-night talk shows with famous guests, and in breakfast television – at least in Denmark.

“Ricki Lake”

“Ricki Lake” is an example of a use of the talk show genre in which a mix between the Debate, the Therapy, and the Consultation has been chosen. At the same time the chaos potential of the uncertainty factor in both dramaturgic models is prioritised equally. For that reason we get a programme in which it is desirable that the participants e.g. burst into tears or break down, and in which it is desirable for the participants to get involved in violent verbal, and sometimes physical, confrontations. In other words, it is intended that private lives are exhibited in “Ricki Lake” and so, sociability is intended to go to its limits, touching on whatever kinds of personal details it can.

However, in spite of the emphasis on confrontations and emotional outburst, sociability still plays a significant role in this series. It is through sociability that consensus is reached in the debate, and the “therapy” succeeds. First of all, the studio host is never challenged and is never part of the conflict. Secondly, each programme in the series has reconciliation as its aim. In many programmes this happens by means of a re-assertion of the positive, almost mythological status of the family. As with the description of the mother, daughter and boyfriend at the beginning of this article, all the other programmes in the series are brim-full with stories of moral guidance. The result then is usually that the solution to all manner of problems is to be found in traditional (nuclear) family values.

Along with the talk show’s fundamental efforts to create “here and now” experiences and an experience of togetherness and community among people, the set of values in the series might also be part of the explanation as to the popularity of the programme. The viewers witness a discussion of a number of serious emotional, and common human problems, and at the same time they are presented with a solution to them.

There is no doubt that “Ricki Lake” is an example of the effective use of the genre characteristics of the talk show, but the effectiveness with which emotional and other human problems are dealt with, is open to debate. The talk show is not a fictive genre, although as in all forms of television of course, there is a high level of construction. The fact that we are dealing with factual television is significant not only for those who appear in the series, but also for those who watch it. As fiction the programme would be unable to survive.

An important question which can be directed towards the series concerns the possible consequences that exceeding the limits of sociability might have. Is the effect that the programme contributes to creating social dissociation and hardening of attitudes, or does it on the other hand encourage empathy and tolerance i.e. diametrically opposed
values? Are the participants in the show exploited in a host-centred freak show that offers five minutes of fame to anonymous ordinary people? Or is the series, on the other hand, one in which the problems of ordinary people are taken seriously and in which the personality of the host is the driving force? And does the programme provide a public forum in which these problems can be thematised and discussed?

It is important to emphasise that “Ricki Lake” represents only one of various ways in which the talk show genre can be used. It is therefore a good idea in discussing the talk show, to differentiate between the genre and the use of the genre in actual programmes. This could also be a point of departure for criticism, in which, one can, with relevance, begin to examine the nature of the uncertainty factor and sociability, and what the experiential consequences might be for the viewer. Such an approach would also mean that it is not the talk show genre itself which is the object of criticism, but rather how different TV stations put the genre to use. As it has been my intention to emphasise in this article, the talk show is popular among viewers because it is a genre based on fundamental qualities of the TV medium; a medium that is an important cultural and political forum in contemporary daily life.

Notes
1. The sequence is from a “Ricki Lake” programme broadcast on Channel 4 on 30.3.1995.
2. The articles theoretical angle of entry and points of view are based on my Ph.D. thesis on the TV talk show and the use of the genre in Danish public service TV. H. Bruun Snakkeprogrammet. Portræt af en TV-genre. (The Talk Show. Portrait of a TV genre) Århus 1997. In the thesis I discuss, among other things, the sparse theoretical literature on the genre. The boundaries of this article, however, do not allow for a more protracted argumentation of my theoretical angle of entry. The thesis focuses on the talk show in Danish public service TV and contains five analyses of Danish talk shows: viz. “Kanal 22”, “Lørdagskanalen”, “Eleva2ren”, “Damernes Magasin”, and “Højlunds Forsamlingshus”.
3. In 1934 the so-called mahogany cart was used for the first time. It was a mobile recording unit which connected a microphone to two lacquer-plate sound-recording machines, each of which could record approx. three minutes of sound. This technical development had a great influence on radio’s aesthetic and linguistic development. See Bondebjerg 1990:22 for a detailed description.
4. Live on tape – also called delayed live, is a production form in which the producers attempt to re-create the live element by simulating a live recording. It involves a chronological and continuous recording which, when finished, is edited only marginally. The main emphasis in production lies in the pre-production process, i.e. concept development, research and briefing. As a rule the recording is made one or two days before the date of transmission, which means that if anything goes wrong with the recording itself it must be transmitted in any case. There is no time to make a new programme even if it is not a success. According to the Danish TV journalist Michael Meyerheim who was host of TV 2’s talk show “Meyerheim at Eight” for a number of years, this is exactly what happened when a well-known politician was to guest one of the programmes. In the research phase NN had been amusing, talkative and courteous. It seemed certain that the politician in question would “deliver the goods” when it came time to record, however, NN, for reasons unknown, closed up like an oyster. He answered in monosyllables, and the prepared jokes seemed lost on him. Meyerheim described this show as one of the longest in his career as a talk show host! (Source: own interview with Michael Meyerheim 16.5. 1994.
5. The realization of television as a much more individualized medium which the fusion of the computer, telephony, and TV makes possible is still some time away. It is also open to debate whether a technological possibility will, in reality, change our conception of the TV medium and the way in which we use it, in a short space of time. There is, perhaps, good reason for skepticism as, apart from the financial outlay necessary on the part of users, this involves an adjustment in the habits and expectations to the TV-medium on the part of the individual. That expectations to the medium are surrounded by a certain tardiness is shown by the fact that the “live” production form as used in the talk show, for example, is still maintained in spite of its being made unnecessary because of technological advances.
6. Drotner et al, p.148 gives an account of the communicative principle of politeness which is presented by philologists as a supplement to Grice’s principle of effectiveness. According to Drotner et al the principle of
politeness can be put into practice in five communicative rules of politeness. These were presented thus by John E. Andersen (1989): 1: Be considerate to others and avoid being troublesome to others. 2: Be generous in fulfilling the wishes of others. 3: Be positive. Avoid criticising or expressing dissatisfaction with your partner in conversation. 4: Be modest. Avoid praising yourself. Be self-critical - and 5: Agree. Seek the greatest possible area of agreement, e.g. by declaring yourself to be in partial agreement although you totally disagree.

7. Goffman’s “face” concept is based on the notion of how we all – individually and in co-operation with each other - attempt to preserve our subjective and socially-created self-image. This image of self is bound together with our self-esteem and thereby our dignity and honour. Loss of face is, therefore, extremely dangerous for the individual, and one tries in many different ways to avoid this e.g. by being polite and tactful when dealing with other people’s “face” in order to avoid their attacking one’s own. In addition, we often attempt to help each other through situations which could give rise to loss of face. If, in spite of these attempts, the situation occurs anyway, one can attempt to “pay back” so that face is regained by the loss of someone else’s. Drotner et al (1996:113) gives an account of the linguistic ritual into which the re-gaining of face can be divided in an interaction, if the situation has been accidental. Thus: 1: challenge - the break takes place and is recognised. 2: Sacrifice: atonement, apology and punishment. 3: Acceptance: the offender is forgiven and 4. Thanksgiving: the healing of the break.

8. The terms debate and therapy are borrowed from Sonia Livingstone and Peter Lunt. In their extensive reception research they examine the type of talk shows which they term, “Audience discussion programmes” in the book Talk on Television - Audience Participation and Public Debate, 1994. In the study the authors concentrate exclusively on talk shows that resemble Ricki Lake. It is however primarily British programmes whose reception they investigate.

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Radio is the biggest medium in Denmark. Eighty-five per cent of all Danes over the age of 12 use radio daily, and the average Dane has his or her radio turned on over three hours each day. But, strangely enough, even though radio is used often and long hours, it does not make much of an impression in the consciousness of its users. Radio is a so-called secondary medium. It plays in the background while we do all kinds of other things (work, eat, clean the house, drive the car, etc.). Radio “is just there” – as taken-for-granted and regular a phenomenon as electric lights, water out of the tap, telephones and traffic lights. It is something we normally do not talk about, nor do we think much about radio in our everyday lives. Only when the receiver breaks down or disappears.

The secondary status of the medium in our lives makes it difficult to find out how people make use of radio. Of course, it does provide a lot of information which keep the listener abreast of happenings in society at large (news, weather reports, top ten lists, background information of various kinds, etc.), but radio as a source of information only covers the kind of uses when the radio is in the foreground of the user’s consciousness. It does not cast light on the greater part of radio use, that which takes place when radio is in the background – the kind of use when we “hear” the radio rather than “listen” to it.

In this article I will offer some ideas about the functions radio may serve as a background medium, functions that are not directly related to, or dependent on the content the medium offers, but which rather have to do with its regularity and ability to set the mood. I wish to discuss whether, and in what ways, radio use is a ritual. Not the kind of ritual that surrounds notable events like moon landings, royal weddings, solar eclipses, and inaugurations of bridges, but the small rituals which take place in seemingly uneventful everyday life. There are many such rituals, and I shall argue that radio is involved in many of them.

My starting point is not that radio use itself is a ritual, but that the presence of radio and its sounds in various social situations help transform day-to-day activities into rituals. Rituals which integrate the participant(s) (the user(s) of radio) into a social and cultural order which transcends the time and space of the particular situation.
This may sound abstract, and I shall try to concretize my proposition with an example from an empirical study. I shall then proceed to examine some of the ways the concept of ritual has been applied to communication and media use. This review concludes with a specification of how the concept of ritual may be used in empirical studies, with inspiration from Durkheim and Goffman, among others.2

Radio Use - Information and Integration

When you ask heavy consumers of radio to explain their use of the medium, the first thing they will say is that they like to “keep up" with what is happening. Especially by listening regularly to the news. They want to know the traffic situation before they leave home, they want to be able to discuss current events with their workmates, and they feel that, as citizens with the right to vote in democratic elections, they have a duty to keep informed.3

Explanations like these are hardly surprising. It is a well-known fact that when one is asked to transform one’s practical routines into a discursive consciousness, one tends to resort to accepted phrases which reproduce a stereotype of ‘why we do what we do’. We say what the interviewer presumably expects to hear, namely, that the radio offers information that we put to some rational use. After all, one has to say something when the interviewer asks!4

But there are ways to get at the truth, to get past the stereotyped, ready-made responses. One way is to point out to the respondents that what they say they do does not always correspond with what they do. Users of radio say that the medium offers information. In doing so, they are articulating an implicit conception of media use as an individual act, a matter of ‘text’ and ‘reader’. But when radio users at the same time relate the details of their hectic daily lives, only a fraction of what they listen to is ‘pure’ information. Radio use is largely determined by certain social and material preconditions in people’s daily lives. These conditions are such that one cannot always assume that the medium is being used as a means of communication in the classic sense. In reality, users often do not focus their attention on the (information) content; they may be too far away to hear, and often someone else has chosen the station to begin with. Nor can people always decide when or how long they can use the radio. Use of radio is, in other words, to a large extent an integral part of everyday social activities.

My point is that radio use as ‘information seeking’ describes only some of the potential uses radio can be put to. For, even if users of radio say they do not always listen carefully to everything that comes out of the little box while it is turned on, most people would not be without it. “Something is missing,” they say. The question is: What exactly is it that is missing? How do people use all the other content that is ‘left over’, so to speak, once we have sorted away all the ‘pure’ information?

An Example

The following example, taken from a qualitative study of radio’s functions, is a good illustration of the day-to-day contexts in which radio use occurs. Anna tells of her family’s – Anna, her husband and their two children – morning routines:

We have basically the same ritual, every morning, day in and day out. And pity the soul who falls out of step even a half second, for every minute you have in the morning... . I mean, our mornings run on a very tight schedule, especially if you are leaving the house ... and one of the first things we do is switch on the radio. (Anna)
Anna describes a typical morning, when she and the rest of her family are in a hurry. All their tasks (washing, breakfast, dressing, etc.) are accomplished according to a strict timetable. Everyone is on his or her way to school or work. That is why, as Anna points out, there can be no deviations in the order things are done or the tempo. And radio? Quite symptomatically, Anna mentions radio last. This suggests that the demands of daily life come before use of the radio. The requirements of the major institutions (work, school, etc.) are what dictate media behaviour, not the media themselves.

But it may be wrong to speak of what comes ‘before’ what, the demands of life or media use. As I see it, use of radio is part of everyday life, an integral part of the daily routine, not something we turn to after all the more important tasks are out of the way. Perhaps it would be more accurate simply to say that we do not organize our days according to the media. Yet, the media form integral parts of our day-to-day existence in that they help to give routine tasks and behaviours a special character and content.

The very characteristic regularity of both media content and media use supports this idea. Most radio stations—and most mass media, for that matter—offer the same kinds of programmes at the same times in cycles of different lengths (days, weeks, months, years). Most radio use is also regularly scheduled; that is, we tune in to a given station at the same time each day, week, etc. Radio’s familiar pattern of programming gives us the impression that the chaotic flow of events in the world are but variations within a fixed pattern, and that the same is true with respect to our own social and physical settings.

Thus, we can say that Anna’s use of the radio in the morning constitutes her day as a familiar place to be. She may not listen very much to the content—she is in a hurry—but she notes that the radio is offering the same kinds of programmes it did the day before, so things must (thank Goodness!) be more or less ‘business as usual’. The sound of the radio ‘frames’ her morning as a situation she is familiar with, one where she knows what she is doing, and is going to do next, and in what tempo.

The interesting thing about Anna’s statement, however, is that she speaks of her and her family’s activities as a ritual. I argue that it actually is a ritual. It is, for example, a set of activities in which several people participate in a community that obliges them in one way or another. Note that radio use is not an individual activity, but something that involves more or less all the family members. Rituals are social in character, and the concept of ritual suggests an analysis of radio use as a social phenomenon, having effects above and beyond the actual media content, but in which the content most assuredly plays an important part.

To this we shall return. First, however, I should like to consider the term, ‘ritual’ and discuss some of the ways it has been applied in media research.

The Concept of ‘Ritual’ in Communication and Media Research
The concept of ritual has long been applied to mass media behaviour, but perhaps the most well-known example is James W Carey’s (1989) distinction between communication as transmission and as ritual. Carey posits the two as alternative metaphors for communication (Carey 1989:14-15).

The transmission metaphor, which is the more common of the two, conceives of communication as the distribution of information in a spatial dimension. Here, communication is the transmission of ‘content’ from one place to another with the aim of influencing others’ thoughts and actions. It is this aspect that users of radio mention first, and it is also what underlies earnest debates as to ‘effects’: whether or not exposure to
commercials whets children’s appetites for material consumption, whether serial fiction dilutes viewers’ morals, the influence newspapers’ party affiliations may exert, and so forth.

The conception of communication as ritual, on the other hand, is based not on the spatial dimension, but is a temporal metaphor. Here, the role of communication is not to effect change or to exert influence, but, on the contrary, to construct and maintain a shared and meaningful cultural realm:

If the archetypal case of communication under a transmission view is the extension of messages across geography for the purpose of control, the archetypal case under a ritual view is the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality (Ibid.:18).

Thus, the role of communication is not information, but confirmation. The effect of communication is not to change people, but to represent and confirm an underlying order; to manifest a current, but subtle social process (Ibid.:19).

Carey uses newspaper reading as his example of ritual behaviour. Newspaper reading is a ritual because it does more than communicate news. Apart from the news of sundry happenings, the newspaper has largely the same characteristics day after day. Newspapers definitely do not change the form and categories in which they represent reality from one day to the next. Under the news, so to speak, the newspaper therefore represents a continuum, a more or less stable image of the order of reality and how it can be grasped. That is to say, the newspaper tells us not what is new, but how the world around us essentially is. Newspaper reading as a ritual is therefore a question of the satisfaction of knowing that ‘things’, after all, have a fundamental order and structure (Ibid.:21).

Given this view of communication as ritual, ‘the news’ is not so much information, as it is drama. The news describes an arena of dramatic actors and activities, in which the reader is invited to take part (if only vicariously). Readers do imagine themselves as having a role in the drama, says Carey. Thus, the newspaper mirrors reality, but also constitutes an arena for action. The ritual of newspaper reading both constitutes and comments upon.

Carey’s emphasis on communication as a ritual practice opens – and has already opened – a number of interesting perspectives for media research. Communication is more than ‘effects’. Communication may be conceived of as an act that at once constitutes reality and integrates one into reality. In other words: communication is participation, not reception.

Routine use of the radio can be explained from this perspective. Radio listening as a daily ritual re-establishes the world each day as a familiar and shared place; in effect it helps (re-)establish certain behaviours and patterns of interaction as natural, as ‘right and good’. Even if the world is full of violence and chaos, the structural and stylistic regularity of radio represents changes in such a way that they are not perceived as ruptures in the continuity of things. Or, less abstractly: We want the radio to supply us with news (the transmission view), but it should be supplied in a familiar form that in no way challenges our conception of the great scheme of things. The new in the news is fine, but it should be played out in a familiar arena.

Carey presents us with a very broad perspective in which to study communication. But he does not specify what a ritual actual is, or how rituals are acted out, out there in ‘empirical reality’. Nor does Carey’s text tell us how to go about studying the particular role of the media in ritual communication. Carey considers all forms of communication,
including dance, and makes no distinction between communication between parties separated in time and place (mediated) or parties communicating face-to-face.

Roger Silverstone does not explicitly define what he means by ‘ritual’, either, even though the concept plays a central role in his theoretical work, Television and Everyday Life (1994). Consequently, it is used rather vaguely on occasion. But Silverstone’s use of the concept of ritual suggests a narrower, and thus more tangible, definition than Carey’s.

According to Silverstone, rituals take place as moments in which the ordinariness of everyday life is suspended. ‘Ordinariness’ he defines as, “the more or less secure normality of everyday life, and our capacity to manage it on a daily basis” (Silverstone 1994:166). It encompasses the greater part of our daily existence, all that we take for granted, things we simply do without thinking or commenting on – either to ourselves or to others. This is not to say that everyday life is somehow a constant, a fixed structure that at some specified moment was set into perpetual motion. Congruent with Giddens’ theory of structuration (Giddens 1984), Silverstone argues that the practices of ordinary life can be made discursive, that is, that it is possible for us momentarily to step out of the normal flow of our lives and think about the structures and positions we are busy reproducing. It is here that rituals come into the picture.

Rituals, Silverstone argues, serve as a kind of mythical reflection on the flow of day-to-day existence, which the ritual suspends, either momentarily or for longer periods of time. He is not speaking of great, ceremonial ritual, but rather “small” rituals that take place every day:

Everyday life is marked by a continuous, predictable and unpredictable, series of shifts between the marked and the unmarked, the sacred and the profane. Daily life is studded with ritual times and spaces in and through which the insistence of the daily round is momentarily put to one side ... In each of these events and in our participation in them (with or without the media) we move perceptibly from one domain of everyday life into another, crossing a boundary or a threshold into a clearly, if often a weakly marked ritual space: a space where the intense ordinariness of the everyday is replaced by a different kind of intensity – heightened and symbolically charged. In these ritual spaces the culture of everyday life is reinforced. In our participation in them ... our place and position in the world is symbolically defined (Ibid.:168).

The important point in Silverstone’s reasoning is that even if the ritual suspends the ordinariness of everyday life, the ritual is all about everyday life and our place in it. Like Carey, Silverstone stresses the strong, mutual relationship between ritual and daily life: ritual both mirrors and creates reality through symbolic forms.

What, then, is the role of mass media in an everyday life peppered with rituals? In this connection Silverstone proposes the myth, a kind of narrative whose content and form explores fundamental aspects of human existence: the relation of life to death, of nature to culture, etc. Mythic forms of communication once took place at august, ritualized places and times, clearly distinct from everyday life. Today, Silverstone argues, modern mass media have a corresponding mythic quality. The media are full of mythic narratives which reflect on life and help to generate cultural forms which are incorporated into everyday life.

The media produce a sort of raw material, a series of narratives – news, soaps, etc. – which the user of the media applies, adapts and changes. Thus, life’s ordinariness is not
only the result of direct, first-hand experience, but equally as much the product of experience and knowledge gleaned from the media.

This is the same line of reasoning as underlies Klaus Bruhn Jensen’s very elucidating differentiation between “time-out” and “time-in” cultures (Jensen 1995:57-58). The concept of “time out” is borrowed from the realm of sports where it represents a (requested) pause in a game or match; Jensen uses it as a metaphor for a generally brief period of time for reflection. Important is the fact that a ‘time out’ always takes place within the period of play, the ‘time in’. That means that ‘time out’ will always reflect on happenings and behaviours in the game. Used to apply to everyday life and routine media use:

[I]nstitutionalized cultural activity such as mass media use may suspend other everyday activity, but still takes place in the context of the everyday (Ibid.:57).

The culture of ‘time in’ is the practice of everyday life. It is here that (in Giddens’ terms) agentivity and structure flow together in social practice. In ‘time in’, we draw on the terms and procedures which make social action possible and which integrate individuals in meaningful social relations.

Jensen regards ‘time out’ as "a separate social practice ... which can be identified by social agents as such. It places reality on an explicit agenda as an object of reflexivity, and provides an occasion for contemplating oneself in a social, existential or religious perspective" (Ibid.:57).

Jensen summarizes the differences between the ‘time-in’ and ‘time-out’ cultures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time-in</th>
<th>Time-out</th>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated practice</td>
<td>Autonomous practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social practice</td>
<td>Aesthetic practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>The ordinary</td>
<td>The extraordinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Exposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Representation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ibid: 58)

In Jensen’s view “time out” is the modern media culture equivalent of what used to be acted out in rituals:

While such contemplation has traditionally been associated with religious rituals and fine arts, mass communication, certainly in a quantitative sense, is the main ingredient in time-out culture in the modern age. Time-out culture is a practice which reflects upon the nature and representation of social reality (Ibid.:57).

Both Silverstone and Jensen align themselves with Carey’s definition of communication as a continuous process whereby reality is reflected, commented on and constituted. And both advance theses concerning the role mass media play in this process. In their view, rituals and time outs, respectively, involving media use take place outside the practical, social behaviour of everyday life. Jensen considers ‘time out’ a “separate” “occasion” in which media uses “suspend ... everyday activity”. At the same time, the pause in ritual space (Silverstone) or ‘time-out’ culture (Jensen) has the character of something extra-ordinary, something “heightened and symbolically charged” (Silverstone 1994:168), i.e., it is a particularly intense experience.
Neither Silverstone nor Jensen offer any empirical evidence of media use as a suspending, extra-ordinary experience. Silverstone speaks of "stolen moments in front of the television set" as an example of how rituals are practised in everyday life (Ibid.:168). In the example the ritual use of the media takes place when the user focuses his full attention on the content of the medium. Thus, it is a question of media use establishing a momentary - and, according to the example, individual - text-reader relation, in which the intensity of the experience and the extra-ordinariness derive from the media content. The rest of everyday life is left out.

Ritual Media Use: ‘Text’ and ‘Social Situation’

One limitation in both Silverstone’s and Jensen’s theories is that ritual - or ritualistic media use only occurs when the ‘classical’ text-reader relationship is established. An element of the transmission view pervades Silverstone’s and Jensen’s conception of communication as ritual: What is sacred and extra-ordinary is the text.

This is, of course, an entirely reasonable proposition. But I contend that one can extend the concept of ritual to embrace other kinds of everyday rituals that involve the media and in which media use represents, as Carey suggests, an integrative force, integrating the user into a social reality. This contradicts Silverstone’s and Jensen’s notion of momentary suspension of social reality, albeit Silverstone and Jensen repeatedly emphasize that the suspension is but momentary and it essentially reflects the reality it suspends.

My argument is this: If we go back to Anna’s morning routines, i.e. the quote at the start of the article, and assume that what Anna calls a ritual actually is a ritual that she and her family perform every weekday, it is certainly not a ritual that suspends reality. On the contrary, it is a ritual about creating a shared reality for all the persons present (the members of Anna’s household).

The kind of ritual media use Silverstone and Jensen discuss is, as was noted, an individual activity. But the kind of ritual Anna describes is a group activity; the family’s use of radio is by no means exclusive or individual. According to Anna’s report, it is even unclear who switches the radio on. She says "we" (Translator’s note: Actually, she says "one" (man), but it is not a reasonable translation of an oral report.) impersonal and unspecified, which indicates that the action is more or less automatic and is not given any, or very much thought. The act of switching on the radio is not an independent act, but is an integral part of the social routine.

Social uses of mass media have been studied many times before. Numerous ethnographic studies have had such a focus, perhaps the most well-known of which is James Lull’s seminal article from 1980, "The Social Uses of Television" (1980/1990). There, Lull points out that “audience members create specific and sometimes elaborate practical actions involving the mass media in order to gratify particular needs in the social context of television viewing” (Lull 1980/1990.28). Thus, the media satisfy certain social needs in ways that are not directly related to the media content, but where the media are involved in social, "practical actions", as Lull puts it. In analyzing my empirical data I rely on Lull’s ethnographic approach, but instead of calling Anna and her family’s activities “practical actions”, I take Anna’s characterization literally and study the family’s use of radio as part of a ritual.

The difference between media use as a practical action (in Lull’s usage) and as a ritual action, respectively, is whether or not the media use gives the individual user ac-
cess to a (micro-)social situation. Media use as a ritual action is about what steers behaviour in the social situation. Thus, whereas Lull sees media use as an individual strategy by which to reach social goals, I see it rather as a social strategy, focusing on factors that constitute the group’s cohesion in the social, ritual act. Or, to put it another way: Whereas Lull’s social uses approach focuses on how the individual establishes a relation to a social group, I use the concept of ritual to explore the relations among the participants in the social group.

The difference is subtle, and it is a question of degrees rather than categorical distinctions. A perhaps more pronounced difference concerns the interest attached to media content in the analysis. I argue that the concept of ritual allows the inclusion of at least some aspects of media content into ‘ethnographical’ analyses of media use. The reception studies contingent within Danish media research has – rightly – criticized media ethnographers for ignoring media content in their studies of media use.

In his review of James Lull’s anthology, World Families Watch Television, from 1988, Klaus Bruhn Jensen complains that the contributors have totally neglected media content as an object of analysis. This is indisputably a weakness. There is, after all, as Jensen points out, a reason why the family gathers around the television set, and not the washing machine! (Jensen 1989:141) In Jensen’s – and Silverstone’s – approach to media use as momentary ‘time outs’ from the flow of everyday life, media content has a necessarily central place in the analysis. The problem with the approach is that it cannot take account of and explain media use during ‘time in’, i.e., when the user is not paying particular attention to what the medium is communicating.

This is not a major problem if we, at an epistemological level, recognize that reception analysis and media ethnography each cast light on their respective aspects of the phenomenon, media use. If we accept the entirely plausible assumption that media use is a multifunctional phenomenon which offers meat to any number of disciplines, we may say that reception analysis and media ethnography both study media as resources – but of two different kinds. Reception analysis focuses on how an individual’s use of the media gives him or her access to an external, not immediately present social context. Media ethnography, on the other hand, focuses on how use of the media provides access to micro-social situations in the user’s immediate physical context.

I shall devote the remainder of this article to developing a definition of ‘ritual’ for use in an analysis of (micro-)social uses of media that allow inclusion of media content as an integral part of the analysis and contribute to an understanding of how everyday, routine use of the media can be involved in projects or goals that extend far beyond the time and place of the media use in question. As a point of departure in this enterprise, I should like to go back to Durkheim’s classic study of ritual.

**Durkheim: Religion as Social Praxis**

In his classic The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912/1995), Emile Durkheim looks for the reasons why human beings have developed religions and observe religious rites. Durkheim’s explanation, highly simplified, is that societies create religions as a means for people to join together and to demonstrate their mutuality, their solidarity. Religions are ‘made’ by the social acceptance of some objects and phenomena as ‘sacred’ as opposed to others, which are ‘profane’. Religious praxis consists of worshipping, protecting and respecting these sacred objects.

It is important to bear in mind that Durkheim’s primary interest is not religion per se. Even if the focus of his research was the Arunta, a tribe of indigenous people in the
Australian hinterland, his true object of study was a more general, indeed universal, characteristic of mankind, namely, “the religious nature of man” (Durkheim 1912/1995:1). For Durkheim, religion is not a question of ‘the divine’ but of a phenomenon that is fundamentally social:

[R]eligion is an eminently social thing. Religious representations are collective representations that represent collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of the assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain or recreate certain mental states of those groups (Ibid.:9).

In order to constitute a religion, three conditions must be fulfilled. First, as mentioned above, certain objects or phenomena shall be venerated as ‘sacred’. Secondly, a number of rites shall exist which set out rules for how the things held sacred shall be treated. Finally, there must be a temple or sacred place, that is, a morally obligating assembly, in which the sacred objects are worshiped.

According to Durkheim, then, rituals are about establishing and maintaining social and morally obliging contracts between people. The point, for our purposes, is that this collective “mental state” cannot be achieved without the help of external “sacred objects” which are collectively venerated and which establish and maintain moral rules as to how members of the group relate to one another (Ibid.:421ff). The ritual links people to form society precisely because morality is essentially social. Participating in rituals is therefore – and in congruence with Carey’s definition – participation and integration in a social reality, which the ritual continuously helps constitute.

Thus, Durkheim’s concept of ritual has the following characteristics: The ritual establishes a common focus (“the sacred object”) and a common mental state. The ritual venerates the sacred objects, and those who do not show appropriate respect will be punished in some way (symbolically or physically) by the others in the group. The penance may be a ritual in itself.

If we ignore for a moment the religious elements in Durkheim’s concept of ritual and instead focus on the social and moral aspects, it is indeed possible to accept Anna’s use of the word, “ritual” to describe her family’s mornings. All the family members have a common focus (to accomplish all the necessary chores in time), they share a common mental state (the stress of rushing), and Anna stresses how important it is that everyone respect the common project, i.e., do the things they have to do in time. And if they do not? “Pity the soul who falls out of step...”

Anna and her family’s morning activities fill the moral and social criteria of ritual by Durkheim’s definition. There are, however, a number of implications of using Durkheim’s definition which should be borne in mind. First of all, Durkheim describes rituals as primarily something out of the ordinary, as extra-ordinary, outside the everyday or in what Jensen would call “time out”. There is nothing extra-ordinary about Anna’s family’s morning routine. To use our earlier terminology, the activities in question are quite definitely within “time in” – a situation in which the family members are acutely caught up in the demands of reality and have not a chance to “suspend” the flow by “stopping and thinking” about what they are doing, let alone why.

Still, I maintain that it is a ritual in Durkheim’s sense of the word. There is a sacred object, a common focus and a shared mental state. What we must do, however, is to ‘secularize’ Durkheim so that we can recognize rituals in everyday social life. I argue that Durkheim’s concept of ritual lends itself to such an application inasmuch as it includes the social and integrative dimensions of ritual, in contrast to, for example, Silverstone’s emphasis on ritual as an individual and reality-suspending activity. We
find a link between Durkheim’s classical concept and the establishment of a operationalizable concept that examines ritual actions – with or without media involve-ment – in modern society in the work of Erving Goffman.

**Goffman: Updating Durkheim’s Concept of Ritual**

Goffman explicitly carries on the legacy of Durkheim and explores the extent to which Durkheim’s religious concept of ritual can be applied to contemporary, secularized society (Goffman 1967, 1971). Rituals exist in modern society, as well, Goffman assures us, but in contrast to traditional, religious rituals, modern ritual does not make a clear-cut distinction between the sacred and the profane. What is worshiped and respected, the sacred object, is the integrity of the individual: “In one sense this secular world is not so irreligious as we might think. Many gods have been done away with, but the individual himself stubbornly remains as a deity of considerable importance” (Goffman 1967:95). The gods are dead, but: “What remains are brief rituals one individual performs for and to another, attesting to civility and good will on the performer’s part and to the recipient’s possession of a small patrimony of sacredness. What remains, in brief, are interpersonal rituals” (Goffman 1971:89).

Ritual behaviour has moved out of the temple and into the micro-social behaviours of everyday life. A vestige of our sacred heritage is a respect for each others’ integrity. Anyone who takes part in an interpersonal interaction is careful to make sure that neither his own nor the other’s integrity is violated. Rather, efforts are made to protect it, to avoid committing a faux pas, making a fool of oneself. This kind of respect is practised in numerous rituals, some of which we may even regard as empty gestures.

But, even the smallest rituals, Goffman assures us, constitute and maintain social reality as a moral reality. Ritual interactions produce and reproduce moral ‘judgments’ which are internalized, tucked away in our consciousness to guide us in future situations; they help us distinguish right from wrong. Goffman’s point is that society is held together by many micro-social rituals, which bring us to conform to various social mores and precepts:

- One must look ... rather to the fact that societies everywhere, if they are to be societies, must mobilize their members as self-regulating participant in social encounters. One way of mobilizing the individual for this purpose is through ritual ... The general capacity to be bound by moral rules may well belong to the individual, but the particular set of rules which transforms him into a human being derives from requirements established in the ritual organization of social encounters (Goffman 1967:44-45).

Goffman considers particularly face-to-face conversations as rituals since they require both parties to accept and abide by the established mood of the conversation. He notes how a particularly successful conversation can leave one in a kind of trance (Ibid.:113f).

Briefly, to sum up: Goffman holds to Durkheim’s basic criteria as to what constitutes a ritual. Ritual is a social form, a mode of interaction, not a given act or content. The makings of a ritual are a common focus (the sacred object, respect for one another’s personal integrity, a shared mental state or mood and a common space (compliance with the conditions pertaining to the interaction, ‘keeping pace’), and negative sanctions, should one break the rules (the element of moral obligation).

Important to my argument here is Goffman’s observation that rituals occur every-where and all the time in everyday life. They are the lubricant that makes social interac-
tion possible. Without them we would, in principle, have a state of chaos for there would be no blueprint for how to conduct oneself successfully, i.e., without constantly putting the Other’s integrity at risk.

A point I would like to call attention to is that even though rituals no longer take place in a sanctuary, the ritual itself creates a special space, virtually regardless of where one happens to be. Thus, the two respective definitions of ritual that we have considered here (Silverstone/Jensen and Durkheim/Goffman) point to two different kinds of ritual spaces. Silverstone and Jensen speak of a place for reflection, a place to get perspective on social reality through contemplation. Goffman, on the other hand, sees ritual as creating a space for action, i.e., ritual is a means of participating in and becoming integrated into social reality, a kind of admission ticket to various social situations. In short, whereas Silverstone’s concept of ritual emphasizes suspension, Goffman’s emphasizes integration.

Of course, it is hardly a question of whose conceptualization is ‘best’. The interesting thing is that we are talking about two different kinds of or aspects of ritual that, for that matter, most probably can occur at one and the same time. For example: It is entirely conceivable that one or another member of Anna’s household might pause if something on the radio, for example, gave him or her cause for thought, for reflection.

Let us now return to Anna and her family’s morning ritual as a ritual in Goffman’s sense of the word. A ritual in which radio, too, plays a significant part.

Anna’s Morning as Ritual
The basis for my contention that Anna and her family’s morning activities qualify as a ritual is the presence of a sacred object that orders the family’s activities. It is not the radio – or the ‘text’, because that is not what the family shows respect for. (On the contrary! one is tempted to say.) At first sight, it may seem that time is the object of everyone’s respect; the one thing the family member cannot do is make each other late. But I propose that the ritual goes deeper than that; I propose that the sacred object is the family. The family as a morally obliging and – in principle – life-long project.

That it is a sacred object is evidenced by the fact that Anna is prepared to punish (if only symbolically) anyone who does not duly respect it. (“Pity the soul...”) There is an implicit moral obligation for every member of the family to preserve the family as a social unit. This may sound rather lofty, but it is, after all, micro-actions that give social institutions their stability.

Rituals by definition always have importance that transcends the concrete situation in which the ritual takes place. We should recall that rituals always elicit some degree of self-discipline among the participants. And this self-discipline must draw on something greater than the situation at hand. This is an important point in extension of Goffman’s moral concept of ritual. As sociologist Eric Rothenbuhler (1998) expresses the notion:

Ritual action is action oriented toward transcendence of the particularities of the situation in which it is performed. A ritual situation is one constructed so as to offer transcendence of the particularities of the social circumstances surrounding it (61).

Thus, we may say that Anna’s family’s morning ritual actualizes an ongoing common project, the preservation of the family as a consistent and coherent unit. A project which extends in both time and space, far beyond the situation any given morning, both back into the past and on into the future. A project that gives each family member enough motivation so that each takes his or her position and plays by the rules. Thus, it is in the
ritual that material reality and idea meet and coalesce. Or, as Rothenbuhler put it: "[R]itical is a communication device for uniting the ideal and the material, the general and the particular, the cosmic and the ordinary, the past and the future, the structures of history and the happenings of individual lives" (Ibid.: 64).

When the family’s morning runs smoothly, like a ritual, it is because each family member ‘knows’ intuitively that they are taking part in a ritual, and that violations of the ritual have consequences that transcend the immediate situation. They may not necessarily describe their morning activities as a ritual (although Anna did), but they recognize the activities as a ritual and adjust their behaviour accordingly.

This suggests that rituals do more than bring individuals together in ‘perfect harmony’. Rituals may perhaps serve to put aside and/or allay tensions that might exist among the participants. The ritual that Anna’s family members perform each morning may therefore be seen as a momentary neutralization of all conflicts that may exist among the family members. Partly because it would be highly impractical if, for example, a son chose to rebel against his father in these few minutes before Father is to have an important meeting at the office, and partly because the ritual, more generally, serves as a means of maintaining social groups over time, despite whatever internal tensions may exist.

When each family member adapts to the situation, they also (re-)assume their position, both in the concrete situation and in the family as social structure. Ritual actions are, as Goffman points out, a means for the individual to be integrated into a social reality, in which he or she has or is assigned various positions, depending on his or her current situation. The ritual assigns a position to all the members of Anna’s family, a position they have no choice but to accept at the time the ritual takes place. One may therefore say that an element of submission is involved whenever one participates in a ritual: Participation presumes that one accepts one’s position. Obviously, when the ritual is over, each is free to position him-/herself again – as a student, for example, or as an employee.

Before I proceed to consider radio’s part in the ritual, I would like to state two reservations. First, not everyone in the family necessarily interprets the function of the ritual in the same way. To Anna the morning ritual may be a project of social bonding; to the others, perhaps a ritual of transition from the private into the public sphere, i.e., a daily separation rite. Different interpretations of what the ritual is about can co-exist, and it is not unlikely that one and the same person may perceive the ritual to fulfil several functions at once. Alternatively, ‘the morning ritual’ may comprise several smaller rituals, each of which serves its own purpose. It is important to note in this connection that all the family members are focused on the same project. Secondly, everyday rituals are not conscious or consciously constituted. They go unnoticed and will often reach consciousness only if the ritual is violated and the ritual order has to be re-established by sanctioning the transgression.

**The Role of Radio in the Ritual**

Thus, as we have established, radio is not the sacred object. Radio is but an instigating element in the ritual. Its contribution is to establish and maintain the mood or atmosphere that is required in order for the ritual to be performed by the participants in concert. My thesis is that the radio’s presence in Anna’s kitchen in the morning helps establish a ritual space through the continuous sound that emanates from it. This space is a space not for reflection, but for action; it is a space which introduces the morning
ritual, focuses and synchronizes the family members' activities. In other words, the radio helps fulfill a precondition for the family's interaction and activities while it also serves as a 'boundary marker', marking the duration of the ritual (cf., for example, Larsen 1998).

Other everyday phenomena - a lighted candle, the aroma of fresh coffee, and so forth - can contribute in the same or similar fashions. But the radio is particularly well suited because its sound can be heard in several rooms and because its content is continuous and regular. The radio helps stage the same ritual day after day and serves as a constant reminder of 'where' and 'what' one is and that one's activities take place within a ritual framework. Thus, radio both helps initiate and helps institutionalize the ritual.

That is the function of the sound of the radio. What, then, is the role of its content? One can only speculate, but I would like to call attention to two aspects. First, the nature of radio as public discourse; secondly, the radio as a special 'pulse' or mood.

Radio broadcasting is by definition public, addressed to and accessible to all. Radio content is therefore an essentially public discourse relative to the more or less private contexts in which the medium is used. Radio's information content - be it news, entertainment or music - intrudes into a private state of existence in the morning and introduces the coming day as a social reality with special rules for social interaction. My point here is that precisely the public, civil tone of radio as a medium and its mirroring of the world as social reality is a prime reason why radio plays such a central, yet virtually unnoticed role in many peoples' mornings. Radio enters into a private room and presents a world that is open to everyone, thereby conveying a kind of parasocial feeling of community, which also affects our behaviour vis-à-vis others in our surroundings. Switching on the radio is to enter into a shared world, a world one also shares with those in one's immediate surroundings. Thus, the radio is well suited to establishing a common frame around a ritual, which in essence presumes a common mental state and focus of attention.

The other dimension relating to content is the pulse, rhythm and atmosphere of the medium. American sociologist Randall Collins has reviewed a series of interesting studies which show that human interaction can be synchronized down to the level of the most subtle gestures (Collins 1988:202f), so subtle that they can only be registered by filming interacting people at a rate of 24 frames per second and then playing the film in slow motion. The film sequences reveal that partners in interaction synchronize their gestures rhythmically: they nod their heads, blink, etc., in accordance with the rhythm of the conversation they are carrying on. The degree of synchronization may vary, but generally it becomes more intense over the course of the conversation. Other studies have found that partners in conversation adjust their voices (tone, loudness, tempo, etc.) so as to establish a common vocal atmosphere. In other words, individuals entering into a social situation adjust their behaviour in a mutual fashion, even down to the bodily, physiological level, which gives the social interaction a common rhythm or pulse.8

The establishment of this common pulse is confirms and intensifies the parties' attention and involvement in a manner that is characteristic of ritual. The individuals are 'united' and are kept in the special realm that the ritual constitutes. The rhythmic synchronization in interaction is not conscious. It is a behavioural, social-biological competence of very subtle expression.

One can only speculate as to the function this behavioural conformity may serve. One thesis suggests that a common rhythm helps make the interaction more predictable. One can sense how the interaction is progressing, one feels the 'beat' and receives
signals as to whether and in what ways one should ‘follow along’ and ‘keep the pace’ in
the interaction. A nother theory suggests that the common rhythm, once achieved, pro-
duces an intensity that is strived for in social interaction, which is one of the main rea-
sions why people like to participate in rituals and why ritual actions, large and small,
give rise to feelings of solidarity and belonging (Ibid.:203).

In my view, radio’s ability to create an atmosphere and to facilitate feelings of be-
longing is a somewhat overlooked element in radio research. I suggest that the tone,
tempo and pulse of radio contributes to the social synchronization and intensity that can
arise between listeners in one and the same room, such as Anna and her family. It is an
aspect that can partly explain the regulating and non-content oriented use of radio in
everyday life. A hypothesis for further study is that radio may be used to regulate the
atmosphere or mood and thereby the space of interaction.

**Conclusion**

The overarching premise in this article is a conviction that media use is not always a
matter of the relation between a ‘reader’ and a ‘text’. Many of those who study media
use in everyday life have reached that conclusion. When one asks a user of mass media
what they use the media for, only a part of their use can be explained in terms relating
to media content. It is my contention that some of this other, unexplained use involves
a ritual function. The kinds of ritual that especially interest me are those where neither
the medium nor its content have the status of ‘sacred object’, but where medium and
content are instigating elements in the unconscious rituals of everyday life. These are
rituals that are symbolic in nature and confirm and comment on aspects of social reality
that do not always relate directly to the media content. The media are instigators in the
sense that they help constitute the ritual by creating a shared mood or mental state
which organize the participants’ attention and behaviour.

The definition of the concept of ritual which I have chosen and applied may be prob-
lematic. For, if we follow Goffman’s definition of ritual as being the mortar that holds
society together, it is then hard to say what kind of behaviour is not a ritual. Goffman’s
concept represents a radical expansion of the concept which can make it difficult to
operationalize. My view is that it is quite possible to distinguish between rituals, on the
one hand, and habits or routines, on the other. First, rituals are social and have the pur-
pose of integrating individuals into the group. Second, the behaviour of members of the
group are organized around a sacred object, be it material or symbolic.

As I use the concept, I focus on rituals in micro-social contexts. This is not because I
discount macrocontextualization of human behaviour. Further analyses will show
whether the concept of ritual may establish an analytical link between micro-and
macro-analyses of behaviours like media use. Rituals are not givens; existing rituals can
be broken and actions can be ritualized and assume social importance far beyond the
concrete action itself. The study of rituals and ritualizations in everyday life is thus a
way to identify permanent and, not least, varying ‘sacred objects’ in society (such as in
the family), how they are venerated in rituals, and the power relationships that exist be-
tween the participating parties.

One area for further study is to see how different content genres may correspond to
different ritualized genres of actions (Lindlof 1988:98). That is to say, to study how lis-
teners’ criteria for choosing to listen to given radio programmes at given times ‘agree
with’ the activities they perform parallel to listening. A n approach that combines use
and content can, I believe, produce interesting insights into the deeper aspects of radio’s integration into everyday life.

Notes
2. Some of the ideas and examples presented in this article form part of a more extensive article I am writing together with Thomas Tufte, University of Copenhagen. That article treats rituals in everyday media use based on data gathered in Denmark and Brazil (Larsen & Tufte, in progress).
3. The statements about radio use that I make use of in this article come from a qualitative study, in which I interviewed people about their use of radio in everyday life. The quotes from radio users derive from this study, as well. The study was carried out in collaboration with Danmarks Radio. The findings are reported in Larsen (1995).
4. That one relies on stereotypes regarding things done routinely, ‘without thinking’, is nothing new. Berelson got the same kind of responses in 1949, when he asked people why they missed their newspaper (due to a strike). Berelson commented on the responses: “To miss the newspaper for its ‘serious’ news value seems to be the accepted, if not automatic thing to say” (Berelson 1949:116).
5. This interpretation may be seen as an extension of, for example, Bausinger’s (1984) and Nordenstreng’s (1972) observations that the act of media consumption (newspaper reading and television viewing, respectively) is at least as important as the concrete information derived from the media. The ritual behaviour confirms that the world is still there in its usual state and, secondly, gives the individual a sense of fellowship with the millions of other who (he or she knows) are doing the same thing. The media’s role in establishing ontological security is described in Larsen (1997), where, in a phenomenological perspective, Alfred Schütz’ concept of ‘horizon’ is applied to explain how the media help to constitute different frameworks of knowledge and experience around day-to-day activities. The article points out that people use the media to demarcate different horizons around their activities, which allows them to control how and to what extent the outside world can penetrate into the realm of the activity at hand.
6. Goffman’s concept of ‘framing’ is very useful in describing how media use helps to define various situations in everyday life. See, for example, Larsen (1998).
7. Both Silverstone’s concept of ‘ritual’ and Jensen’s ‘time out’ are reminiscent of the reflective state which phenomenologist Alfred Schütz so simply and appropriately call “stopping and thinking”, a process whereby we step out of the undifferentiated progress, or durée, of everyday life in order to think over one or another phenomenon and thereafter return, more “knowing” and “competent”, to the flow of life again (Schütz 1974:53).
It is the same notion as underlies anthropologist Victor Turner’s concept of the liminal experience in ritual (cf. Larsen & Tufte, in progress). Both Silverstone and Jensen refer to Turner.
8. Collins refers to studies by McClelland (1985) and Gregory (1983), among others.

References


Sally Potter’s “ecrands seconds”
A Reading of Sally Potter’s Work

Anne Jerslev

During a discussion with English film scholar Pam Cook in 1984 about visual representations of the female body director Sally Potter is asked whether she agrees with the strategy of certain female artists to completely avoid imaging the female body. Sally Potter answers

Yes, I do, though I don’t share it entirely. In my performance art in the past, I have been seen on an ice rink with no clothes on, holding a microphone, debating what’s it like to be both the muse, the female nude, and speaking for the muse.

Sally Potter’s first fiction film Thriller (30 minutes) from 1979 is a kind of meditation upon Puccini’s opera La Bohème. In Thriller the dead Mimi reflects on her role in the opera and at the same time she is reflected visually in a kind of avant garde doubling of scenes from the opera as frozen frames and pantomime tableaux. In Potter’s latest film The Tango Lesson (1997), the overall narrative principle takes the form of a doubling, too, the director placing herself both behind and in front of the camera, the auteur thus being both inside and outside the film.

Although different with respect to both narrative form and visual style, the three mentioned examples from Potter’s work are united through the principle of reflexivity, from the performance artist’s work in the beginning of her career, through the early short and to her recent film. In the above quotation there is a twofold enunciation. The artist is talking about reflexivity as a strategy and the role is referring to the pose she is adopting. In Thriller, the role is, likewise, talking both from the inside of the operatic diegesis and from the outside. She is trying to understand what happened to the seamstress Mimi, and at the same time she is repeating the melodramatic narrative of which she is a central part, by recalling that “I was told that the story is this”. Hereafter she retells the story of the opera. In The Tango Lesson, reflexivity is inscribed in the metafilmic narrative: A film director is preparing the film that has unfolded in front of our eyes. But reflexivity is at the same time present in a more subtle way in the sense that real life director Sally Potter is doubled as a diegetic character, namely a film director called Sally Potter. Thus, The Tango Lesson is about a film director named Sally Potter, played by Sally Potter who, in the beginning of the film, thinks she is working on a thriller called Rage, the setting of which is the glamorous world of fashion. But she abandons the project because the American financers want a story that she is not willing to either write or direct. At the same time she becomes infatuated with the tango and, not least, a tango performer and therefore she decides to start on a whole different film.
A Formal Principle

While the textual doubling in the first two examples from Potter’s work, the performance and the short film, is reflected upon verbally, in The Tango Lesson, it is embedded in the story, despite the emphasized metareflexivity. Whereas enunciative positions are clearly demarcated in the first two examples by means of a reflexive voice— even though, in Thriller this voice comes from a dead character in another fiction, an opera—in The Tango Lesson the image maker just installs herself in the fiction as a character—fictitious or not.

In the very first shot in Thriller a dark skinned woman sits in a chair in an empty room, laughing. There is a dissolve to a full length shot of a set piece of a room in an attic and on the sound track we hear a few notes from Bernhard Herrmann’s score to Psycho. These notes form a sound bridge to the third shot, an extremely unbalanced ultra close-up of an arm and a pair of feet. Herrmann’s score again forms a sound bridge to the fourth shot, where the title is written upon a freeze frame of the laughing woman from the first shot, Mimi. Her face is turned towards the audience and she holds her hand over her mouth in a frightened gesture. Behind her her image is doubled ad infinitum in a kind of mirror effect.

This visual construction can be regarded as one very distinct example of the formal principle and formal expression that Christian Metz, in his reflections upon Les écrans seconds (1991) calls mise en abîme, diminished or, as he puts it, “reproduced and “reduced”” (se reproduit et se “réduit”“ (Metz 1991: 73)), in principle endless, doublings of the work within the work, “the work that buds by growing smaller” (“l’oeuvre qui bourgonne en se rapetissant” (Metz 1991: 74) - miniatures of the same. In principle stories within stories ad infinity, a kind of structure of inscrutability (Thobo-Carlsen 1999: 69). Mise en abîme is one of the rhetorical expressions of textual reflexivity. It points out the level of enunciation and here, in the fourth shot in Thriller it points towards the very meaning of the film. But, furthermore, it points forward towards the interlaced, ornamental structure in The Tango Lesson.

Metz remarks that mise en abîme is just one formal construction of an écran second. But often this secondary screen is not a condensation of the first; it is not just the work reproduced en miniature, but rather refers to the very basic elements of the cinematographic medium, “procédé d’aiguillage du regard et témoignage semi-involontaire de cinématisme” (Metz 1991: 74), forming frames within frames, scenes and stages, characters framed within windows, doors and so on.

Style categories mise-en-scène and cinematography establish frames within frames in the last examples. Thus, l’écran second is most often a pictorial figure. Referring to French film scholar Marc Vernet Metz then continues in more general terms to talk about “diégétisation du dispositif” (Metz 1991: 74). Hereby he understands the many different formal strategies for inscribing profilmic and extrafilmic processes within the diegesis in a more or less invisible manner— of which l’écran second is just one:¹

¹ De la même façon, le filmage à travers un rideau incomplètement transparent (Sternberg, ophuls) “équivaut” sensiblement, pour l’effet, à un flou. Dans espoir de Malraux, la voiture des partisans qui se jette contre le canon franquiste, se sacrifiant pour le détruire, nous vaut un spectaculaire travelling-agent. ...[...] Il y a en somme
SALLY POTTER’s “ecrands seconds”

une correspondance, imparfaite et précise à la fois, entre certains effets optiques et certains motifs ou déplacements diégétiques. Ou plutôt, peut-être, entre deux mouvements symboliques, contraires et complémentaires, complices adverses et enchevêtres qui s’expliquent l’un par l’autre: de même que les procédés técnicos, bien qu’ils modifient, modulent et même modèlent notre perception de la diégèse, sont interprétés le plus souvent comme des caractères naturels et préexistants de l’histoire racontée, de même – ou inversement – certains éléments de la diégèse peuvent se “décoller” d’elle sans la désérer, mimer l’intervention discursive, et façonner notre point de vue sur les autres motifs de la fable (Metz 1991: 77).

What I am interested in in the following is, nevertheless, more specifically l’ecran second as a pictorial principle and mise en abîme as doublings and structures of inscrutability. In Sally Potter’s work constructions of beautiful images, mise-en-scène, visual pleasure, emotionality and entertainment are mixed with diegetized reflections upon the very same visual pleasure. Over and over again she forms ecrands seconds within The Tango Lesson’s mise-en-scène on both a metafilmic and metacinematographic level in the same manner that Metz points out that l’ecran second as a formal principle is always metacinematographic whereas it is not necessarily always metafilmic.

The film wraps up dance numbers in ecrands seconds. Often shots are framed symmetrically through the rooms’ ornaments so that the edges of the frame seem to form a stage, columns frame the characters dancing in the same way that a door and a curtière form a curtain in a theatre in Pablo’s performance in the kitchen. A gain and again ecrans seconds are extrapolated, the film thus calling attention to the fictional and the scenic. Likewise the director’s gaze is multiplied inscrutably within the metafilmic register. The audience is invited to look at Pablo the way the director looks at him as a woman in love. But we are also given access to a different gaze that, although the two ways of looking are not completely inseparable, Sally occupies in scenes where she is trying out possible camera positions for her Rage project and hesitatingly forms ecrands seconds with her hands in front of her eyes. What seems in one moment an obvious metafilmic gesture suddenly transforms into mute ecrans seconds, the second – or secondary – screen both doubling and covering the first because the character Sally’s framing gaze equals the camera’s. In this respects, l’ecran second may both as scenic frames within frames and Sally’s framing gaze be characterized as mise en abîmes constructions, because director and main character is one and the same. The gaze of the diegetic director, the film director, is always, simultaneously, superimposed onto the gaze of the extradiegetic director, the film’s director. Nevertheless, this mise en abîme construction has got nothing to do with privacy.

The film maintains a profound visual ambiguity. Put differently, the film insists that personal and professional matters are inseparable. The director inscribes herself within the story as herself and yet as someone completely other. When the diegetic Sally’s look is emphasized in point of view shots she is a corporealized character and at the same time diegetized filmic apparatus. The fictive character looks primarily at others; but she is also looked upon by herself. Confronted with this dizzying filmic abyss one is likely to ask: Supposing the film we are watching is the finished film, so to speak, is Sally within the fiction then constructed by another fictive Sally – or is she constructed by Sally Potter?

Following from the above argument I disagree with critics who have stated that The Tango Lesson is too private. It seems to me that quite the contrary is the case. The film captures the viewer in an abysmal interpretative crisis or in the middle of a visual mise
en abîme structure of inscrutability, surrounded by the director in front of and behind the camera. In this respect the level of privacy is present as the very epitome of inscrutability. To a certain extent the same tension between fiction and biography is installed in Virginia Woolf’s novel Orlando from 1928, upon which Potter’s film Orlando is based. The novel was originally titled “Orlando. A Biography”. Woolf used her friend and lover Vita Sackville-West as a model for the novel’s title character Orlando, and, on top of it, both the first edition of the novel and the Danish translation contained photographs of Vita Sackville-West allegedly representing Orlando.

The novel has been titled the “longest and most charming love letter in history” by Vita’s son Nigel Nicholson (cf. Glaessner 1992). Originally the book was meant as a refractory fantasy, a kind of reconstruction of the friend’s history. Among other things, and contrary to the film, Woolf donates Orlando her ancestral estate because she gives birth to a son. And, one last layer in this intertwined reality-biography palimpsest: it is said in the text following Philip’s CD recording of La Bohème, Sir Colin Davis conducting Orchestra and Chorus of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Katia Ricciarelli and José Carreras singing Mimi and Rodolfo, that Henry Murger’s novel Scènes de la vie de Bohème from 1851 from which Puccini’s opera is adapted contained autobiographical traces. In this respect, The Tango Lesson resembles Orlando and Thriller by containing (auto)biographical traces that are transformed and subverted. A further point with respect to all three films is that no basic text is nearer to reality than any other: The biographical part of The Tango Lesson is just as much a fiction as Woolf’s biographical fantasy and Puccini’s adaptation of a transformed autobiography.

Feminism, Transformations and the Essential Being

Sally Potter often mentions that she has never been interested in destroying the visual pleasure produced by classical Hollywood. When Orlando is looking directly into our eyes this is not part of a strategy of verfremdung in the Brechtian sense. Neither may Thriller be understood in this manner, contrary to the work of other 1970s avantgarde artists – and contrary to open declarations by feminist film critics who wished to destroy visual pleasure.Rather, Potter’s films from 1979 and till now situate themselves within an interesting tension and creative paradox: On the one hand the director is obviously fascinated with and inspired by mainstream cinema and on the other hand this popular film tradition is always at the same time deconstructed and taken into new directions.

There is an obvious fascination with genre films running through Potter’s work. She has worked within musicals, thrillers, and costume films. At the same time she transcends and transforms genre formulas in a substantial manner which is very obvious in The Tango Lesson, at the same time as the film makes tribute to and refers to a range of classical musicals. Likewise Orlando is, of course, neither a costume film nor a historical film. Sally Potter situates herself in the middle of this paradox by describing herself as part of an “avant-garde show business”, and she works with what she calls “the pleasure mode” (Florence 1993). On the one hand Thriller forms a profound critique of a deep rooted tradition in Western art history of inscribing woman as victim and sufferer, she who has to die spectacularly and beautifully in art in order that the male artist (inside and outside fiction) may continue and prosper as an artist. This is, of course, basically what La Bohème is about, the poor seamstress falls in love with poet Rodolfo and dies in his arms by the end of the fourth act. But at the same time Potter says of this seductive and melodious tear jerker that “After I’d listened to La Bohème a thousand
times I could still find myself moved to tears at the end of the death scene, not by the heroine’s victimization, but perhaps by the melancholy and the loss within” (MacDonald 1995). In Potter’s reception of the opera, loss transgresses the gendered embodiment of the emotion and turns into a general human experience and a kind of aesthetics of suffering.

Sally Potter is born in 1949. At first this year of birth tells a great deal about her development as a film maker. She belongs to a generation of female artists, who were part of or at least in different ways influenced by the 1970s feminist movement. Potter’s work has in one sense developed along the lines typical for the way understandings of gender has changed both within art, science and cultural debates during the past 30 years but also, more narrowly, among female artist rooted in feminism and experimental film and art groups in the 1970s. First, it is possibly to trace a movement towards mainstream or away from a too narrow and basically quite unheroic and artistically marginalized (low budget) position – at least from the point of view of Sally Potter. Second, the preoccupation with gender has shifted both from mere political-didactical positions and from understandings of relations between the sexes as simple, biased power relations. Instead, what followed is stories about relationships between men and women which are extremely difficult and filled with conflicts but at the same time also joyful and equal. In Thriller and The Gold Diggers (1983) male characters are constructed as anonymous symbolizations of power, whereas in both Orlando and The Tango Lesson they are charismatic macho figures filled with androgyne charm; fascinating creations of a different world than the female. But at the same time they are looked upon by both the female characters and the director with mixed feelings of infatuation and humour.

This change of view in Sally Potter’s work may be illuminated by comparing the beginning and the end of The Gold Diggers from 1983 with the final dance sequence in the large room in The Tango Lesson. In the beginning of The Gold Diggers Ruby, played by Julie Christie, is led down the stairs from the balcony to the ballroom by her father’s hand. In her beautiful costume she is queen of the ball, stared at with admiration and awe by everyone, and given away by her father as a kind of precious gift in order to circulate among the men on the dance floor. This scene is repeated in the end of the film, with a marked difference. Now Ruby kicks each man’s shin so that he falls ridicuously to the floor. Finally all the men lie defeated while the female guests gather to look at them.

The idea is, of course, in the manner of feminist cinema at the time, to end the film by letting the woman rise and fight against suppression, defying the fetishistic circulation of her as exchange object and aestheticized commodity in patriarchy. In the magnificent, energetic and sensual dance sequence in The Tango Lesson, on the other hand, the very physicality in the dance takes center stage. In contrast to the earlier film, dancing bears no symbolic value, and Sally circulates seemingly weightless, graceful and joyful between the three men. Now she dances with one of them, now with an other and now again with the three of them together. Finally, lying outstretched horizontally on Pablo Veron’s shoulder, her body circles floatingly dizzy and euforic. Contrary to the ritualistic and fetishized exchange in The Gold Diggers, dancing is here constructed as the outmost bodily well-being.

Of course it is difficult not to understand both Orlando and The Tango Lesson as films about gender. The preoccupation with gender and gender differences runs through the whole Potter oeuvre, from descriptions of gender differences and suppression in her first two films to notions of a fundamental equality in her last two films, a kind of hu-
man essence and solidarity that transgresses gender differences: “Same person, just a different sex”, says Orlando in front of her mirror image right after ‘he’ has turned into ‘she’. And in The Tango Lesson, romantic tensions are added to the power struggle between Pablo and Sally. Their relationship is thus symbolically duplicated in the tango which is a dance of passion more than of power, built upon a notion of the reciprocity of difference. But Potter’s films are not only about gender. It is important to her not to be labeled feminist film maker; she has underlined this often in interviews and talks about Orlando. To Potter Orlando is less a film about femininity and difference than it is about what she with a reference to Virginia Woolf calls “the essential self” (Glaessner 1992), a notion that in a way abolishes gender differences. Overall, Potter is rather reluctant to talk about feminism these years – contrary to what she did in the 1980s. In an interview in 1993 she says that

Feminism is a really difficult thing to talk about. I’ve been asked so many times by the, let’s say, populist sort of journalists: “Are you a feminist?” It’s like laying the gauntlet down. If I say yes, then it’s - Ah, we know who she is and we’ll put her back in her box and we don’t need to think about her anymore. But more important than that they all thought they knew what a feminist was. So if I said, “Yes, I’m a feminist”, it would slot in with their definition, which was a cliché of a protesting radical – everything they fear. But I’ve learned that to win, you’ve got to have cover. You’ve got to be clever. You’ve got to speak freshly with nice juicy words that intoxicate – not trigger jargon words that turn people off (in Ehrenstein 1993).

In another interview in the middle of the 1990s Sally Potter makes a big thing of having left school when she was fifteen (MacDonald 1995), of being a “hands-on person”, a practical person, and that she has just about read enough book jackets to know academic discussions and to be able to join the conversation. But in the years around 1980 the director spoke in a very different manner and in accordance with the ideas of the avantgarde of the time. In the aforementioned talk about The Gold Diggers from 1984 conducted by Pam Cook, one of feminist film theory’s leading writers, Sally Potter speaks confidently about such marxist terms as surplus value, fetishism and commodities, and she cites at length from Michel Foucault’s Les mots et les choses which inspired her into making The Gold Diggers. Nevertheless, neither in this early interview does she consider herself a maker of feminist films. In this respect she resembles many other female artists who were in sympathy, but only to a certain degree, with the feminist movement of the 1970s:

As an artist, filmmaker, or whatever, one is on some level essentially androgynous. I mean my identifications historically are with Hitchcock, Godard, Tati and other great male mentors, and the exceptions to, like Dorothy Arzner. But in cinematic history most of the filming has been done by men. I think of myself as a director and want that sense of colleagueship, of history and tradition. It gets dangerous to say that because you’re a woman you haven’t got a cultural history. That’s not true, that history is ours, too (in Cook 1984).

But even though Sally Potter has become a famous film director by the end of the 1990s, who has travelled around the world and presented her much admired and critically acclaimed Orlando, and even though her view upon film and their use value is different today from what it was 20 years ago, there is nevertheless an interest in questions of gender and art and a preoccupation with film language that unite her works throughout these 20 years. I shall elaborate further on these topics in the following by continuing
my discussion about reflexivity, écrans seconds, and narrative mise en abîmes. More specifically I shall deal with the relationship between fiction/illusion and reality in the films; this discussion is, especially in The Tango Lesson, intertwined with reflections upon the relationship between fiction and biography. And, furthermore, I shall go into those parts of the films that may be regarded as reflections upon ways of seeing connected to the films’ level of reflexivity as well as to their construction of gender. For example, in Orlando through Orlando’s glances into the camera and by way of casting – Tilda Swinton plays both the man and the woman Orlando through 400 years and Quentin Crisp plays Queen Elizabeth – and, in The Tango Lesson, through the characters’ repeated discussions – or arguments – about looking, about being able to see each other and about change of views.

What unites these two films, and The Gold Diggers, too, is the theme of transformation: “I think the key word in my work is transformation” Sally Potter said in 1995 (in MacDonald 1995). Likewise she has Julie Christie’s character in The Gold Diggers say: “I search for the secrets of transformation. I search for the secrets of my own transformation”. In The Gold Diggers the topic of transformation is further connected to gold and alchemy, a subject that Potter often refers to in interviews, possibly because of the mystical-philosophical level in alchemy. Whereas individual transformation is at stake in both Orlando and The Tango Lesson. These stories are not merely about individual growth in a more traditional understanding of the term, though, about characters reaching their essential self in a psychological sense. Especially the latest two films may be understood as stories about cosmopolitan subjects, who have transformation and travel as their final destination (whether through the centuries, across continents or from male into female). Characters are cosmopolitan subjects rooted in what German philosopher Georg Lukács calls transcendental homelessness in his work Theory of the Novel (1916/1971) – although in quite a different context. Therefore, being homeless in a broad existential understanding of the word is the artist’s destiny as well as her or his creative possibility. The transformational self is the essential self in Potter’s work. The Tango Lesson finishes with Pablo speaking his fear of never being “chez moi” anywhere, his fear of “d’être quelqu’un sans racines”, of disappearing without leaving a single trace. But Sally responds that this was maybe the reason why they met each other. The result of their meeting, the film itself, is therefore a trace and a miracle which at least and almost literally may establish an “imaginary homeland” to borrow Salman Rushdie’s phrase (1991).

Sally Potter’s Work
Before I go further into the latest film I want to say a little more about Sally Potter’s earlier work. As a multi artist she has worked both as a dancer and a choreographer – she formed the Limited Dance Company in 1974 and participated in a number of dance shows throughout the 1970s. She makes music (for example Jimmy Summerville’s song in Orlando), she sings (the final songs in Orlando and The Tango Lesson) and she has combined film with other art forms. In the 1970s she was especially interested in experimenting with the basic elements in film language such as the frame and the cut and she worked with both 8 and 16 mm film stock. Her work Combines from 1972 which she made in collaboration with The London Contemporary Dance Theatre consisted of both live dance and projections of the very same dance onto three screens behind the dancers. Thus, early in her work she showed the interest in the relationship between reality and illusion that seems to me to form a fundamental tension in The Tango Lesson.
In preparation of her work Play from 1971 Potter filmed three pairs of twins who play on a sidewalk. All three pairs of children were filmed with two cameras, so that each camera covered one part of the sidewalk. When the work was shown to audiences two projectors presented the two different takes of each pair of twins side by side and, thus, Potter produced a kind of split screen effect. In this way the whole width of the sidewalk was projected at once, separated only by the film frame. What is seen is therefore the sidewalk projected as one unit and yet divided in two different cinematographic spaces. The original separation of the profilmic space is further enhanced by projecting the left part in colour and the right part in black and white. In this way Potter underlines the magical breaking open of both film space and film frame when one twin suddenly jumps from one screen to another and from one film space to the other.

After Combines Potter made Thriller (1979) which is primarily based on Puccini's opera; but it refers likewise to Alfred Hitchcock's Psycho. The following The Gold Diggers (1983) is also an avantgarde work. It starred Julie Christie in one of the two leading roles and was produced by an entirely female crew. It goes for both Thriller and The Gold Diggers that it are stories about the symbolic role of femininity in Western art and culture; thus woman and gold are repeatedly made synonymous in The Gold Diggers. Furthermore, like Thriller it is about female friendships as an alternative to the commodified, fetishized or stigmatized circulation of women among men. In the last sequence the black woman liberates the white woman. She rides into the ball room on a white horse and rescues the Christie character like the Prince rescued Snow White and together they ride towards new and promising horizons.

The Gold Diggers did extremely poor at the box office. It seems among other things that casting Julie Christie, one of England's most admired actresses and most photographed faces in the 1960s and 1970s, gave rise to quite wrong expectations. It appears that the failure with The Gold Diggers has been quite traumatic to Potter. In all her interviews after Orlando she mentions how terrible it was to see people leaving the theatre before the end (“After The Gold Diggers I was cinematically in the wilderness for a decade”, she recounts, for example (in Ehrenstein 1993)). Furthermore, she underlines that she does not find it attractive at all to be placed in a marginalized position, heroic or not, she wants more than just a narrow audience. She got a big audience nine years later, in 1992, when she made Orlando. She had worked on the project for several years, most of the time together with Tilda Swinton, at the same time as she tried to find ways of financing the film without funding from the BFI who had blacklisted her after The Gold Diggers. Simultaneously, she made other projects, for example two documentaries for Channel 4, one of which is a programme about female characters in Russian cinema called I Am an Ox, I Am a Horse, I Am a Man, I Am a Woman (1989) – she had therefore spent some time in the USSR before she made the scenes with the Russian princess in Orlando which is Russian co-produced. Likewise, she made a kind of spy film parody called The London Story in 1986.

Metatextual reflexions run through all Sally Potter's works in the sense that they are all about art, about visuality and gender and the cultural circumstances under which art is produced. Thus, Thriller is basically about the perpetual and pathetic construction of female figures as victims. Female characters represent emotion and eternal beauty. Therefore, when Mimi is carried away from the attic "in arabesque" as she simultaneously describes her pose off screen, she mimes, or forms a posture in classical ballet, the arabesque, where the dancer is standing on one leg, with the other stretched and lifted backwards, and often with the arms stretched as well. In death, the female characters are transformed into pure emotionality and ethereal pathos.
Sally Potter lets the dead Mimi ask herself whether this is really the story of her life and the story of her death. In this respect not only the title frames but the whole narrative forms a mise en abîme. The diegetic character reflects upon the reasons for the very short life given to her in another fiction, an opera, performed for the first time in another time and place, in Torino in the beginning of 1896. A corresponding reflexive figure is repeated in Orlando, which is furthermore a story about the birth of an artist, a writer. In the beginning we see the young page sitting under a tree with a pile of blank paper in his lap. In the part called “Poetry”, in 1650, we meet Orlando as the romantic young man who tries to write poems. But, even though the renowned poet who visits Orlando is constructed as a vulgar opportunist, there seems to be no doubt that his opinion of Orlando’s writings is right. Nevertheless, Orlando wrote a poem called “Death of a Lover” in the part of the film that follows immediately after Sasha has left him. In the “Birth” part of the film both a girl and a book is born. Orlando gives her manuscript to an editor, who wants more love and a happy ending just as the American producer in The Tango Lesson wants something different than Sally Potter has written. In the final scene in the film, Orlando sits under the same tree as in the beginning, only this time she has no paper in her lap. The blank paper has been filled simultaneously with the progression of her own history. The book is finished – maybe the written version of the film that we have just seen. Writing a book is at the same time creating the essential transformational self in Orlando.

In an interview about The Tango Lesson in Time Out (Andrew 1997) Sally Potter mentions that she is inspired by Powell and Pressburger’s The Red Shoes from 1948 “which is about the compulsion to dance”. The same inspiration is obvious in Orlando which is also dedicated to Michael Powell (1905-1990). The dedication may surprise if one is only familiar with Michael Powell’s infamous horror film Peeping Tom from 1960. But together with Hungarian immigrant Emeric Pressburger, Powell made a range of film in the second part of the 1940s who were both praised and criticized for their flamboyant visual style and rhythm, their extremely choreographed use of colour and their unique blend of fantasy and reality, for example Black Narcissus (1947), The Red Shoes (1948), and The Tales of Hoffmann (1951). The last two films are ballet films and both The Tango Lesson and Orlando enter into a dialogic relationship with The Red Shoes in several ways. The train, for example, is a leitmotif in The Red Shoes – just like the train or rather, the sound and the smoke from a train represent “the future” in Orlando. And like The Red Shoes the Tango Lesson is about the difficult relationship between love and art.

The Red Shoes is a tale about a ballet dancer, Victoria Page, who is divided between her devotion to her work and her private love life. Therefore she is in a sense also divided between two men. One of them is the ballet master Lermontov who has made her a great artist and intends to make her an even greater artist and contends that “a dancer who falls in love will never be a great dancer”. The other is her beloved husband Julian Kraster who is also a composer and conductor and who, on his side, could not imagine having a wife who would not devote her whole life to him. This visual masterpiece’s impossible and absurd solution to this dilemma is to have Victoria take her own life. She returns to the ballet, because this is all she can do. Even though it will ruin her marriage and her life she returns once more in order to dance the prima ballerina’s part in the ballet “The Red Shoes” based upon Hans Christian Andersen’s story about a girl who danced herself into death, while at the same time life and love just passed her by. But right before the curtain rises her feet in the red ballet shoes takes her life into theirs and lead her onto a balcony from which she throws herself in front of a train.
Both Orlando and The Tango Lesson can be regarded at one and the same time as contemporary versions of The Red Shoes. But they are also kind of defiant alternatives to Powell and Pressburger’s notion of woman as artist. Even though The Red Shoes is more complex and rich than I have made it, it suggests that sublime art can only be created in a realm of solitude, in seclusion from every day social life. Likewise, it suggests that it is the female artist who has to choose between impossible alternatives. Whereas both The Tango Lesson and Orlando, on the contrary, suggest that art is part of life and great art arises from the interplay between everyday life and creation. Not in the sense that art is just confessions in disguise. Orlando is far from this and The Tango Lesson, too, even though it has been referred to as documentary (underlined by its blank and white images) or semi-biographical privacy. Rather, both films believe in an absolutely anti-romantic notion of art.

Mimi’s death in La Bohème produces the ending’s melodramatic pathos. But in Thriller she rises from the dead or speaks from the beyond of opera history. Since she is already dead she is in a sense placed in a privileged enunciative position as a disembodied voice over. She looks at the scenery and asks herself whether this tragic death was not in reality a murder. In Thriller, the voice-over refers to herself as both “I” and “you” and thus she creates a fluid enunciation – at the same time she is both homodiegetic and heterodiegetic. Orlando starts by having the young page Orlando turn towards the audience and make clear what the voice-over is referring to: “But when he...” says the narrator, but then Orlando interrupts and says “that is, I”, and the narrator then continues “...came into the world”. Thus the voice-over seems at once to be both frame narrator and embedded narrator. In The Tango Lesson one might say that the voice-over narrator is embodied and transformed into a fictional character within the diegesis. It is thus no coincidence that the film besides music from La Bohème uses the famous score by Bernard Herrmann in Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho – one further correspondence being that in Psycho, too, the heroine dies tragically. As is well known she is murdered brutally quite early in the film. Both Mimi’s talk and the whole film takes the form of a quest for the answer to this murder question, and embedded in this narrative quest is a complaint that she and the opera’s second female character, Musetta, who is a prostitute and the mistress of painter Marcello were just “set up as complementary characters to serve our roles” – the good girl and the bad girl – “we never got to know each other, perhaps we would have loved each other”. The only diegetic sound is Mimi’s laughter in the beginning and in the end of the film. Thus, the hearty laughter as a non-discursive bodily expression functions here, like in other feminist films from the same period (Marleen Gorris’ A Question of Silence (1982) and Anja Breiens Hustruer (Wives, 1975)), as a subversive strategy towards patriarchal discourses. And yet, besides the dissonant style and avantgarde form there is still the popular and melodic Puccini opera music – at least today the music is widely known and popular. There is the beautiful bodily postures that even in this first film transcends any critical discussion of the construction of the female body in Western art. And finally, there is the ambivalent invocation of the arabesque, that refers back to Potter’s career as a dancer but likewise points towards the construction of the dancing body in The Tango Lesson.

The Tango Lesson has the arabesque both as its basic formal principle and the focus of its visual fascination. Primarily we find these interlaced patterns without reference and without meaning in the tango’s intertwined ornamental figures and close-ups of the dancers’ legs which without effort wind around each other in stylized and sensuous pat-
terns. Furthermore, through the stylized interaction between the male and the female tango dancer the film resumes Potter’s discussion about female figures’ function as ornamentation within masculine projects in art. Thus, Pablo states right after Sally has performed as his tango partner in a show that “you should do nothing when you dance, just follow; otherwise you block my freedom to move, my liberty”. What is interesting in The Tango Lesson, though, is that there is a reversal of these gendered positions in the second half of the film. And obviously man and woman are not fundamentally antagonistic. Furthermore, The Tango Lesson makes no effort to describe friendships between Sally and the other female characters. On the contrary, as a matter of fact:

In the scene where Sally sees Pablo Veron dance for the first time, he is finally framed solely by Sally Potter’s camera when he and his partner are applauded after their flawless performance. To a certain extent the director has brutally cut out den female dancer. This framing might on one hand be understood as a a point of view shot, expressing that Sally has only eyes for Pablo, a cinematographic expression of love at first sight. But the framing might also be understood in a different way. The framing might be understood as the extradiegetic director’s imprint within this mise en abîme structure, where illusion and reality, diegetic and cinematographic levels form their own arabesque, From beyond fictional time and space Sally Potter inscribes here almost invisibly the jealousy that is not represented diegetically until in a later sequence. In an interview in Time Out Potter responds when asked about the biographical material in the film that “It was far more tempestuous in reality! [...] I had to tone everything down” (in Andrew 1997). But after the fact and behind the camera director Sally Potter can alone decide to cut out the female dance partner from the image frame that the character Sally Potter has great difficulty to admit she is jealous of.

Apparently The Tango Lesson is a film about what it is like to be a (female) film director, and it is about the preparation of the finished film that we are watching. That is, a more or less autobiographical film, the reconstruction of a part of a personal past. Sally Potter plays herself, and the same goes for Pablo Veron and other characters. But The Tango Lesson is not a documentary. Rather, it is at once a musical and a tribute to the non-American and non-commercial cinema. Evidently, the film is an informed critique of Hollywood films and the economical cynicism and cynical populism in the business. This is expressed most clearly in the swimmingpool scene with its caricature of the American producer and his team. But the film is more subtle than just being a caricature. Because, just like the film director Sally Potter can manipulate Pablo Veron’s dance partner out of the image frame she can conjure up an actor without legs. The sequences about Sally’s Rage-project might thus also be regarded from the point of view of mise en abîme doublings: a defiant comment upon the American producers reluctance to cast her fantasy about a film director without legs in a wheeling chair: not the diegetic Sally but Sally Potter’s colourful takes belies the fictitious – but maybe also biographically authentic – producers’ words. Films are economical realities but also magic. Therefore, the Rage sequences may be understood as an act, a number which basically stages film director Sally Potter’s superiority. She gets her revenge in more than one sense, contrary to the diegetic Sally who by the end of the film has still not raised enough money for her tango film. The director Sally Potter makes a whole different film and at the same time she shows that she might just as easily and with equally magnificent results have made the first one.

Thriller recreates La Bohème as a theatrical performance. Film recordings of earlier performances of the opera are intercut with Mimi’s reconstructions and reflections that
take place in a theatre set piece. Likewise, The Gold Diggers mixes a theatrical setting with a ‘realistic’ setting, since a range of the film’s scenes take place in a theatre, both on stage and behind stage. This goes for The Tango Lesson, too, only the theatre stage is here more subtly and invisibly staged as “écran second”. Like an ordinary musical The Tango Lesson consists of a range of dance numbers. It refers openly to some of the classical musicals, for example in the scene where Pablo and Sally dance at the Seine which refers to Gene Kelly’s and Leslie Caron’s dance on the same location in An American in Paris (1951). In both films this particular scene furthermore takes place during the couples’ first rendez vous. Likewise, the rain dance after Pablo’s and Sally’s arrival in Buenos Aires refers to the title number in Singin’ in the Rain (1952). Overall, there is a lot of Gene Kelly in Pablo Veron’s dance.

The filmic highlights are the dance numbers just like in other musicals, and the story is more often a means of tying the dance numbers together. Like in many other musicals dance numbers are motivated in the sense that they take place in a ballroom, on a stage or otherwise are spontaneous expressions of joy. But some of the narrative sequences in between dance numbers in The Tango Lesson turn out to be numbers – or stagings – as well. In a sense they resemble the dance numbers because they suspend the flow of narrative time and transform the scene into illuminated and condensed moments. Thus, The Tango Lesson equals dance and love, or maybe, rather, the film tries in a time bound medium to transcend this very specificity of the medium in order to construct feelings of juissance.

Dance may be understood as signifiers without signified. A n art form which just like music does not mean anything and does not refer to anything in itself (cf. Kolbjoernsen 1998). Dance often constructs its own space on film. Although dance numbers take place in well-defined and narratively motivated places the scenes often transform these place into dream spaces beyond time where the body is capable of transcending its daily physical capacity. Thus, dance is an essential expression of transformation in Sally Potter’s work. And dance make us forget “ce corps trop terrestre” (Hadj-Mousa 1993). But the camera’s choreography and movements contribute to this – in The Tango Lesson for example when Sally dances with Pablo after she has returned from Argentine for the first time or, later in the film, the dance number in the large hall in which the movements are enhanced and enlarged through the grandiose camera travellings along the four dancing persons. Thus, Ratiba Hadj-Mousa’s important point is that cinematography contributes as much as choreography to the creation of beauty, sensuality, weightlessness, and bodily energy in filmed dance. In this respect dance as suspended time in The Tango Lesson becomes yet another miniature image of the whole film, a mise en abîme frame within the frame. Even though from the outset the film seems quite simple narratively, its fundamental mise en abîme forms a temporal arabesque and thus the film may finally be regarded as a complex interlaced pattern.

Sally Potter once stated that one cannot capture “the experience of dancing, at least not directly. You may get the surface of it, but you don’t get anything that resembles the incredible feeling in the body that dance gives you” (in MacDonald 1995). I think she touches very precisely upon a fundamental aspect of the fascination with both dance and the musical genre; and like Jane Feuer said, too, this genre has an air about it of total freedom. It gives us “a glimpse of what it would like to be free” (Feuer 1982: 84), liberated from bodily gravity, freed from social bonds, completely absorbed in bodily harmony. Maybe Sally Potter tries to evoke the same feeling outside dance numbers by means of her fundamental deconstruction of narrative time. One might say that in a
certain respect she tries to visualize what cannot, paradoxically enough, be visualized in moving images.

A n example of the film’s deconstruction of continuous time: In “The Fifth Lesson” Pablo and Sally sit in a cafe and talk philosophically about God and our ability to control our own destinies. She says that she would call herself an atheist, but that on the other hand she feels that she is a Jew. Hereafter he says “I’m a dancer – and a Jew”. In the following shots they take each other’s hands at the same time as tears run down the chin of both of them, so real and yet so finished so that they almost resemble glycerine tears. This feeling of artificiality and voluntary pathos is confirmed by the rumble of thunder on the sound track – which together with melodious and yet dissonant tones from a clarinet leads into the next ‘number’ in the airport, where infatuation and parting is at once melodramatized and parodied. In “The Eleventh Lesson” where Pablo asks Sally whether he has any lines in her film and that he must take “acting lessons”, she asks him to say “je suis un danseur”. He tries to say the line, but then he asks why he has to say it, since she already knows that. Then Sally asks him to imagine exactly the scene in the cafe, that we have already seen; the only difference is that she asks him to say in French what he said before in English. To which he responds that maybe he doesn’t want to cry at all on film.

Again, the scene may be understood in different ways. First, Sally’s and Pablo’s argument may be understood straightforward: the director gets an idea to a scene from her own experiences, and she transforms reality into fiction with artistic liberty (here: The line is changed from English to French). But the scene might also be regarded as one more expression of and contribution to the collapsing of continuous time. Regarded from this point of view the feeling of glycerine tears is confirmed: The idea to the scene, that we saw earlier, is conceived here, and, thus, at this point in the film, the earlier scene is transformed into one of the stagings in the film that Sally is both inside and outside and which Sally Potter is both inside and outside. When Pablo cries in the earlier scene this might be understood as yet one more expression of the superiority of film director Sally Potter: Despite his alleged unwillingness she has Pablo Veron crying in The Tango Lesson. She may be the female dancer in the tango but she is also able to lead.

Of course it is also a joke that Sally Potter lets Pablo pronounce with such naïvety that she already knows he is a dancer. The line is one example of the film’s very affectionate and yet ironic construction of Pablo Veron as an at once self-centred and brilliant dancer. (Another example is the funny shot of him sitting in the bath tub with a mirror in front of him, reading a book about Marlon Brando). But Pablo’s remark contributes at the same time to the film’s overall question: what is illusion and what is reality. Sally insists upon inscribing reality in fiction, and she says in the beautiful mirror-scene in the barber shop that work and private life is one and the same thing to her: “What do you see?” Pablo asks to her mirror image. And Sally replies, “I see you on a screen”. Pablo thinks this implies that then she is not present, because she has transformed herself into a camera, but Sally denies: “That’s how I love you, Pablo. With my eyes. With my work”. Again this is an example of a multi layered construction of l’ecran second: Sally tells Pablo that she is looking upon him from a certain, filmic, point of view. She constantly installs him into inner frames, so to speak, and, thus the film’s many point of view shots are already ecrans seconds. In this scene she is furthermore framed in a mirror at the same time as she is observed by the director outside the film. - At least one of the layers of fiction is eliminated as the camera pans away from the mirror image.
The ambiguous construction of fiction and reality is likewise linked to Potter’s choice of actors in Orlando and to questions of a gendered gaze. Just like the question is whether the Sally Potter character in The Tango Lesson is Sally Potter, so the question in Orlando is whether we look at a man or a woman. It seems that profilmic reality keeps intruding when we look at the characters and really want to see them. The fact, for example that Queen Elizabeth is played by a man (the late Quentin Crisp), who is, furthermore, a famous gay personality, creates a tension that may to a certain extent place the diegetic characters above gender: It seems to me that when the queen in a close up tells the handsome and almost dewy page Orlando not to fade, not to wither and not to grow old, then the image of her is freed from gendered determinations as much as Orlando is by the end of the film. Both the camera angle, the close-up, and the portrait within the frame, the old face, contributes to the creation of a melancholic awareness of aging and bodily decay that seem to make gender transparent. Like when Potter talks about her love of La Bohème the close-up filled with pathos and melancholy illuminates loss, the loss of youth, the loss of life. Thus, it makes reference to the essential self at the same time as the image constructs a gender labyrinth: a queen playing a Queen, or a man playing a woman who is said, in reality, to have told about herself that she was a woman on the outside but a man on the inside.

The very same ambivalence is constructed in casting Tilda Swinton as the man Orlando, especially in the scenes with Sasha. One the one hand we have a romantic young man who falls madly in love with a joyful young woman. But the ambivalent interplay between diegetic and extra diegetic levels likewise stages a woman looking intensely at another woman and kissing another woman as they sit together in the sleigh on the iced over river. So in a double movement both a homosexual and a heterosexual scenario is established. “There can be no doubt about his/her sex” says the voice-over narrator in the beginning and the end of the film respectively. Thus, biological sex is beyond doubt while gender, on the other hand, is a question of variable positions. And yet the film confuses our understanding of sex, too, which is actually the funniest part of the film. The confusion of gender as sex and sex as gender is more radical than just the demonstrations of patriarchal stupidity, for example in the conversation between Lady Orlando, Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope. Or, likewise, when Archduke Henry angrily warns Orlando who has declined his offer of marriage that because of her sexual ambiguity she shall most likely end her days a spinster. But his prophecy does not come true and basically his anger was rooted in the fact that the archduke loved the man Orlando.

**Final Remarks**

It seems to a certain extent that even though The Tango Lesson and Sally Potter’s oeuvre in general is so unique and not easily fitted into categories, her latest film also forms part of certain trends within 1990s cinema in general. Thematically, The Tango Lesson resembles a range of contemporary films about dancing and woman’s transformation through dancing (Emile Ardolino’s Dirty Dancing (1987) and Baz Luhrman’s Strictly Ballroom (1992)). Dirty Dancing is about a girl’s transformation into a woman and both Strictly Ballroom and The Tango Lesson are about the realization and blossoming of femininity. Off go the glasses in Strictly Ballroom and beauty breaks through, whereas, in The Tango Lesson, Sally purchases high heels and puts on smooth and soft skirts. Especially Strictly Ballroom is also about dance as absorption and timelessness and it visualizes bodily capacities beyond daily realities. The Tango Lesson visualizes
extendedly the sovereign and coherent body, which is able to climb up walls – in one of Pablo’s equilibristic dance numbers. Likewise, the body seems to be in such control of its movements so that it appears to be filmed in slow motion – this is marvelously done in Veron’s initial dance with his first dance partner. The moving camera never intervenes but follows the dancing bodies obdient and thus it underlines the virtuosity of the bodies.

In quite another end of contemporary film culture the same bodily sovereignty is constructed visually but here digital camera and editing technique does much of the work. I am referring to The Matrix (1999) whose special effects produce the perfectly controlled body which is so fast so that it seems to transcend gravitational pull. The art scene as well as film and cultural analyses have within the last decade been very interested in bodily excesses and morcellated bodies. Both in art theory and film analyses, especially in analyses of horror films and images of fragmented bodies terms such as “traumas”, “wounds”, “the return of the real, “bodies without organs”, and “abjection” have been widely used. But as far as I can see there has been another tendency as well. In 1990s art scene in general the body has also found a more complete form, first and foremost staged on the dance scene which has formed an important part of contemporary visual culture but also for example in the return of adventure movies and the elegantly dancing action-body, corporealized first and foremost in the actor Antonio Banderas. Dance films are another examples of the construction of this sovereign body, The Tango Lesson not least.

It seems to me, too, that The Tango Lesson is one of several films from the past decade who are preoccupied with enunciation – films like Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) Twelve Monkeys (Terry Gilliam, 1995), The Usual Suspects (Bryan Singer, 1995), Lost Highway (David Lynch, 1997), Fight Club (David Fincher, 1999). By using many different formal strategies these films deconstruct narrative time and space, they deny narrative coherence and continuity and thus, basically, they deny endings. In the end they place the spectator within a kind of visual loop because meaning becomes almost impossible at the same time as the films invite the use of classical reading procedures. But like in The Tango Lesson non of these films use their narrative strategies in order to establish verfremdung. Rather, The Tango Lesson like a range of other films seem to problematize the very idea of order and linearity that is embedded in the narrative forms that they, likewise, use.

**Notes**

1. The concept obviously refers to 1970s theory about the cinematic apparatus. But here it must be understood solely as a formal principle without the psychoanalytical foundation that was crucial to the understanding of the apparatus.

2. A slightly longer version of the chapter in L’enonciation impersonelle ou le site du film is translated into Danish by Palle Schantz Lauridsen in Tryllelygten 1, 1991.

3. The following brings quotations from reviews in three Danish newspapers: In Kristeligt Dagblad (11-7-1998) Søren Marquardt Frederiksen writes that “As I mentioned “The Tango Lesson” is a very personal film and maybe the problem is that it is too personal. In order to fully appreciate the film on has to be a female fan of the tango but maybe even a Sally Potter-fan, too. Or it is possible that one has to be Sally Potter in order to like it”. Kim Skotte writes in his review in Politiken (10-7-1998), that “the film is more personal than really concerning. It is more dancing pages from a diary than romance”. His review ends in the following way: “But when one gradually starts rotating restlessly in the seat, it is not from a desire to start dancing, but because, in the long run, it is almost unbearable to continue to look at Sally Potters oh so sensitive features on the screen. A fascinating film and an unbearable ever present main character. This is some dilemma”. Finally Ebbe Iversen writes in Berlingske Tidende: “And this film is identical to “The
Tango Lesson”, which is, thus, narcissistically about itself and its own creation. If this isn’t coquettish affectation. It is hard to imagine that anyone on this earth would be as glad to see the film as Sally Potter herself”. His concluding paragraph goes like this: “And first and foremost it feels a bit embarrassing to sit and look into another person’s very personal diary, because this is what “The Tango Lesson” looks like more than anything else.

4. It would be obvious, maybe even too obvious to discuss Sally Potter’s first two films with Laura Mulvey’s famous article from 1975 as the starting point.

5. In Orlando transformation and the journey as utopian destination is inscribed for example in the final voice-over comment: “She is no longer trapped by destiny – and ever since she let go of the past [England – “since this is England”], she found that her life was beginning”. Orlando starts with the part called Death and ends with Birth. The point of departure is the death of two patriarchs, namely Orlando’s father and the queen. Their deaths make transformation possible, though, and the films ends with the birth of a human being, Orlando.

6. Although constructed in quite different ways there is the same effort to open up space or to blur dimensions and boundaries within space construction in The Tango Lesson. The primary stylistic device for disturbing the uninterrupted construction of space is mirrors. For example in the elevator scene where Potter places Sally and Pablo with their heads turned in the same direction within the frame and centers the image so that one of the old fashioned elevator’s iron bars divides the frame vertically between them. But although they seem from the outset to look in the same direction and, thus, not to speak directly to each other, within the constructed space and because of the mirror in the elevator, “in reality” they do look at each other and they do talk directly into each other’s face.

7. The reflexive structure of inscrutability is enhanced in both Thriller and The Tango Lesson by means of the complex use of voice-over that constantly shifts between the four formal categories that Sarah Kozloff (through Genette) uses in her book Invisible Storytellers (1998). She talks first about a frame narrator or an embedded narrator who tells a story in the story. Second she talks about either a heterodiegetic or a homodiegetic narrator, i.e. is the voice-over narrator at the same time a character in his or her story or not.

8. Cf. Kolbjørnsen (1998) who remarks that childishness is an important part of Kelly’s star persona. This is in accordance with Sally Potter’s description of Veron as a playful child.

9. Sociology as well as interdisciplinary youth culture research would understand dance from another more functionalistic point of view, cf. For example Andrew Ward’s article “Dancing in the Dark. Rationalism and the Neglect of Social Dance” but also other articles in Thomas 1993.

Literature
A Battle for Public Mythology

History and Genre in the Portrait Documentary

SØREN BIRKVAD

This article treats the term portrait documentary in its broadest sense. I do not, as some do, distinguish between the biographical documentary and the there-and-then-“impressionistic” portrait documentary. To me the thematic question of personal identity is at the core of the genre - the focusing of life aspects and character traits of a person, famous or non-famous, living or dead - not narrative formats in themselves.

In this attempt to outline the sub-genre and its implications for history and textual mythology an obvious starting point is therefore the crossing between two predominant factors in cultural history. On one hand the 18th century idea of personal freedom, promising individuals a liberation from powerless anonymity by defining themselves beyond class and family. On the other hand the simultaneous breakthrough of a modern mass mediation of this idea. A crossing that is often associated with the “age of modernity”.

In terms of genre history the portrait documentary thus has its roots in cultural discourses associated with a secular, bourgeois and realistic assertion of individuality that broke through in the 18th century. Along the dual development of a more independent type of artist and the mass distribution of printed portraits, popular novels and biographies the balance of power shifted in this period from subject to artist, printer, and publisher. Instead of reproducing a highly standardized image of distant, monarchical power, painters and engravers included a whole new galaxy of bourgeois, self-made heroes, at once realistically individualizing and symbolically emphasizing their impact to a wider public1. In the same spirit the novel, exemplified by 18th century-writers like Defoe and Fielding, and its non-fiction equivalence, the biography, rejected the metaphysics and allegorical anonymity of the Renaissance and the Baroque in order to portray psychologically interesting characters, stressing by so doing causality, chronology, likelihood and the one-to-one relation of reader to subject.

The dialectics between the freedom of the individual and the pressure of the surroundings, between man as a dynamic subject and as an object of others is the thematic cornerstone of the novel and makes it historically - beside the press - the great liberal bourgeois medium. Both the novel and the press are grounded on the humanistic notion of man and society as objects of public interest and rational investigation. What makes them and later mass media genres like photography, popular magazines, film and television “modern” is not only, in principle, their unwillingness to take anything for granted apart from an optimistic interest in the individual. What makes them modern is also this very individualism paradoxically exposed to the multiplying effect of the mass media themselves: individuality on the assembly line, as stereotyping, as fame.
A remarkable trait in this media development has been the ever growing tendency towards mediated, psychological intimacy. From the 20th century personal problems and private feelings have not any longer been restricted to fiction as we have come to know it from novels, Hollywood movies or soap operas, but have become (especially after the Second World War) part of the public agenda of “real life” too. The reflexivity of modern life, as it has been interpreted by Anthony Giddens – the fact that all social practice is being constantly revised in the light of new information about this practice – is thus applicable on the present trend of endless, personal “revealing” of recent authorities and past heroes of public life. It is even this aspect, in combination with the “globalizing” (Meyrovitz) and “narcissistic” (Lasch) effect of the media/media-user relation, that in many ways seems to confirm Jürgen Habermas and Richard Sennet’s darkest statements on the downfall of a sober public discourse.

Today’s marked prevalence of the portrait documentary in commercial and public television must be seen as a result of these trends, but I also think it must be seen as a prime example of their paradoxical character. As an exponent of what in Bill Nichols’ term is called the discourse of sobriety the documentary genre is generally considered on the opposite side of Richard Sennet’s “tyranny of intimacy”. It is regarded as pro-society, pro-facts, pro-arguments, and in general as apsychological, non-individualistic, non-subjective, non-fiction. No wonder then – uniting diverging tendencies as sobriety and intimacy, biographical facts and psychological speculation, empathetic respect and voyeurism – that the portrait documentary has become popular!

Though not until fairly recently and not in a unambiguous way. Historically speaking it has thus been an essential part of documentary’s public image only to relate to individuals as types, as representatives of specific cultures, groups or public functions in society. Personality in the “modern”, psychological sense – the more or less complex character as we know it from novels, dramas and written biographies – does not play any significant role in the documentary until the 1960’es. Thus let me state three main reason for this remarkable “delay”.

One has to do with practical and technological conditions. In this perspective the heavy and inflexible camera and light equipment of the thirties and forties are in themselves factors to consider if one is to comprehend the apersonal character of the subject matter in the first “golden age” of non-fiction film. These technical shortcomings could not in a striking way be compensated through the traditional means of fiction film without somehow betraying the credibility and specific fascination of the genre. Nevertheless especially problems with lip-synch drove documentary filmmakers to treat the scattered segments of their films containing dialogue in an extremely concise way, heavily coaching subjects and using studio facilities as a necessary evil (as in Watt & Wright’s Night Mail, 1936, or Flaherty’s Man of Aran, 1934).

The other main reason for the lack of “character study” in the documentary tradition is the central one: ideological resistance. One factor in this connection has to do with the very premises of journalistic discourse. Although being an only “lightweight” equivalent to the daily newspaper, the newsreel (as later television news) is historically attached to the sobriety of public concern: the neutral or consensus-oriented focus on matters of common interest in society. Like contemporary tabloid papers and popular magazines newsreels such as March of Times and British Movietone paid much attention to famous individuals in politics, royalty, entertainment and sport. By so doing they were, however, also highly restricted by the narrow time slots, the respect of authority and the serve-the-public minded news criteria of this movie house variety of reportage.
The newsreels offered glimpses and image, not portraits. They offered individuals as news, as facts: not the “real” Franklin D. Roosevelt behind “the mask”, but the American president journalistically documented as he makes a speech or pays a visit to a foreign country.

The most heavily marked ideological factor in this regard is however linked to the norms of officially funded documentary film production, as we know it from the griersonian tradition. In all from working methods (the flight from the studio) to subject matter (the working class), from purpose (public education and social agitation) to justification (the artist as a political actor) Grierson and the British documentary film movement put society as a collective in focus3. Not leader figures and celebrities, as the newsreels did, but types in the broadest sense: the Man of the Masses (as we also know it from otherwise diverging filmmakers like Vertov and Riefenstahl) or at best the curious exception (from Flaherty’s Nanook, 1922, to Jacopetti’s Mondo Cane, 1963).

Thus paying tribute to the 19th century tradition of naturalism and socialism the ideal of the British movement seemed to be the highest possible degree of “representative” depiction. The griersonian belief (in contrast to the “romantic” films of Flaherty) in mediating an image of ordinary people “in a not exactly dehumanised way, but a sort of symbolic way”, as Edgar Anstey once put it, would even become the subject of later scruples4. Pat Jackson: the documentary “showed people in a problem, but you never got to know them (...) You never heard how they felt and thought and spoke to each other, relaxed. You were looking from a high point of view at them”5.

Following as a consequence of the other two main reasons (technological conditions and ideology as it has been summed up here) the third main reason for the lack of marked individuality in documentary has to with norms concerning narrativity and aesthetics. Brian Wilson in his important study, “Claiming the Real”, is making a needed point emphasizing the often ignored quality of narrativity in documentary films. As in the case of his emphasizing the “individualizing” strategy of the groundbreaking “social victim”-film, Anstey & Elton’s Housing Problems (1935), it is however also urgent in this connection to emphasize how general principles like narrativity and “individualization” in the documentary has been worked out in distinctly different ways (and less distinct) than in the genre’s fictional counterpart. People in Housing Problems are “individualized”, but not in the Hollywood way: the “problem” is bad housing (not the acts of a villain), the “victim” is a group of fellow citizens (not a captured woman) and the rescuing hero is not a single man (and due to Winston’s political criticism not the people in distress themselves), but the promise of institutional intervention from the British Gas Council!

The more or less discrete heroizing of (public) institutions, nations, groups of people and professions in classical documentaries furthermore has it’s marked implications for the general aesthetics of the genre. Oral documentary rhetoric as it is used in Pare Lorentz’ The Plow That Broke The Plains (1937, “Wheat will win the war”) and The River (1937, “Poor land makes poor people”) does not imply any spoken utterances beneath Voice of God. The almost geometrical, ichonographic symmetry of Führer and Volk in Leni Riefenstahl’s Triumph des Willens (1935) does not leave room for the intimacy of revealing point of view-shots or flashbacks on the side of its sole protagonist. Plot lines, dialogue, actors, colors and costumes: the whole vocabulary of mainstream fiction film is adapted for the idea of the dynamic and sometimes psychologically interesting individual. Documentary’s vocabulary, as we know it from the classical works, is not. Until the 1960’s one could even say: on the contrary.
A Turning Point: the 1960s

Definitely the 1960s represent a breakthrough towards a more psychologically individualized and socially graduated perception of human subjects within documentary. Thus new handheld synch cameras developed for television news from the mid-fifties had by 1960 a revolutionizing effect in the hands of Direct Cinema-directors like Drew and Leacock, Maysles and Wiseman or Cinema Verité-people like Rouch and Marker. “It is life observed by the camera rather than (...) life recreated for it”, as the film critic James Blue summed it up.

On an ideological level the new technology not only opened up for aspects of private intimacy (making the immediacy of real tears or outbursts a trade mark of the new documentary’s blend of empiricist proof and voyeurism). It also went hand in hand with the aggressive curiosity of the 1960s anti-authoritarian movements. Independent film and TV-program makers approached institutions by not going from the outside in (as the Industrial Britain-heritage did at best), but by going from the inside out. Most often, to use Direct Cinema as an example, with a “critical” result: by not showing Society Taking Care Of The Mentally Sick, but insane George being bullied around in a state hospital bath (Titicut Follies by Wiseman, 1967), by not showing A New Dawn For Middle America, but the curious bible seller Paul Brennan with a squeezed foot in the door opening (Salesman by the Maysles, 1969).

The same firmly individualizing strategy was used when people in high office were challenged by the new documentarists. In Primary (1961), Leacock and Pennebaker’s groundbreaking study on the rivalry between Humphrey and Kennedy, the filmmakers desisted from voice over-lecturing and turned instead attention towards details of flickering sensuality: Humphrey’s insinuating pattering around voters, the nervous twisting of hands by Jackie Kennedy. In films by Emile de Antanio characterizing details like these were even integrated in a politically goal-directed, satirical “demythologization”. By insinuating the suspicious and ridiculous character traits of Joseph McCarthy (McCarthy – death of a witch hunter, 1964) and Richard Nixon (Millhouse – a White Comedy, 1971) or contrasting their oral statements with real-life-footage he succeeded in negatively identifying a whole political system with some of its very front figures – newsreel journalism turned upside-down.

In a larger context what the breakthrough of the 1960’es meant was first of all, I think, a heightened sense of front region and back region in contemporary society. Thus an emblematic figure in this regard, apropos d’Antonio, is Richard Nixon: a politician with a sophisticated PR-use of modern media – generally putting back region aspects of his life (personal deeds, background and family) in front, while ironically falling on the same grounds. As a political phenomenon he – and the intensive media coverage he was subjected to – not only made topical the old sense of the word “public” (the domain of institutionalized political power) and the newer one (“open” as opposed to “private”/ “secret”). Nixon also reminds us of the breakdown of both senses of the word by the fateful blurring of back region and front region on an institutional as well as a personal level.

The “character question” and “the public’s right to know” seemed after Watergate to be notions of a piece – as it had been earlier to some degree with larger-than-public-life-figures like Hitler, McCarthy or Hemingway and as it later would become with the heavily media covered cases of the Kennedy’s, a Pablo Picasso, a Michael Jackson, an O.J. Simpson or a Bill Clinton. If Nixon’s fate in many ways indicates the fall of public
man, to quote Richard Sennett, it also indicates the definitive rise of public “portraying”.

**The Concept of Mythology**

A main premise in connection with media’s “portraying” is a notion of an equally vague character, namely “mythologisation”. Nevertheless “mythologisation” is in my view a key epistemological factor if one is to comprehend the genre history, as it up to a crucial point has been laid out above, and a typology of the portrait documentary, as it even more sketchily will be laid out in the following.

According to this view the very dialectics of the portrait documentary has to do with the interplay between two apparently incompatible aspects. On the one side the “strict facts” of a person (without which the subgenre would loose it’s constituting prestige and at best turn into a biopic or docudrama). On the other side the genre’s more or less conscious use of mythological explanation, of “mythologisation”. To my purpose mythology might thus be summed up in this general definition: an interpretive framework of common, cultural references and thematic codes, incarnated in master or model narratives of more or less fictitious character, through which Man in Society is made comprehensible and relevant to a public.

Emphasizing in this way the impact of mythology also implies an emphasis on theory and textual analysis at the relative expense of an analysis of empirical verification (à la: “the portrait documentary X on person Y differs factually from A’s autobiography, but is close to the written biography B that however is inconsistent with information gained from sources C and D”). This presentation neither can or will rise above questions of truth and verification, but put in general questions like these are, I think, better answered on a level of principle than on a level of normative empiricism.

Thus what is striking if one is to establish a brief outline of the portrait documentary is in my view its highly standardized patterns: the predictability of its thematic main explanations of a life, its cliché-mediations of types and professions. This standardization is explainable on many general levels – for instance practical (under what conditions is the person in question “accessible?”) or economic/institutional (how are formulas working in accordance with the “assembly line” budgets/working methods of television?). The standardization aspect is further explainable on ideological levels in its broadest (“what is individuality?”) as well as in its media and genre specific terms (see the parts above).

In all of this the portrait documentary - in order to manage, pay off, make sense - leans on mythology. What is interesting in this connection is therefore not only the notion in its at once broadest and most scientifically “local” sense - Lévy-Strauss or Roland Barthes’ idea of mythology as a basically “empty” case of random, ideological projection. On a concrete level the phenomenon first of all covers the constant recycling of classical or trivial myths and mythological notions in (un)popular culture. The stories of sharply outlined figures - Madonna as Narcissus, Garbo as Cinderella or an All-American bible salesman as The Death of a Salesman - are as such, in an ironical way or not, helping us to “understand our culture and ourselves”, as it is often explicitly claimed in the documentaries themselves. Or with the (popular) psychology of C.G. Jung or Rollo May: myths are the metaphorical expression of the basic, unconscious experiences and identity formation of human beings, connecting and reconciling through identification the stages of our own lives. Like modern myths Madonna, Garbo
or the Maysles’ salesman give human or society related conflicts a direction, sometimes even seem to release them through the force of example.

Or to be precise: the force of mass mediated example. "Portraying"’s intermingling of general communication principles on the one side and the mechanisms of media and genre on the other has been described in an exemplary way by Leo Braudy: “To be talked about is to be part of a story, and to be part of a story is to be at the mercy of storytellers – the media and their audience. The famous person is thus not so much a person as a story about a person – which might be said about the social character of each one of us”.

A Rough Typology: Heroes, Villains, Complex Characters, Open Texts

What then are on a more concrete level the master, or at least some highly standardized, stories of the portrait documentary throughout time? In order to give an answer of some general value I think it is appropriate to temporarily disregard otherwise relevant angles such as the portrait documentary’s standard models of social understanding (sociological, historical, psychological etc.), its dramaturgy models (from Great Man-narrative to verité or “Citizen Kane-puzzle”) or its models of reception (empathy, voyeurism, moral judgment etc.). Instead a fruitful starting point is, I think, at the very core of classical mythology: Who is good? Who is bad?

Thus what is at once self-evident and striking is the fact that a large majority of portrait documentaries until the 1960s (and a majority since) are about heroes – plus a few villains. From the birth of Western culture, incarnated by Homer’s The Iliad and The Odyssey, and later the beginning of the modern age (when the printed praising of 18th century monarchs were illegally supplemented by pamphlets and caricatures) a public of readers and viewers has been supplied with personal emblems of heroism and villainy – alternatives to follow or avoid among common people including the famous in spe. Leo Braudy: “Since fifth-century Athens, fame has been a way of expressing either the legitimacy of the individual within society or (in the Christian and spiritual model) the legitimacy of the individual as opposed to the illegitimacy of the social order”.

No wonder then that the documentary genre, historically the very exponent of public enlightenment and political correctness, would in a more explicit way than its fictional counterpart expose the audience to proper role models. As in the works of the Antiquity the typical documentary portraits before and (to a lesser degree) after the 1960s are thus dedicated to the most important achievement of an individual. In this tradition both the celebrity and his or her portraying subject share the ideals of community and undying fame: warfare feats, political leadership, records in a generous competition. There is in this general sense a distinct connection between otherwise diverging documentaries as, say, Vertov’s Three Songs of Lenin (1934), Riefenstahl’s Triumph des Willens (1935), BBC’s The Complete Churchill (1991), CNN’s special Colin Powell – a general’s general (1993) or Leon Gast’s When We Were Kings (1996, on Muhammed Ali). In this understanding Triumph des Willens is thus in many ways a prime example of classical Roman-style role modeling while for instance Colin Powell – a general’s general is Roman fame with a marked democratic twist: the African-American warrior is first of all portrayed as a product of The American Dream.

Consider the two last-named subjects, Hitler and Powell, in respectively a British WW2-compilation documentary and an Iraqi TV-documentary: the same footage and propaganda stereotypes turned upside-down as it has been seen (what Triumph des Willens is concerned) in Frank Capra’s Why We Fight-series, 1942-45, or in the classi-
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cal documentary pamphlets by Erwin Leiser (Mein Kamph - Hitler’s Rise and Fall, 1961) and Paul Rotha (The Life of Adolf Hitler, 1961). In both the hero portrait and the villain portrait footage in this authoritarian tradition is indeed, as Barthes might put it, empty cases of random, ideological projection. Whether the person in question has been a way of expressing the (il)legitimacy of the individual within society (as in the above mentioned examples) or the legitimacy of the individual as opposed to the illegitimacy of the social order (as in Robert Epstein’s gay-documentary The Times of Harvey Milk, 1984, or in Jon Blair’s Anne Frank Remembered, 1995) the distribution of positive and negative character traits is here strictly centralized.

It is therefore also strictly contextualised: in The Life of Adolf Hitler for instance the rottenness of Hitler’s closest affiliates is through Voice of God emphasized by their alleged homosexuality. All differences apart what thus unites the cinematic cases of Paul Rotha (Hitler) and Robert Epstein (Harvey Milk) is not their view on homosexuality, but their belief in the didactic force of positive and negative examples. In this respect the two directors represent a high degree of consistence between left-wing documentaries in the thirties and forties and in the seventies and eighties. In both cases the perception of individuals is first of all subjected to political strategies and propagandistic persuasion (from Shub’s The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty, 1927, and Iven’s Borinage, 1933, to Kopple’s Harlan County, U.S.A., 1976, Field’s Rosie the Riveter, 1980, or Rafferty, Loader & Rafferty’s The Atomic Cafe, 1982).

In the case of hero and villain portraits we are in other words far from the aesthetically and existentially open-ended essayism of French Cinema Verité (for instance Rouch and Morin’s Chronique d’un été, 1961, or Marker’s Le joli mai, 1963). Here, as to an even higher degree in the self-reflexive and performative portraits and (auto)biographies of the eighties and nineties, documentary at long last seems to reach a level of artistic complexity that is equivalent to the modernistic tradition of fiction. Thus what in the eighties and nineties is in focus is not necessarily “better” in itself, but it is qualitatively different: another main category of portrait documentaries stating their subjects as neither heroes or villains, but as open texts. In for instance Peter Greenaway’s Darwin (1994) or Mark Rappaport’s Rock Hudson’s Home Movies (1992) the subjects in principle seem open for any public or personal projection. Not only is the filmstar and AIDS-victim Hudson, according to Rappaport’s film, perceivable as both straight/macho and gay in the sublime shallowness (i.e. ambiguity) of Hollywood genre formulas – it is all up to the eyes of the beholder. In accordance with Rappaport and Greenaway’s films Hudson and Darwin are at once perceivable as anti-establishment and pro-establishment, as both sovereign as characters and all-accessible as icons. Thus in the post-modern mirror cabinets of Darwin and Rock Hudson’s Home Movies the two modern icons are “owned” by nobody and anybody while for the same reason set free through the unrestrained interpretations by Greenaway and Rappaport.

It is in other words the distinctly personal character of these highly stylized artfilm documentaries of the 1990’s that frees them from the good guy/bad guy predictability of the traditional portrait documentary. Their post-modern insight – a person is what you make of him or her – does not however imply that they are pointless or without substance in their reality-references. On the contrary their emphasizing of the portrait subjects as open texts seem to put a few things straight in a genre so heavily burdened by mythological projections. We all must, they seem to say, re-interpret individuals of public or private history in order to identify what is present with what is past, and what is private with what is public.
For finally the mainstream BBC or PBS-portrait documentary - placed between the old-time propaganda/educational documentary with its tabloid equivalents and the documentary avant-garde as it is referred to above - an adoption to modernist criteria of “psychological depth” has been important means to gain journalistic and artistic respectability; especially since the 1980s. One of the arch-myths of personal transformation, The Prince in The Frog, that so perfectly had suited the talent-before-birthright-dogma of 18th century“s France and America, is in many of these documentary portraits supplemented with another popular myth: Mr. Hyde in Dr. Jekyll. The truly individual individual combine “a vision of wholeness”, as Leo Braudy calls it - larger-than-life talent and charisma in one - with the opposed or contradictory traits of an “interesting” character. These complex characters thus make up the fourth and final category in this rough typology.

In films and programs like these the classical character traits of good and evil, so predictably distributed in countless documentary odes and pamphlets respectively, are given full attention according to the concept of two-in-one. Examples stretch from early TV-programs like See It Now: McCarthy (1954, front versus back personality), CBS’ Stravinsky (1966, the artist between The Old and The New World) or The Ups and Downs of Henry Kissinger (1975, the underdog and star) to recent programs like BBC’s The Comeback Kid Clinton (1994, the Frog turned Prince), BBC’s The Peter Sellers Story (1995, Jekyll and Hyde turned actor), Lennon and Epstein’s The Fight Over Citizen Kane (1996, Orson Welles and Randolph Hearst as Ying and Yang) or the Danish TV2-production Røde Ruth (1994, Brecht the idealist as a womanizing parasite).

In spite of the positive possibilities of anti-authoritarian demystification and breakdown of taboos the mainstream documentaries of this kind not seldom seem to emphasize the dirty little secrets at the dispense of the proclaimed general perspective. Speaking in general and in terms of reception they rely on the voyeuristic satisfaction of being behind the scenes, to rip away the veil of official stories and discover the supposed real truth, to control rather than be controlled. To be, in yet other words, the one who knows whether this knowledge is gained through commercial “tabloid TV” (Olivery & Harry’s Hollywood Heaven: Tragic Lives, Tragic Deaths, 1990, with lively enactment’s!), or through the public service equivalence of “tabloid TV” (BBC’s Diana - a Celebration, 1997) or through independent art films like the Maysles’ Grey Gardens (1976, high society eccentrics on creep show display). For the same reason (apropos models of social understanding) portrait documentaries, voyeuristic or not, are often utilizing certain lightweight key-notions of socio-psychology and psychoanalysis in combination with (apropos dramaturgic models) the “Citizen Kane character-puzzle”.

Recent examples are Zozarinsky’s Citizen Langlois, 1994, on the film archivist Henri Langlois, Broomfield’s Heidi Fleiss Hollywood madam, 1995, or Pietrowska’s Sex, Lies and Jerzy Kosinski, 1995 (on the Polish-American author).

Sometimes key-explanations of this kind purely seem to have come about as a narrative emergency solution (as in Maben’s Helmut Newton: Frames From The Edge, 1988, claiming the Lolita-in-the-closet secret of it’s photographer-subject in order to end the film). In other cases they are arranged as the final point in a climax-construction of artfully mystifying hints leading to the answer to the character riddle. An example is Dan Säll’s Greta Garbo - fresterska och clown, 1985, symbolically disclosing its subject’s hidden dream of playing a woman in a man’s clown dress. Another example is the final redemption of the escape-Leitmotif in Mishan and Rothenberg’s Bui Doi – Life Like Dust, 1994, a highly stylized portrait of a traumatized, Vietnamese refugee/LA-
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gang member. The latter example is furthermore representative of a distinct trait of the post-war documentary in general and the portrait documentary in specifics: in all it’s “political correctness” Bui Doi - Life Like Dust seems to victimize it’s human subject through the heavy underlining of victimization as the dominant mode of social understanding.

In character studies like these we are certainly witnessing marked elements of “fiction”, “tabloid journalism” or “performative documentary” – and all in a blur with “facts”! Though there is a decisive difference between the empirical status of “Rhett Butler” and Franklin D. Roosevelt or even “James Foster Kane” and William Randolph Hearst, the often disputed ontology of documentary is admittedly even more vague in this subgenre variety. Plot and characters are undoubtedly “taken from real life”. But “the facts” are mixed with appropriate fictional props so that the story line turns out simple, dramatic and climatic (or complicated, introvert and “lyrical”), yet still identifiable as a matter of public concern, just indignation or human interest.

Thus in the portrait documentaries of heroes, villains, complex characters or “open texts”, attempting to provide visual evidence of life patterns, character traits and emotional impulses, the subjects are indeed at the mercy of story-tellers. More so than in documentaries on for instance animal behavior or airplane construction, but in principle just as much as when each of us leaves a room full of slightly gossiping colleagues or old friends.

The Battle for Public Mythology: Aspects of History and Sociology

It is the same elementary mechanisms of general communication principles and medium that provide some of the background for the, in my view, most remarkable aspect of the portrait documentary as a historical and genre related phenomenon. It deals namely in a mass mediated and factual way with what matters most for all of us while at the same time is the most subjective to each one of us: the personal impression of the Other. In practice, whether it is focused on people in public office or the man next door, the portrait documentary is consequently a battleground for public mythology. Underneath the “factual” supertexts of great or ordinary men and women there is always, I want to argue, a subtext of negotiation and quarrel: who is good? Who is bad? What is (extra)ordinary? What is a remarkable achievement?

Thus, as it has been suggested in this presentation, one obvious answer to the last question is this: what is considered remarkable varies over time. The celebrities of the Antiquity were few and distant achievers of physical deeds and immortal glory in public service. The documentary tradition represents at once a follow-up and a departure from this conceptual starting point. In the thirties, forties and fifties newsreels and the publicly sponsored documentaries considered achievement as a part of a public culture while at the same time claiming collectivism and the outstanding individual as a harmonic entity. The trendy portrait documentaries of the sixties turned this upside-down, as it further has been indicated above, by revealing a discrepancy between society and individual. The public definition of achievement, as it was made topical in the films of the sixties, was relativised, pluralised, made unglamorous or gaining distinctly different kinds of glamour. The seventies in documentary history in many ways represented a return to the ideal of collective achievement claiming the force of didactic example through the centralizing voice of “talking heads” for instance. Whereas finally the self-reflexive and postmodern portrait documentaries of the eighties and nineties put an
ironical question mark to the whole idea of individual sovereignty through achievement.

Thus today there is not, even discounting any postmodernist excess, the public consensus of earlier times about what constitutes a remarkable achievement or even proper behavior. Figures of public life are trivialized to the point where it seems enough to be famous for being famous. Likewise the ever-expanding need for fame in the mass media creates one fifteen-minutes-celebrity after the other 11. Who is to be “portrayed” or not is more than ever an object of discussion and power struggle in editorial offices all over the world.

A second possible key answer to the question of achievement is equally relative: the character of “remarkable achievement” and its mediation depends in each case on the subject’s social status and role. Thus in terms of general sociology every social status (defined as a position occupied by an individual in a social system) and its dynamic, social mediation through role has a cultural history of its own. The status of the politician for instance in this historical understanding indeed varies from the role performance of Hitler to the same of Nixon, but the mythological mass mediation varies, often conflicts, accordingly: from Paul Rotha’s classical villain’s portrait (the above mentioned Life of Adolf Hitler) to the more or less “psychologically penetrating” one by for instance de Antanio (the above mentioned Nixon portrait Millhouse), Marilyn Mellowes (Nixon, 1991, the Thames TV-series) or Oliver Stone (Nixon, 1995, the docudrama).

Likewise there is a gulf of conflict and ambivalence between the romantic depiction of the artist as a persecuted genius in Curt Oertel’s classical The Titan – the Story of Michelangelo (1939, or Jørgen Roos’ Mit livs eventyr, 1955, on Hans Christian Andersen) and the post-modern, romantic-ironical vision of the artist (and of artistic professions and role spectra) as we find it in Thomas Gislasen’s Fra hjertet til hånden/Heart and Soul (1994). The last-mentioned film, about the dynamically alienated Danish poet and filmmaker Jørgen Leth, is in principle equaled with Wender’s Lightning over Water (1980, on the filmdirector Nicholas Ray), Skjødt Jensen’s It’s a Blue World (1990, on the Danish painter Hans Henrik Lerfeldt) or with Longfellow’s Our Marilyn (1988, on Marily Monroe). But their postmodern, ambiguous it’s-all-in-the-image(es) attitude is also recognizable in more mainstream oriented artist portraits like Keshishian’s Truth or Dare: In Bed With Madonna, 1990, or Zwigoff’s Crumb (1994, on the cult cartoonist).

Finally, keeping the sociological perspective in focus, I want to argue that the act of portraying and being portrayed involves a decisive element of status and role interaction. In this respect the portrait documentary seems to both make topical and relativise a main thesis of sociology: “Although every status set includes a large number of different statuses, we certainly do not pay attention to all of them, or even several of them, at once. In the typical social situation, only one or a few statuses are actually relevant and identify our current position”12. Thus the portrait documentary is – as opposed to the typical social situation - at the same time subjected to the (in principle) grand plurality and (in practice) narrow selectivity of “portrait angles”. This is also what constitutes the hidden power play behind any documentary portrait: the often diverging considerations to personal and/or institutional positioning of subject and viewer, the subject’s possible resistance or cooperation in the process, the compromises made by the film or program makers to make the portrait factual yet fascinating, multi-faceted yet immediately comprehensible, “exotic” yet relevant - and saleable - to a broader public.
Let me sum up this point through a concrete example. Referring to the above-mentioned Nixon-portrait by Thames Television the series’ highly standardized prelude enumerates through talking head-sound bites, stemming from “experts”, a number of Nixon’s characteristics. In sum the high level of mythological generality of these “expert”-statements legitimizes the TV-series’ fascination with its subject: the worth of his political achievements (China), his Americanism (“He was the American model, but also the American nightmare”), the most general and most intimate keys to his character (“a blend of good and evil”, the very close relationship to his daughter). What really constitutes our reception of this portrait subject – critical distance, ambivalence, empathy – is, however, summed up in the in medias res-opening of the first program in the series (repeated in the third and last part): Nixon giving his tearful farewell speech to the White House staff. At this low point in his career – and high point of tragedy – the president seems to embody the myth of hybris-stricken Oedipus – falling on the grounds of not looking reality in the eyes, of not having control over his own political destiny and private mythology (as also heavily emphasized in the docudrama by Oliver Stone Nixon is pathetically waffling about the loss of his mother).

All of this in Mellowes’ TV-portrait certainly gives us a voyeuristic thrill. It seems relevant too and very well done, but at the same time painfully predictable. Referring to the sociological statement above Mellowes’ Nixon provides us with a broad range of “Nixon”-statuses (such as that of “president”, “politician”, “husband”, “son”, etc.). But at the same time the series seem to insist that the more you focus on the highly “private” statuses the closer you get to the ultimate truth of an “official” individual’s interaction with the world (as if Nixon “the crook” in his suspect methods substantially differs in comparison with many of his predecessors and descendants!). As many recent scandals in public life indicate there seems to be no end to the media personification of all general (in this case: political and highly institutional) questions, of the anecdotal focus on private life as the public issue.

Or is there? Thus in the best of the current portrait documentaries the most “self-evident” – that is hidden and often, “backstage”, highly disputed – choices of the subgenre are often strikingly put in play. The mythologizing that’s why’s are replaced with the de- or remythologizing why’s and who’s of creative self-reflection: Why basically is this person chosen – or this status aspect of a person? What considerations to “facts”, “entertainment value” or “general perspective” are governing this specific portrait mythology? Who on a level of aesthetic vision and ethics owns the image of the portrait subject – the person who portrays? An institution he or she represents? The subject itself? An institution he or she represents? The public in general?

To return to an earlier example of distinction and resemblance in one: the Riefenstahl’s and the Rotha’s may have much in common what documentary mode is concerned (from Triumph des Willens to The Life of Adolf Hitler). But putting pragmatic questions like the above stated to their respective work – as some of the most creative of the 1990’es’ documentary portraits do to their own agenda - will definitely place them in opposite corners of the battle for public mythology.

**Problem and Solution in One: Two Concluding Text Readings**

The general questions raised above are, to make the final examples, in different ways illuminated in two remarkable films of the nineties: Die Macht der Bilder (The Wonderful Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl, 1993) by Ray Müller and Nobody’s Business (1996) by Alan Berliner. They are both aesthetically quite simple films, far from the
arty extravaganza of for instance Darwin, Rock Hudson’ Home Movies or Fra hjertet til hånden/Heart and Soul. Thus as a career biography Die Macht der Bilder, to begin with, consists of the standard mix of archive footage and interviews, including M üller’s own long and pushing inquiry about Riefenstahl’s role as a filmmaker in The Third Reich. Admittedly the film also has its share of the portrait documentary’s usual illnesses. A s Ruth Starkman points out in a recent article the film in part looks like a shaky compromise between a critical investigation of Riefenstahl’s nazi-past and an otherwise respectful all round survey on her talents as a technically brilliant auteur 13.

It is however in my view the more or less deliberate laying bare of this “internal” battling for mythological status that distinguishes the film – including the almost physical quarrels between the competing portrait makers, M üller and 92 year old Riefenstahl, in “hidden camera”-scenes revealing their divergent perceptions of the film’s subject! Riefenstahl not only in many ways conquers the film (the nazi aspect remains a marked, but isolated third of the three hour long film), but M üller also in part turns this what-she-is-best-at-wins aspect to the paradoxical benefit of the film. Thus his own fundamental ambivalence towards his subject is summed up at the end of part one when Riefenstahl is “caught on the run” at the editors table, going through technical and stylistic details in Triumph des Willens, euphoric at the sight of the wonderful black and white effect of kicking nazi-boots marching towards us on her monitor! What in other words might be the problematic bias of the film – a certain overweight of one social status of its character, the talented craftsperson, the pro – in this disclosure-through-situation scene serves an important point in itself. It puts an at once sharp and general light on the grotesque, social aspect of “purely professional” fetishism: to Riefenstahl Nazism is still first and simply Bilder. In this lies, the film seems to claim, the true horror of her example.

Whereas M üller’s film to an explicit and fascinating extent is part of the problem Alan Berliner’s Nobody’s Business (1997) could be considered, to quote the old 68-slogan, as a part of the solution. Or maybe, in a specific sense, on the contrary: the father and son interview-dual between Alan, trying as a family member and documentary maker to get hold on his father’s (and thereby his own and their shared) life story and character, and Oscar, rejecting the son’s approaches as “nobody’s business”, is a film that offers no solutions to anything. On the contrary it is – through the interactive dramaturgy of question and answer – an at once hilarious and dialectically clear study in the never-ending struggle of opposed interpretative projections.

In this understanding Nobody’s Business is in itself an example, elevated by self-irony, of the surveying eagerness of any ambitious documentary film. By from the start putting us in the questioning position of Alan we – 1! – on the one hand gain sympathy for Oscar’s level-headed “I’m just an ordinary guy”-objections as opposed to his son’s well-meaning attempts to seize him through documentary’s models of social understanding. Models such as history (Oscar’s status as the son of an emigrant), ethnical background (his Jewish roots), genetic heritage (although Oscar admits a certain resemblance to Alan), psychology (Oscar’s suggested father complex, the impact of divorce and family breakdown) and first of all the portrait-ontology of the ordinary man (the unique individual behind the salesman). On the other hand however the film is also a touching testimony, especially when the conversation turns more concrete and confidential, of the personal costs – the inevitable loneliness – of Oscar’s defense mechanisms and sarcastic pessimism (that also touches Alan on the raw). In all Oscar’s insistence on what might be considered his personal mythology: the all-American, ahistorical pride of a self-made man.
Thus exposing the ever fragile and life important interaction between interpreter and interpreted Nobody's Business is to me an uplifting, contemporary example of a general portrait documentary ideal, the union of intimacy and general perspective. Whereas Ray Müller in Die Macht der Bilder momentarily, as indicated above, serves the classical art ideal of stating the general from the particular, Berliner, in a paradoxical way (and to the reluctant satisfaction of his father?) goes the other way round. The film in sum, as Bill Nichols has stated in another context, “brings the power of the universal, of the mythical and fetishistic, down to the level of immediate experience and individual subjectivity” 14.

In that respect this film also represents a point of much needed self-reflection in a genre history of apersonal, total solutions in the one end and tabloid psychology or atomizing, personal avantgardism in the other. Nobody's Business offers no good guy or bad guy, no Best Achievement or Inner Truth, no prince in the frog or Jekyll in Hyde. It even resists the non-committal put-anything-in-the-box attitude of the post-modern portraits. What the film offers, beside its sober generosity, is however room for the mystery, a sense of the unspoken and interminable, in inter human relations. The very sense that sometimes elevates our everyday life-existence, but so often has been betrayed by the matter of mythological fact.

Notes
1. The general point of “modernity” being made here stems from a variety of sources, first of all Thompson, Braudy, Giddens and Dahl.
2. These practical aspects are further discussed in Wilson, pp. 54 ff.
3. The specific summing up of the four main griersonian aspects is drawn from Wilson, p. 26.
5. Ibid., p. 76.
6. James Blue: “Discussion with the Maysles”, Film Comment vol. 2, no.4, p.22; quoted in Wilson, p. 149.
7. The brief reflection on the notions of “front”/“back region” and “public” draws on Thompson, pp. 118 ff., pp. 235 ff.
9. Ibid., p. 585.
10. Ibid., pp. 6 ff.
11. This point is fully developed in Braudy, pp. 607 ff.
14. “Getting to know you...”. Knowledge, Power, and the Body”, in Renov, p. 188.

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What the Metaphor Could Not Tell Us About the Prime Minister’s Bicycle Helmet

Rhetorical Criticism of Visual Political Rhetoric

Jens E. Kjeldsen

What kind of questions should the academic discipline of rhetoric propose and attempt to answer? If we turn to the rhetorical apparatus, both ancient and modern, and to the history of rhetoric in theory and practice, one central research question emerges: How does one influence people through intentional (i.e. rhetorical) communication? By analyzing a specific discourse, this article tries to both provide suggestions about how the visual rhetoric of this discourse functions and potentially influences people, and to illustrate a general approach to rhetorical criticism. By introducing terms such as latent visual rhetoric and manifest visual rhetoric, and persuasive cues and persuasive hierarchies, the article also seeks to provide some theoretical knowledge about visual rhetoric in general.

One of the most cited texts in works concerning visual rhetoric is undoubtedly The Rhetoric of the Image by Roland Barthes. Along with Barthes’ article, Jacques Durand’s “Rhétorique et image publicitaire” is considered a seminal article. Both Barthes and Durand represent a French structuralist semiotic tradition. In communication studies, their articles have contributed to a variety of tropological approaches to visual rhetoric. What is common and distinctive to these approaches is that they apply only a very small and limited part of rhetorical theory and its apparatus when explaining visual rhetoric. Critics using insights from Barthes and Durand tend to turn to the ancient rhetorical art of style (elocutio), and especially the art of ornament and adornment (ornatus), one of the four virtues of elocutio. The critic scours pictures for visual elements that might function as a visual trope or figure, and then tries to explain the pictures’ visual persuasion through these. The search is mainly for metaphors and metonymies, which as concepts are often paralleled with Roman Jakobson’s linguistic concepts of paradigm and syntagm. Thus, the analyses present themselves as a unification of semiotic and structural theory with ornatus. I refer to this method of critique and analysis as the ornatus-approach or the tropological critique of visual rhetoric. Ornatus being only one of the four virtues of elocutio, and elocutio being only one of the five canons of rhetoric, it should be obvious that this approach is only partly rhetorical.

It is necessary here to stress that while Durand truly uses a tropological approach, it would be simplistic to claim that Barthes does the same. Still, it is important to remember that the article “The rhetoric of the image” is more about semiotic signification than rhetorical persuasion.
Flagraising Studies
Some explanations of visual rhetoric describe a tropological approach that in fact is little more than the enthusiastic hoisting of a flag every time a trope or figure is located. Others use the tropes mainly as a means of describing semantic operations, i.e. ways of making meaning, while some try more directly to explain persuasion through these operations. However different these approaches might be, they all rest on structuralist, instead of rhetorical, ground. They thus share a tendency to overlook important rhetorical knowledge. This knowledge is crucial when attempting to discover how a specific visual discourse works and how it might influence and persuade people. Firstly they tend to disregard the importance of the rhetorical situation. Secondly, they provide a very limited account of the discourse's persuasive elements. Thirdly they overlook the rhetorical strategies and appeals.

Let me now, by way of a specific example, attempt to illustrate some of the problems with tropological critique, and then carry out a more comprehensive rhetorical critique of the same example. Since the endeavor is to show rhetorical limitations of the common critical ground of the different tropological approaches, I will not try to deconstruct an existing analysis, but instead to construct a simple tropological analysis according to the basic structural rules. There is another reason for doing this: Since a critic would never use an example which his theory or analysis could not explain, I have purposely chosen an example of rhetoric that challenges the tropological approach. The example is a political newspaper advertisement from the 1998 Danish election campaign.

In a structural tropological critique of this advertisement, the study would start with the discourse itself (parole), but the endeavor would normally be to reconstruct the language system (langue) behind it. The study would therefore not pay much attention to the specific rhetorical situation. The analysis could look something like this:

The advertisement is a political discourse that aims to persuade the voters to vote for the Social Democratic Party (SDP), presenting a bicycle helmet as a metonymic representation of knowledge (and thereby education). This meaning is created through a relation of contiguity between the helmet and the brain, a representation of space (the inside of the helmet) for content (the brain); a metonymic continens pro contento. When the image is decoded in connection with the written text (see translation below) the advertisement states that we should take care of the system of education, which is metonymically represented by the absent head and brain, which again is metonymically represented by the depicted helmet.

However, we can also categorize the visual message metaphorically: Metaphorically the helmet represents knowledge. This meaning is created through a relationship of similarity between the helmet and the brain, which share the same form. Furthermore, the helmet bears a resemblance to the human skull in both looks and function, and therefore one more relation of similarity can be constructed. Decoding the image in connection with the written text, the advertisement reads that we should take care of the education system, which is metaphorically represented by the absent head and brain, which again is metaphorically represented by the depicted helmet.

Such a tropological analysis tells us that there are several roads to the visual creation of meaning. But the fact that the creation of meaning can happen both metaphorically
In the 1998 Danish election campaign the advertising agency Propaganda created this advertisement for the Social Democratic Party. The advertisement was published in the Newspaper Politiken Friday, February 27th. The size was 52.0 x 17.5 centimeters. The headline in the advertisement reads “We can all get wiser”, and the text reads: “We shall continue to learn our whole lives. However, the school is the fundamental part of life’s luggage. It is in the schools that the children must get the knowledge and the independence, that is needed in a country that lives by knowledge. That is why our system of education must measure up to the best in the world. And that is why all young people must be given the chance to be educated. Call 31 39 0440 if you would like to receive a pamphlet on other positions of ours.”. The advertisement is reproduced at the courtesy of Propaganda and The Social Democratic Party.
(paradigmatic) and metonymically (syntagmatic) serves only as a very limited explanation of the rhetorical influence and persuasiveness of both the bicycle helmet and the advertisement as a visual message. This limitation is caused primarily by a lack of situational knowledge.

A Danish reader will know that an important situational element has been left out in the analysis above: The bicycle helmet as a sign of the tainted ethos of Danish Prime Minister Poul Nyrup-Rasmussen (SDP). In 1995, the Prime Minister attracted the nation's attention with his somewhat half-hearted and clumsy participation in a bicycle demonstration against French nuclear testing. Just before he hastily jumped on a borrowed bicycle, someone handed him a bicycle helmet. When the Prime Minister noticed that the helmet was several sizes too small, he received the laconic answer: "Nobody will notice". Not quite nobody. Thanks to a flow of pictures in both press and television and the media's perpetual ridicule, the entire Danish population could not help but noticing. For the opposition, as for many other Danes, the image of the Prime Minister with the little bicycle helmet on top of his head manifested itself as the symbol of his lack of statesmanship and an often artificial and forced staging of political events. The president of the biggest liberal opposition party, Venstre, (The Danish Liberal Party [DLP]) commented on the Prime Minister's bicycle performance this way:

As an elected politician I have at my disposal very different ways of voicing my opinion. So did the Danish Prime Minister. Among other things, he had the possibility to say what he thought about the nuclear tests, when he sat at the dinner table in Cannes during the meeting of the European Council. But there he sat as Mr. Sheepish and said nothing. Instead he jumped on the bicycle. That is not the way a Danish Prime Minister should put forward his views.6

While the picture of a bicycle helmet in general can be seen as a sign for both protection and cyclists, in connection with political discourses in Denmark it is a very potent symbol with a specific meaning. Already by taking this specific situation into consideration we are starting to move beyond the structural explanation of langue into a more situational rhetorical and hermeneutic understanding of a specific parole.

As a science that is primarily synchronic and nomothetic, principally seeking the laws of the language system (langue), structural analysis and critique are not designed to take into consideration this single, specific situation wherein rhetoric is are found (parole).7 If the specific rhetorical background were applied, how would the analysis then turn out? With the situational rhetorical understanding we can still categorize the helmet as both a metonymic (syntagmatic) relation based on contiguity and a metaphoric (paradigmatic) relation based on similarity. Due to the lack of rhetorical functionality in this distinction, however, we shall not attempt this in detail. Here it will suffice to state that the helmet establishes a connection to the problematic ethos of Prime Minister Nyrup-Rasmussen and his assumed lack of statesmanship. A structural-tropological analysis including the rhetorical understanding of the specific situation would probably describe the message of the advertisement something like this:

As has everybody else, the Prime Minister has made mistakes, and like everybody else he learns from them. Knowledge and education are like a helmet that protects us, and just as it is important for the Prime Minister to learn, it is therefore important for both Denmark and the Danish people that we can learn something all our lives. That is the opinion of The Social Democratic Party, and if you agree you should vote for us.
However, as any Danish voter would intuitively know, the rhetorical appeal in the advertisement is both something different and something more. This we will look into shortly.

As already admitted, the analysis rendered above is a somewhat simplified version of the semiotic ornatus-approach. It has not been the intention here to vulgarize the tropological analysis, but to make clear its inherent and fundamental ways of thinking and analyzing. It is these basic principles that make the tropological analysis rhetorically problematic, or at least limits its rhetorical field of vision. One rhetorical problem with the tropological analyses and explanations is that a categorization of the visual statement as a metaphor or metonym does not render much substantial rhetorical insight in the way that the advertisement appeals and persuades, or in its rhetorical strategy or presumed effect. Secondly, the structuralist tropological analysis does not normally include the situational circumstances that determine the persuasive value of the statement. This applies to both the specific situation concerning the Danish Prime Minister on a bicycle protesting against French nuclear testing and the many other events that contribute to the creation of the Prime Minister’s political ethos.

The tropological analysis can provide us with an understanding of the way we make meaning of a statement. Its main usefulness for rhetorical analysis is this capacity to elucidate the statement and its message. However, this is not enough for a rhetorical analysis. Even when specific rhetorical circumstances are provided, e.g. knowledge of the bicycle helmet’s significance, the tropological analysis still has difficulties in explaining how the advertisement functions rhetorically, how it attempts to persuade, and how this form of persuasion might influence the audience. Furthermore the tropological approach is not designed to make any normative assessments about the rhetorical discourse. Finally, though the structuralist approach might be able to tell us that an understanding of the advertisement can be created through both a metaphoric and a metonymic path, it still cannot provide a very satisfying explanation of how these two roads to understanding may work, or what rhetorical significance it has for the advertisement as a persuasive statement.

Rhetorical Analysis

By now it should be clear that the proper and most comprehensive understanding of a rhetorical message is to be found neither solely in the structure of the message nor in the langue as a whole. Instead, this understanding should be sought primarily in a specific and limited situation. A rhetorical understanding of the discourse—and thereby of the significance and presumed effect of the appeal—is to be found through an understanding of both the election situation and the specific situation that the bicycle helmet refers to. The combination of a bicycle helmet and the Danish Social Democratic Party evokes the experience of when the Prime Minister wore a too-small helmet. Because his demeanor in the situation in general was considered as unfortunate, or even plain silly or incompetent, the helmet represents this incompetence and silliness. At the same time, the situation is just one of many similar situations. The helmet does not represent only a single event, but a rather certain view of the Prime Minister’s ethos. Thus it refers to unfortunate events during his time in office as well as to events in the election campaign that the advertisement was a part of.

In order to understand the rhetorical significance of the advertisement, and to determine the rhetorical significance of its visual elements, we therefore must attempt a more comprehensive rhetorical approach. The approach in the analysis that now fol-
lows is of course just one of many possibilities. Other rhetorical approaches can be applied depending on the critic's intention and the normative criteria the critic may want to use. Central in the following analysis is an attempt to understand how visual elements work rhetorically, and to reveal which functions they might have in a specific example of visual rhetoric. Rhetoric here refers to a discourse that intends to influence and persuade the audience, and possibly affect the ballot.

Though the account of the rhetorical analysis is carried out step by step, chronologically following the points mentioned below, the actual analysis is not necessarily executed in this way. A rhetorical understanding of the advertisement is only achieved by a continuing rhetorical-hermeneutic alternation between all the elements and the discourse as a whole. The account below is thus arranged chronologically for the sake of illustration and composition. The analysis has four topoi:

I. The Rhetorical Situation
II. The Persuasive elements of the discourse
   Location of persuasive cues
   Reconstruction of persuasive hierarchies
III. Strategies and forms of appeal in the discourse and the situation
IV. Evaluation of the rhetorical discourse as a whole

I. The Rhetorical Situation

Rather than structural explorations of rhetorical 'texts', the comprehension of rhetorical discourses requires an understanding of the rhetorical situation. And an understanding of the rhetorical situation requires an understanding of the necessary components of every rhetorical act and the reciprocal relationship among these components. That is to say the relationship among 1. Circumstances; 2. Communicator; 3. Receiver; 4. Medium, genre and form of expression; 5. Message and intention.

The importance of the rhetorical situation is present in the rhetorical tradition from the ancient orators to the rhetorical theorist of today. This includes, sometimes implicitly, the importance of the reciprocal relationship among the necessary components of the rhetorical situation. A rhetorician like Cicero saw such a situational analysis as a departure point for the attempt to create the most persuasive speech. However, this way of analyzing can also contribute to determining whether an effectuated piece of rhetoric might be appropriate and convincing. In its totality, such an analysis involves an account for the relation of each component to the other four components. In total that would mean an examination of ten different relations. However, in our case the purpose of the rhetorical analysis is not primarily a pragmatic and normative determination of how a message should be constructed rhetorically, or if a specific piece of rhetoric is appropriate and convincing. Instead the main purpose is, as already mentioned, to make some substantiated assumptions about how the visual rhetoric in a specific discourse works and influences people. With this purpose the rhetorical situational analysis is still necessary, but it works mainly as a prerequisite rhetorical-hermeneutic analysis of the preconditions for the visual rhetoric.

The Circumstances. The circumstances of the rhetorical discourse in question are the specific events, facts and situations wherein the rhetorical discourse must be seen and understood. For instance, the circumstances that the discourse is a response to. It can
also be those circumstances which are the necessary conditions or prerequisites for the efficiency and the raison d’ètre of the utterance. Behind these specific circumstances lie the more general circumstances, such as the time in history and the cultural and social conditions.

As a rhetorical discourse, “The Bicycle Helmet” is a response to the events: election and election campaign. In a time of election, one of the circumstances is the prevalence of two dominating forms of rhetoric: The assessment of the past and the visions and strategies for the future. In the assessment of the past the incumbent government will emphasize all the achievements and positive events during their administration. The opposition, on the other hand, will of course stress the problems and failures of the present government; or if all is well and problems are limited, claim that everything could have been even better if only they had been in power.

In a Danish election campaign, there are traditionally disparities in the quality of campaign material, and a widespread presence of poorly designed material, especially in the case of newspaper advertisements. Traditionally only a few parties use professional communication agencies to arrange their campaign. When a party has members that work as designers or communication consultants, it is common that they will create the campaign material and lay out the campaign strategy. The 1998 election, however, showed an increased use of external communication agencies, and The Social Democratic Party was the first to hire a professional, politically independent advertising agency to oversee their campaign material and campaign strategy.

Among the more specific circumstances in the election campaign was the fact that the government (constituted by The Social Democratic Party and The Social-Liberals) and the opposition (primarily represented by the The Danish Liberal Party) were strongly opposed. By the time of the election call, the media was already talking about the “presidential election” between Prime Minister Poul Nyrup-Rasmussen (SDP) and the leader of the opposition, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen (DLP). This is noteworthy because Denmark does not have a president, but a Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister is not chosen by the voters, who do not primarily vote for a person, but for a party. Since there are eleven parties to vote for (of which ten are presently represented in the Parliament [Folketinget]), it is a significant sign of the importance and positions of the parties that the media refer to a party election as a presidential election. The term also suggests the rising (media) importance of the two main party leaders (both potential Prime Ministers) and a turn from issue-oriented party politics to image-oriented person politics.

Two other specific circumstances are important: Firstly the fact that the opinion polls, at the beginning of the election campaign, made it clear that the incumbent government did not have enough votes to hold on to power. Thus the government was forced to try to steal votes from the opposition. Secondly, the short duration of the campaign. The election was called February 18th and election day was set to the 11th of May. This gave the parties less than three months to prepare and implement their campaigns, and the last two months before election day were characterized by intense and hectic campaigning.

The Communicator. The communicator in the advertisement is The Social Democratic Party and, implicitly, the leader and Prime Minister Poul Nyrup-Rasmussen. The Social Democratic Party originated from the Danish socialist labor movement and had close links to Marxism, at least until the Second World War. Today – especially after the fall of the Berlin wall – the party has somewhat removed itself from traditional socialism, and moved toward the “Third road” as advocated by Tony Blair and the British
Labour Party. In spite of this turn toward the Third road, the Labor movement and socialism in many ways still characterize the Social Democratic Party: It still maintains close links to the Labor movement, the 1st of May is still an important day for the Social Democrats, red is still the party’s color and the red rose still its symbol. Furthermore, according to the Social Democratic Party’s advertising agency, many Danes still conceive the party as a “party of oldish socialist beer bellies with red suspenders, singing Internationale”.9

Poul Nyrrup-Rasmussen made his entrance into party politics in 1992 at the expense of then party leader Svend Auken. The change of party leader was marked by conflict. In an article describing the new party leader as a “back stabber”, a Danish newspaper named the change “Regicide”.10 This controversial leader shift was the first in a number of much-discussed events in Nyrrup-Rasmussen’s political career as party leader—Events that the media described as either unfortunate or plain incompetent. The youth organization of the Danish Liberal Party, for instance, exploited the Prime Minister’s tainted ethos in its political campaigning, when it used a daily cartoon to remind the voters of the Prime Minister’s blunders (See Cartoon).

In general—and especially during the election campaign—a large part of public opinion conceived of Nyrrup-Rasmussen as a staged person, not behaving as himself but rather as a person who willingly gave in to the constraining terms of the media and tried to play the part of a great statesman. In a country where political communication consultants are extremely rare and often viewed with suspicion, there is no wonder that the Prime Minister’s extended use of such experts was much discussed. To a considerable extent, his attempted media appeal was perceived as unsuccessful and inappropriate. Already before he became Prime Minister, the media had named him “Mr. Woolly-minded talker”. During the campaign, the largest Danish newspaper published an article entitled “The Failure of the Consultants. The Danes Turn Away From Dissimulation”11, which described the impression of the Social Democratic election campaign in this way:

A lot of the voters have—thank God—apparently seen through all the tricks, when a rehearsed and choreographed Prime Minister rushes around the country while he says odd things and has his photograph taken with little children and old ladies.

Intention and message and The receiver. The advertisement’s intention was of course to get as many people as possible to vote for The Social Democratic Party, so that the party could stay in government. To do this, the party had to keep the traditional Social Democratic voters and “steal” votes from other parties. As advised by their advertising agency, the Social Democratic Party tried to appeal to young voters and constituents who traditionally vote to the right of the Social Democratic Party. That means, primarily, the Danish Liberal Party and the Conservatives.12 To this target group, consisting of many young Liberals, the socialist worldview is bankrupt—it is a worldview without political or personal appeal. To overcome the reluctance and dislikes of these groups of voters, the advertising agency Propganda launched an image campaign attempting to signal a modernized party with a youthful appeal. Thus, both the advertisement and the campaign as a whole aimed to exterminate the view of the party as an out-of-date party for old socialists and blue-collar workers.13 The effectiveness of such a rhetorical strategy is challenged by the difficulties in appealing to two different groups at the same time: 1) The voters to the right of the party, recalcitrant to the party’s political tradition,
During the 1998 Danish election campaign the youth organization of the Danish Liberal Party presented a daily cartoon in the national newspaper, Politiken. The aim of these cartoons was to remind the voters of the Prime Minister’s blunders. Both cartoons are titled “I ask myself...”. The first cartoon comments, respectively: 1. The Prime Minister’s takeover as leader of the Social Democratic Party from then leader Svend Auken (saying: “I made short work of Auken”); 2. The Prime Minister’s anxiety for national safety because fathwa-condemned Salman Rushdie was to receive a literary award in Denmark (“I got revenge over Rushdie”); 3. The Prime Minister’s half-hearted participation in a bicycle demonstration against French nuclear testing (“I gave Chirac a bloody nose”). The last frame is a somewhat unclear reference to leader of The Danish Liberal Party, Uffe Ellemann-Jensen (“I should go hunting with Uffe”). The other cartoon comments on the view of the Prime Minister as a pawn in the hand of the media consultants, presented as a politician who does not mind ‘roller-skating’ if that would appeal to the media and the public. The advertisements were published in the national newspaper Politiken February 26th and 28th, respectively. The size of the cartoons is 10 x 35 centimeter. Reproduced at the courtesy of Unge Venstre (The youth organization of the Danish Liberal Party).

and 2) The traditional social democratic voters, recalcitrant to a redefinition of the party, and possibly to the forms of expression chosen to signify this change.

Media, genre and form of expression. The advertisement was part of a campaign from the advertising agency Propaganda. Like the other campaign advertisements, this was inserted in the newspapers with the largest circulation in the country.14 Inserted in a newspaper, the advertisement has the communicative disadvantage that the reader might pass it by unnoticed or only read it partly. It is therefore important that the advertisement create attention and interest. On the other hand, a newspaper advertisement has the communicative advantage of using the written form to set forth good and relatively elaborate reasons for the party’s viewpoints. This includes giving a proper explanation of proposed policy.

These short remarks on the five necessary components in a communicative act do not qualify as a fully comprehensive, situational analysis. However, they do show the char-
acter of such an analysis. Hopefully the following will add a further understanding of the value of the rhetorical situational analysis.

II. Persuasive Elements

An analysis of visual rhetoric must take into consideration that influencing and persuading can occur in two fundamental ways: As an unconscious, or not thought through, response to persuasive cues, and as a conscious, or thought through, consideration. Social psychologists Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo call these two routes toward persuasion the peripheral and the central routes to attitude change. The central route to attitude change involves the active and conscious deliberation for and against the encountered discourse. The receiver weighs the relevant arguments against each other and determines which side is the more convincing. It is difficult to lead a person through this route, because it requires that the person be involved in cognitive, conscious deliberation. But when a person goes through this central route of attitude change, that change of attitude will be stronger and more persistent. The central route is, of course, especially effective if good arguments are at hand. It is also the most effective route when addressing a recalcitrant audience, because persuading such an audience requires elaborate and detailed argumentation, including refutation. For the same reason, persuading through this route is potentially most easily and efficiently performed in writing.

Deliberations made when going through the central route are primarily rational and can be displayed as persuasive hierarchies of values and attitudes. Such an understanding of argumentation is also dominant in Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca's work *The New Rhetoric*, in which the authors state that orators through their argumentation aim at the "adherence of minds." Such an adherence, we may add, requires that the speaker find a common ground (topoi, or in the terms of Stephen Toulmin, Warrant) for his message and the receiver.

Basing the argumentation on the common ground that "democracy is desirable" a politician opposed to EU membership can try to persuade an audience that the EU is an undemocratic institution. If members of the audience accept that the EU is undemocratic, they will be influenced (or even persuaded) into casting a "no" vote for membership in the EU. Thus, because a person seeking to persuade must always try to build argumentation on common ground rhetorical, argumentation is always based on hierarchies of values and attitudes. Such hierarchies and persuasive structures can be uncovered, displayed, and analyzed by Stephen Toulmin's model of argumentation, because it makes possible a structuring of the relation between the elements and levels of the argumentation.

In the peripheral route to attitude change the receiver is not actively and consciously engaged. The change of attitude is created not through deliberation, but through so called "persuasive cues." These are "factors or motives inherent in the persuasive setting that are sufficient to produce an initial attitude change without any active thinking about the attributes of the issue or the object under consideration." These cues—which can be an attractive source or a beautifully designed layout—allow a person to evaluate a communication without engaging in any extensive cognitive work relevant to the issue under consideration.

Because the peripheral route does not engage the person in extensive cognitive work, it is easier to lead a person through this route to attitude change. However, this route does not create a very strong or persistent change of attitude. Because the persuasive
cues are best at confirming and strengthening present attitudes, this route is especially useful when a communicator does not have substantial arguments and when one addresses an audience favorable to the claim or speaker. For these same reasons the peripheral route is not very efficient in persuading recalcitrant audiences. Finally, due to the transparent character of the persuasive cues, persuading through the peripheral route is potentially more easily and efficiently performed through images.

In the Social Democratic Party’s advertisement we find elements that appeal to both the central and the peripheral route. The advertisement uses both persuasive cues and persuasive hierarchies to appeal.

Locating Persuasive Cues

Three kinds of persuasive cues appear in the graphic design of the advertisement: (1) the use of color, (2) the composition and (3) the individual graphic elements (i.e. the helmet, the text and the logo). Since the advertisement is constructed of very few elements, the use of color is dominated by the plain blue background. On this background, and as a part of the only figurative and photographic element (i.e. the helmet), the bright yellow color dominates. On the bottom of the advertisement, and as part of the word “SociAldemokratiet” (“The Social Democratic Party”) we find the white ‘A’ capitalized and enclosed in a red circle. Thus the advertisement has a limited spectrum of colors made up of the clearly distinct colors light blue, yellow and red. To these colors we can add the use of black on the helmet and in the text, and of white in the logo’s capital ‘A’.

Yellow’s tendency of isolation and demarcation is accentuated by the light blue background, and the juxtaposition forms a remarkable and striking contrast. Mentally, the contrast marks confrontation and dynamism rather than harmony and stagnation. In this way the colors express something daring and sprightly, something energetic. Furthermore we normally find these colors and their combination in magazines, commercials and goods aimed at young people. At the end of the 90s, light blue was among the most fashionable colors. Thus the dynamism and energy of the contrast is strengthened by the modern and youthful color choice.

In the specific rhetorical situation, the light blue and yellow primarily connote anti-socialism and thus represent a move away from the traditional Social Democratic Party. Both colors are almost negations of the red rose and the red banners, and blue is the traditional color of the Liberals. However, the red circle draws in the opposite direction of the blue color’s statement of non-socialism and a renewed party. Also, the changed logo, “SocialAldemokratiet” (The Social Democratic Party), signifies a changed party - The main change being the introduction of the white ‘A’ in capital letters, in the red circle. Since ‘A’ is the place on the electoral list for the Social Democratic Party, this also serves to emphasize where the voter should place his or her vote (see also note 20). The black part of the bicycle helmet and the black text give weight and tone down the daring and sprightly. This way it is ensured that the bright, distinct and contrastive colors do not render the impression of something rash and uncontrolled.

All things considered, the advertisement’s composition has only four visual elements, united in a structure that is simple and austere, with the center as the compositional rallying point. On the light blue background (1), the bicycle helmet (2) floats over the center of the advertisement. Below the helmet, which is surrounded by free space, we find the heading and text (3) united as one visual element. At the bottom of the advertisement, as a foot that provides balance and support, we find the logo
(“SociAldemokratiet”) and the slogan (4). The composition has very few visual artistic effects, and few elements at all. It is characterized by simplicity and pronounced lightness. This simplicity and lightness not only makes the advertisement and the advertising concept as a whole recognizable, it is also a persuasive cue indicating the kind of party the Social Democrats have: A dynamic party, one that is not too heavy for change and adjustment to new times.

That the helmet appears to float supports both the compositional indication of lightness and the colors’ suggestion of dynamic movement and potential for change. At the same time the very simple, austere composition and black color indicate that the possible change is not an uncontrolled movement, but a controlled act, therefore representing progress rather than confusion. Clarity, simplicity, control and free space (and therefore potential for movement) combined with a restrained use of artistic means can be seen as a sign of quality and competence (as they are often used in commercial advertising). With the simple, controlled and light composition and the sparse use of elements, the composition therefore indicates quality, professionalism and energy.

The advertisement has several graphic elements that function as independent persuasive cues. The short, simple text visually indicates conciseness, energy and honesty. It implies that this communicator does not try to avoid the subject and hide in a political flood of words–this communicator uses no fuzzy or “woolly” sentences or verbal evasions. In contrast to the general view of the Prime Minister as “Mr. Woolly-minded talker”, the advertisement seems to signify a political party and Prime Minister that speak out and give plain answers.

Through the use of color, composition and graphic elements, and on the basis of its visual aesthetics, the advertisement creates at least three connected persuasive cues–Cues that because of the specific rhetorical situation will be taken as political qualities concerning: 1. Innovation, 2. Energy, dynamism and honesty, and 3. Competence.

**Reconstruction of Persuasive Hierarchies**

The rhetorical power of the persuasive cues lies in their transparency; the audience does not notice them or think actively about them. Encountering such a visual discourse, we normally do not consciously reconstruct the immanent persuasive hierarchies of these cues. If we did, we would more readily discover their foundation, and their often insufficient rationality. If we analyze the advertisement’s graphic manifestations as argumentation, three main arguments appear, which can efficiently be displayed in the argumentation model of Stephen Toulmin. The italics in the following hierarchies indicate statements that are visually explicit. Anything not in italics is therefore argumentation that is potentially constructed by the reader himself.

**First area of political quality: Innovation**

**Claim:** The Social Democratic Party is not the old unmovable, heavy, socialist labor party it once was, but an innovative, modern and dynamic party.

**Data:** In the advertisement the party is represented with a new logo, without the red rose and with a modern austere design, dominated by youthful, fashionable and light colors such as yellow and light blue.

**Warrant:** A change and an innovation in the presentation of political ideas means a change and innovation in political thought.
Second area of political qualities: Energy, dynamism and honesty
Claim: The Social Democratic Party is an energetic, dynamic and honest party.
Datum A: The party has changed and innovated its presentations and policy (cf. the innovation argument above).
Warrant A: Those who bring change and innovation are energetic and dynamic.
Datum B: In the advertisement the party is visually presented with an austere style and a composition characterized by simplicity and pronounced lightness. Overall the advertisement has few elements, a restrained use of artistic elements and a short text with a limited amount of words.
Warrant B: Simplicity, austerity, few elements, few words and a restrained use of artistic effects are all signs of honesty (and partly also of energy and dynamism).

Third area of political quality: Competence
Claim: The Social Democratic Party is a competent party.
Datum A: With its limited elements, lightness of design, concise text and controlled use of fashionable colors, the advertisement for the Social Democratic Party presents a professional and dynamic discourse.
Warrant A: It is competent to present a professional and dynamic discourse.
Datum B: The advertisement’s design makes it obvious that it has been created by a professional communication agency.
Warrant B: It is competent behavior to use professional communication agencies when dealing in public communication.

In the reception of the persuasive cues of the advertisement, arguments like these will be entangled with each other. The reader that does not go through the central route will thus neither sort out the specific elements of the argument (claim, datum, warrant), nor assess their persuasive relations. The reader will instead meet a clustering of persuasive cues, i.e. one undifferentiated statement indicating that the Social Democratic Party is an innovative, contemporary, professional, energetic and dynamic party (or at least that it wants to present itself as such).

While it is true in some cases that the way one behaves and presents oneself discloses something about how one actually is and what one thinks, the argument in this case is not as straightforward. First, here it is not the Social Democratic Party that expresses itself, but an advertising agency expressing ideas for the party. Does this still include the assumed link between form and content? Is a party really professional, just because it uses competent professionals? Regardless of the answers to questions like these, the rhetorical importance of persuasive cues is that their reception does not normally include analytic thinking like this. They instead render an uncontested view of the communicator through the form of the message.

Even more interesting in the construction of persuasive hierarchies is the choice of the bicycle helmet as a visual symbol. For the members of the audience who do not contemplate the meaning of the helmet, it will function as a persuasive cue about the qualities safety and protection, and about a problematic ethos. These qualities cannot as a matter of course be meaningfully connected, and they have no direct connection with the design and graphic of the advertisement, or the heading “We can all wise up”. This
lack of connection and obvious meaning forces the audience to contemplate the meaning of the bicycle helmet and the advertisement as a whole. In this way the audience is forced to cognitively go through the central route to attitude change. The persuasive implications of the use of the helmet can be illustrated in the following manner:

The bicycle helmet argument

**Claim 1.** You should vote for Prime Minister Nyrup-Rasmussen (i.e. The Social Democratic Party), because he has political qualities.

**Datum 1:** Prime Minister Nyrup-Rasmussen has humor, self-irony, and self-insight.

**Warrant 1:** It is sensible to vote for candidates with political qualities, and humor, self-irony, and self-insight are political qualities.

**Claim 2/**

**Datum 1:** Prime Minister Nyrup-Rasmussen has humor, self-irony, and self-insight.

**Datum 2:** Prime Minister Nyrup-Rasmussen admits and points out his own blunders.

**Warrant 2:** A person that admits and points out his own blunders has humor, self-irony, and self-insight.

**Claim 3/**

**Datum 2:** Prime Minister Nyrup-Rasmussen admits and displays his own blunders publicly.

**Datum 3:** Prime Minister Nyrup-Rasmussen presents the visual symbol for his blunders (the bicycle helmet) in his own advertising.

**Warrant 3:** To present the symbol of your blunders in your own advertising is publicly admitting and displaying your blunders.

At this point our rhetorical analysis differs from the tropological in several ways. Instead of beginning with and placing emphasis on the discourse in order to reconstruct a hidden langue, the rhetorical analysis begins with and emphasizes the rhetorical situation. Then, in the light of the situational analysis, the rhetorical critic looks for persuasive elements in the specific discourse (parole). Locating the persuasive cues is in many ways similar to the tropological analysis, but is more directly oriented toward persuasion, and is not tightly connected to the verbally anchored apparatus of ornatus. Furthermore, the locating of persuasive cues is just one step on the rhetorical analytical road. The ability to locate is pre-conditioned by the situational analysis and is elaborated in the reconstruction of persuasive hierarchies. Then (as will be shown shortly) the cues will be used in exploring the rhetorical strategies and forms of appeal.

The reconstruction of persuasive hierarchies is not used in tropological analysis, but is important for rhetorical analysis. Such an ordering and display of the arguments can clearly illustrate how the elements are related. Furthermore it reveals the ground on which the argumentation is built. Warrant 1, for example, clearly reveals that the argument’s foundation is the conception that humor, self-irony and self-insight are political qualities. Understanding this is a prerequisite for an assessment of the visual argumentation. The reconstruction also clearly tells us that only a very limited part of the argumentation is explicit (the arguments marked by italics), and that it is not (main) claims, but the data that are explicit. Thus the audience itself must create the argument and make explicit the claim, thereby participating in its own swaying.
For our purposes, the display of the hierarchies was primarily meant to illustrate the usefulness of Toulmin’s argumentation model as an analytical means. Using all of the model’s elements and terminology, and analyzing the structures, elements, and fundament in more detail, the rhetorical analysis could be made even more precise and comprehensive.

III. Strategy and Appeals
It now begins to be clear that the main visual strategy (or mode of operation) is dominated by two appeals to ethos. One is the use of persuasive cues in the graphic visual design that presents the Social Democratic Party in a professional, dynamic and competent way. This appeal aims at image building and persuading the audience that the party is competent and contemporary. The other appeal to ethos is the use of the helmet as evidence of the ‘political’ qualities (humor, self-irony and self-insight) of the party leader and hence the party in general.

Both the overall graphic design and the helmet as a visual symbol appeal to good moral character (aretē)\(^2\). The primary visual appeal is thus to ethos, and both the general design and the irony are forms of enforcement of political image. The visual uses ethos to appeal to an appreciation of self-irony and thereby attempts to create a change of image for the Social Democratic Party. The verbal primarily uses logos in an appeal for the importance of education, and thereby implies that you should vote for this party because it appreciates the importance of education. The crucial question here is the visual appeal, and therefore we shall not concern ourselves particularly with the verbal appeal. However, it is notable that the written text presents nothing but generalities, commonplaces, and empty remarks. The title is “We can all get wiser”, and the text reads as follows:

> We shall continue to learn our whole lives. However, the school is the fundamental part of life’s luggage. It is in the schools that the children must get the knowledge and the independence, that is needed in a country that lives by knowledge. That is why our system of education must measure up to the best in the world. And that is why all young people must be given the chance to be educated. Call 31 39 0440 if you would like to receive a pamphlet on other positions of ours.

Every single statement in the text could out of hand be placed in any Danish party’s advertisement. The text says nothing but states that education is important—a political commonplace that no one will disagree in.

Through these considerations we can, among other things, establish that the advertisement employs different appeals in the verbal and visual statements. It employs a verbal appeal to logos characterized by political generalities, and a visual appeal to ethos characterized by the (re)construction of image. Knowing the character of these appeals is important in determining the rhetorical significance of the visual, and the assessment of the rhetorical, discourse.

IV. The Rhetorical Significance of the Visual
The visual is significant in its ability to attract attention and create interest. The austere visual design and sparse text are a promise to the reader that here is a statement that does not require too much cognitive energy. This promise of limited labor in decoding invites the reader to a closer look at the advertisement’s message. Furthermore, the
mysterious combination of the bicycle helmet and the heading: “We can all get wiser” both creates attention and holds the reader’s interest. The visual composition thus has the same function as the exordium in the traditional rhetorical speech: To create attention and interest, and to win the good will of the audience (captatio benevolentia).

When interest has been created, the reader encounters the “real” visual rhetoric. Here we can distinguish between two main forms (strategies): The latent and the manifest.

**Latent Visual Rhetoric**

Latent visual rhetoric is characterized by the fact that it does not obviously present itself as rhetoric and is not at first thought of as rhetoric. It therefore leads the audience through the peripheral route. The function and persuasive value of this type of visual rhetoric is primarily to hide that it is rhetoric. Though the latent visual rhetoric creates claims and arguments, it is rhetorically important that they are not perceived as claims and arguments. It is precisely characteristic for persuasive cues that they are seldom consciously perceived as claims or arguments.

In our specific advertisement, the persuasive cues give mainly an impression of the kind of party the Social Democratic Party is (or wants to be regarded as). However, though the visual representations exert rhetoric in this way, they do not appear as statements or arguments, and therefore evade the cognitive engagement of the reader. The rhetorical advantage of visually showing the statement about the Social Democratic Party is that it in this way is not claimed, but just appears, and therefore just ‘is’. To let something appear without spelling it out explicitly, is especially important in mediation of ethos and image. Both common knowledge and rhetorical theory tell us that we do not improve our credibility just by saying that we are professional, dynamic and contemporary, but by behaving professionally, dynamically, and contemporarily. Through the visual, one can represent statements that would seem importunate if expressed verbally and explicitly.

Of course, it is possible to appear professional, dynamic, and contemporary through a written text, without explicitly claiming to possess these qualities. However, the visual representation can deliver this message faster, more effectively, and more economically than the verbal. This is very important because readers normally do not deploy much time, attention, or cognitive energy into advertisements. In contrast to the cognitive labor it takes to engage in and read a text, all we must do with a visual advertisement like this one is glance at it to understand the message about the Social Democratic Party’s image.

The visual rhetoric, which apparently shows the content of the message to the eye, seems to make it invisible to conscious thought. The visual argument is not perceived as an argument, because the argument is not perceived. By contrast, the verbally expressed argument does not make its content visible to the eye, but restricts itself to tell it, using the arbitrary connection to the written text. It is precisely through this verbal invisibility that the content of the argument makes itself seen to the mind of the audience. One can almost say that we realize what is written but do not see what is shown.

**Manifest Visual Rhetoric**

Manifest visual rhetoric is characterized by the fact that the visual representation obviously functions as rhetoric. This primarily leads the audience along the central route to attitude change. The function and value of this type of rhetoric is first and foremost to
WHAT THE METAPHOR COULD NOT TELL US ABOUT THE PRIME MINISTER’S BICYCLE HELMET

make audience members engage in construction of persuasive hierarchies and consider consciously certain arguments.

In the specific advertisement, the main entrance to the central route to persuasion is through the use of the bicycle helmet as a symbol. Since it is obvious that the helmet functions as a statement in a persuasive context, the reader will almost inevitably assess what the helmet is used to state. Thus the reader engages himself in a cognitive deliberation. Through the wish to understand and create meaning, the reader is forced to consider the topic that the visual representation brings forward: the ethos of Prime Minister Nyrup-Rasmussen. The use of such visual representations and symbols to lead the audience into persuasive hierarchies is rhetorically advantageous because these representations do not directly seem to claim anything, but instead indicate arguments. In so doing they create what we can call controlled freedom in the construction of persuasive hierarchies. The reader knows that the helmet is part of a political and rhetorical context, and will therefore–either intuitively or consciously–try to construct a persuasive argument that gives meaning rhetorically. As the communicator is the Social Democratic Party, the meaning cannot be the claim that the Prime Minister is a staged, incompetent, bicycle riding politician. In the search of rhetorical coherence and meaning, the reader is led to the construction of the argument about the political qualities of the Prime Minister. In this way the bicycle helmet functions as a visual enthymeme.

In his reinterpretation of the Aristotelian enthymeme, Lloyd F. Bitzer has advocated that the essence of the enthymeme is that it is constructed by speaker and audience in communion. In the enthymemes of a speech, the premises are omitted, so that audience members must contribute the premises themselves. Thus, the members of the audience themselves help in creating and completing the syllogistic argumentation by which they are persuaded. Thus, according to Bitzer, the enthymeme holds an important persuasive value in its ability to help create a self-convincing audience. Self-convincing is a most effective form of convincing, because the person is actively engaged in creating the arguments himself. Seemingly, audiences are offered the freedom to draw their own conclusions, and they think that they themselves have worked out the answer. This is exactly what the advertisement attempts to accomplish.

In this explanation of the advertisement’s rhetorical function it is important to remember that the visual enthymeme created by the image of the bicycle helmet is just a part of a more comprehensive rhetorical discourse: the advertisement as a whole. What determines the rhetorical value of the image is its relation to this context. The closest and most important relation is to the heading and text under the picture. Therefore a few remarks about this are necessary.

**Anchorage and Relay Rhetorically**

In a great deal of rhetoric the visual and verbal messages are used to strengthen and support each other. This support can occur because both discourses redundantly express the same thing, and thereby emphasize similarities in meaning (anchorage), or it can occur because the visual and the verbal express something different, emphasizing differences between the two discourses (relay), thereby creating a new ‘statement’ of a higher order. The operations anchorage and relay create meaning, but not necessarily rhetorical—Which does of course not mean that these operations are not rhetorically relevant, just not rhetorical in themselves.

In our specific case anchorage does not occur. However, it could be argued that the visual statement about the ethos of the Prime Minister and the Social Democratic Party,
along with the verbally expressed statement about educational policies, create an inter-
play between signifier and signified, and therefore the verbal and the visual are united
in a statement of a higher order. However, because differences in meaning can only be
seen on the background of existing similarities, anchorage is a necessity for the function
of relay, and thus for the creation of a meaning of a higher order. Because the image of
the helmet as a visual symbol possesses so many different and distracting meanings,
this anchorage does not occur.

There is not a clear enough connection between the references to the events con-
nected to the bicycle demonstration against French nuclear testing and educational poli-
cies to form a united message. In the end, both modes of expression act on their own
behalf. The advertisement does not hold the redundant, reiterating power of anchorage
nor the communion of two different modes of expression in a third message. The visual
rhetoric does not seem to be maximally utilized.

V. Assessment of the Rhetorical Discourse as a Whole

The conflict between the statement of the advertisement and the reader’s perception of
the real events.

Displayed in formal persuasive hierarchies, both the appeal to logos and the ethos
are logically valid. While the validity of the arguments can hardly be questioned, the
truth of their premises, or their degree of their probability can. We can, for instance,
question whether it actually is the Social Democratic Party that expresses itself in the
advertisement, and we can question the ‘value’ of the argument when recognizing that
it is not the Social Democratic Party but the advertising agency expressing the argu-
ments. Also, the implicit argument about the Prime Minister’s ethos is logically valid.
It is not very debatable that the advertisement actually represents and admits the
blunder(s) of the Prime Minister. And it is hardly debatable that representing and ad-
mitting your own blunders is normally a sign of humor, self-irony, and self-insight. The
argument about humor, self-irony and self-insight is therefore in a sense self-fulfilling,
because the blunder is actually presented.

However, this does not mean that the argument was convincing. The claim was in
conflict with the view held by a considerable part of the public. Generally, and in the
election campaign especially, the public did not conceive of the Prime Minister as a
straight-talking person with the ‘political’ qualities of humor, self-irony and self-in-
sight. He was, as we have seen, rather perceived as a ‘woollyminded talker’ and a
staged person not behaving like himself, but instead trying to please the media, playing
the role of the great statesman. Since the attempt at the role of great statesman— as de-
scribed earlier— was generally perceived as a failure, it concurred with neither the asser-
tions of competence nor those about humor, self-irony and self-insight.

The discrepancy between the view of the Prime Minister’s political appearance and
the advertisement’s assertion erodes the entire message of the advertisement. That the
advertisement is paid for and created by an advertising agency even conveys the risk
that the whole advertisement is considered a part of the staging of the Prime Minister. If
this happens, the advertisement will deconstruct its own persuasion, and refute itself.

Ambiguity and double communication. As are many of the other advertisements cre-
ated by Propaganda for the Social Democratic Party, “The Bicycle Helmet” is a visually
ambiguous discourse. On one hand such an ambiguity is a rhetorical advantage, because
it creates attention and engages the reader cognitively in determining the meaning of
the message. On the other hand the ambiguity is rhetorically problematic, because the
many possible decodings and interpretations of the advertisement are left without much interpretative control.

In “The Bicycle Helmet” the value of the ambiguity is diminished because the ambiguity is too open and uncontrolled. Firstly, this is caused by the ambiguity of the helmet’s role as a symbol, and secondly due to the lack of anchorage between the different modes of expression. Encountering the picture of the helmet and the text “We can all get wiser”, the reader will presume that the picture refers to the Prime Minister and that the text does too – That is not the case. The text is about how important education is, and how important it is to gain knowledge throughout life. Because the helmet as a symbol is dominated by connotations about the Prime Minister’s ethos, the connection between bicycle helmet and education is recalcitrant. The advertisement sends a confusing and thereby unrhetorical message. Consequently, the power of the central route to persuasion is undermined, and the readers largely left with the persuasive cues leading to the peripheral route.

Furthermore, when using images it is communicatively hazardous and possibly inappropriate to simultaneously talk seriously about the importance of education and try to be humorous and self-ironic. It is easier to be both serious and funny or self-ironic during a speech. Due to the linear and temporal communication form of a speech, it is by nature possible to alternate between styles. Without losing the confidence of the television audience, a news reporter can first, with a concerned expression, announce death and suffering following a natural disaster, and then turn his face into a smile announcing that a Panda in a Chinese zoo just had twins. Because non-moving images do not unfold in time as moving images do, such changing of styles is extremely difficult when communicating with images. When trying to appeal through both a serious and a funny style within the same image, it is likely that the discourse will be conceived as announcing a natural disaster with a smile.

Image and recalcitrant audience. The primary function of the visual in the present advertisement can be determined as an attempt at an appeal to ethos in order to create a change in image. In the specific rhetorical situation, this strategy is problematic. To change and consolidate an image takes time and can hardly be achieved in an election campaign as short as the 1998 Danish campaign. Image campaigning requires continuous marketing during a substantial period of time.

Add to this that it is probably more difficult to succeed with image campaigning in politics than in the pure commercial realm. In Scandinavia this is partly because parties simply cannot afford the price an image campaign of long duration would have. Secondly, it is difficult to succeed with paid image campaigning in Scandinavia because the construction of a party’s (and a politician’s) image is created primarily by the daily non-paid appearance of the politicians in the media. In their day-to-day work politicians are effectuating ongoing image campaigns for themselves and their parties, and the effects of these campaigns are much stronger and more lasting than the effects a short paid campaign before an election can produce. Moreover, the message of image campaigning seems unreliable when this campaigning only appears just before elections.

The analysis of the advertisement “The Bicycle Helmet” indicates that in some cases in politics – and I believe in most cases – the best ethos is created through the logos of the politician. The image of the politicians and the parties first and foremost depends on how they act politically. Mostly, the content determines the form, and not the other way around. For the same reasons I do not consider it likely that Scandinavian election campaigns can primarily be won through image campaigning.
In “The Bicycle Helmet” the image changing appeal is primarily created through visual persuasive cues. As mentioned earlier, such persuasive cues do not entail an effective way of persuading engaged readers in affairs that have personal relevance and/or might have personal consequences. In a Scandinavian election campaign, where voter turnout is normally between 70-90 %, the voter will almost always have some form of conscious involvement in the election and experience some kind of personal relevance toward it.

Under normal circumstances it is likely that the average voter in a Danish election campaign is so involved in the campaign that he or she will choose the central route to attitude change. If met by discourses that mainly appeal through persuasive cues, by the previous account this voter will probably reject it. This is especially true for the Social Democratic Party advertisement, because both the advertisement and the election campaign as a whole are directed toward voters who do not traditionally vote for the Social Democratic Party, and therefore can be expected to be not only concerned about the election and politics in general, but also recalcitrant. Recalcitrant and concerned voters are not swayed by persuasive cues. To move voters from one party to another requires more than a contemporary and dynamic design. This ‘more’, could have been the statements in the written text, but here the voters are served generalities and political commonplaces—Empty political statements so general that they only work as persuasive cues.

Hopefully the analysis of “The Bicycle Helmet” has illustrated that when we try to understand how rhetoric works and potentially influences people, we must consider the rhetorical situation, the persuasive elements and the rhetorical strategies and forms of appeal. The tropological analysis does not entail such considerations because it originates from structuralist semiotics, which is not a theory about persuasion or argumentation but about meaning and how meaning is created. This means that it has neither a method nor a system of terminology that can deal with persuasive hierarchies of values and attitudes or general rhetorical strategies and appeals. The tropological analysis cannot in an analytically expedient way distinguish between a simple statement and an argument, or determine whether something is a good or a bad argument—be it in ethically or efficiently good or bad.

Of course, this does not mean that the tropological analysis is useless—Far from it. Structuralist insight and some forms of tropological analyses can be very helpful in decoding and determining the meaning of specific rhetorical discourses. Still, the structuralist or tropological approach does not qualify as primarily rhetorical. Because rhetorical discourse is fundamentally situational, a search for a hidden rhetorical langue that can account for the persuasiveness of all rhetorical utterances is bound to be in vain. Before Monica Lewinsky, one could seriously state that “Bill Clinton is truly a considerate father”. When ironically stating the same words today, nothing in the structure of the sentence has changed; The new rhetorical quality of the statement stems solely from the new situation and the ironical intention. In other words, the rhetorical is not primarily to be found in the structure of the signifier, but in the situation wherein the signifier is embedded.

Besides illustrating a more comprehensive and situational rhetorical analysis, the critique of “The Bicycle Helmet” has hopefully also produced some insight into how intentional visual communication possibly influences people, as well as presented the value of the rhetorical analysis. In general we can say that the overall objective of the tropological analysis is non-evaluating and semantic or semiotic; while the overall ob-
jective of the rhetorical analysis is evaluative and pragmatic or functional. The first describes how meaning is created in general, the second how specific instances of rhetoric work and how they can be judged.

Notes

1. The fusion of the of the concepts paradigm/syntagm with the concepts metaphor/metonymy happens with Jakobson (1956). For comments and accounts of this fusion see Barthes (1980, page 50, including note 2), and Vickers (1997, pages 442-53). Gérard Genette (1970) writes about tropological reduction, referring to the gradual limitation first from a general rhetoric to the treatment of rhetorical tropes and figures, and second to only metaphor and metonymy, then finally exclusively to the metaphor. With reference to Groupe μ (1970), he says: “Nowadays we call general rhetoric what is in fact a treatise on figures” (page 103f).

2. The five canons (alternatively called the parts, faculties, functions, categories, or divisions) represent the five fundamental rhetorical issues: Inventio (Invention), Dispositio (arrangement, organization), Elocutio (Style and adornment), Memoria (memory) and Actio (delivery and presentation). The four virtues in Elocutio are Perspecuitas (clarity), Decorum (aptness), Puritas (Correctness) and of course Ornatus (adornment).

3. For a more elaborate theoretical treatment of the limited rhetorical foundation of the ornatus-approach see Kjeldsen (1999).


7. In the structural tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure, who mentions in his Course in General Linguistics (1959: 16) that linguists study langue, which has two aspects: The synchronic (the system at a given time) and the diachronic (the history of the system).

8. Cicero writes in De Oratore III.iv.210: “no single kind of oratory suits every cause or audience or speaker or occasion” (my italics) and hereby both mentions the necessary components of every speech act and underscores the value of a situational analysis.

9. Interview with Frederik Preisler from the advertising agency Propaganda (September 8, 1998).

10. The article “The Rose is in Poisoned Water. The Regicide, the Character Assassination, the Coup” (“Rosen står i forgiftet vand. Kongemordet, karaktermordet, kuppet”) was published in the newspaper Berlingske Tidende on March 22nd, 1992. The article describes an extraordinary executive committee meeting in the Social Democratic Party, where a prominent party member and former minister (Mogens Lykketoft) proposed Poul Nyrrup-Rasmussen as the party candidate for Prime Minister instead of then party leader Svend Auken.


12. Interview with Frederik Preisler from the advertising agency Propaganda (September 8, 1998).

13. Interview with Frederik Preisler from the advertising agency Propaganda (September 8, 1998), cf. note 9.

14. On Friday, February 27th, it was inserted on a half page in the broadsheet format of Politiken (Size 17.3 x 21.2). The same day it was inserted on a full page in the tabloid format of Ekstra Bladet. The elements were the same, but the advertisement had a somewhat different composition.


20. For the same reasons the advertising agency for the Social Democratic Party (Propaganda) advocated that the circle with the capital A - seen in all of the campaign material for the Social democrats - should be in yellow. The Social Democratic Party considered the proposal to be radical, and rejected it in fear of frightening off traditional social democratic voters. It was put forward by party members that yellow was a
strong "non-social democratic" signal, and that yellow is the color of deceit (Interview with Frederik Preisler from the advertising agency Propaganda the 8th of September 1998).

21. Following Aristotle's distinction between good sense (Phronesis), good moral character (arete) and goodwill (eunoia) in book two of the Rhetoric.

22. See for instance chapter VI ("Making Discourse Ethical", especially page 191) in Garver (1994), which describes how the best ethos is created through the good logos.

23. Barthes (1977), Larsen (1995), page 27. In exemplifying relay, Roland Barthes refers to cartoons: "The function of relay is less common (at least as far as the fixed image is concerned); it can be seen particularly in cartoons and comic strips. Here text (most often a snatch of dialogue) and image stand in a complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realized at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis" (1977) page 41.

24. In Denmark the political candidates participate in television debates, political interviews and other programs much more than candidates in, for instance, the U.S. - and are seen and heard by a large part of the population (See for instance Kaid & Holtz-Bacha 1995). A nother important difference between political campaigning in Scandinavia and the U.S. is that, except for Finland, political advertising on television is prohibited in all of the Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Iceland).


26. As Roland Barthes seems to suggest in "The Rhetoric of the Image" when he writes: "Classical rhetoric needs to be rethought in structural terms (this is the object of a work in progress); it will then perhaps be possible to establish a general rhetoric or linguistics of the signifiers of connotation, valid for articulated sound, image, gesture, etc." (1977) page 50. The "work in progress" was later published in Communications 16, (1970) as "L’ancienne Rhétorique (Aide-mémoire)", the structural approach is further elaborated in the general theory of the figures of language as proposed by Groupe µ (1970).

References


WHAT THE METAPHOR COULD NOT TELL US ABOUT THE PRIME MINISTER’S BICYCLE HELMET


The World Wide Web offers almost unrestricted freedom of speech. Consequently, this large marketplace of ideas contains all kinds of information including plagiarism, falsifications, and incorrect data. Sometimes, web information is considered problematic, or even dangerous, because of its possible influence on the readers’ thoughts and acts, but, “dangerous” information is not necessarily related to issues like pornography, racial hatred, blasphemy or bomb-making. The presence of misleading, unreliable or indefinable information might be a problem that is even more difficult to survey. Since we are expected to collect an increasing amount of information from the World Wide Web, what information can we use and trust?

This study shows that the freedom of the World Wide Web can provide great opportunities for some actors, but it can also mislead the readers. Living History, a serious information campaign, supported by the Swedish government, was plagiarised by an anonymous web actor, True History, which presented conflicting opinions. This plagiarism gave rise to an interesting kind of interaction between these two actors, whose inequality as regards their positions and resources would certainly be more noticeable in other arenas.

The concept hypertextual dialogue is chosen to describe the above interaction. The first part, hypertextual, refers to the structure on the World Wide Web, but also to the intertextuality that unites texts from different sites and makes them interrelated and part of the same discourse - the term hypertext can be used to apply to both the structure and the content. In this study, the latter aspect is focused. The second part of the concept, the dialogue, refers to a definition used by Linell (1998:9): “any dyadic or polyadic interaction between individuals who are mutually co-present to each other and who interact through language (or some other symbolic means)”. A hypertextual dialogue takes place in an arena, like the World Wide Web, where the actors interact more or less deliberately in several ways.

The aim is to identify some kind of hypertextual dialogue between the two sites on the World Wide Web, and to find out,

- how the texts become interrelated and part of the same discourse;
- how the reproduction and recontextualisation of words or text segments cause a change in the meaning of the message;
how the actors interact and affect one another;
how the actors describe their own and the other’s identities.

Methodological Considerations
The method chosen for this study is textual analysis inspired by rhetoric together with theories of dialogism. Texts from two different web sites are examined and compared. One of these sites uses the Holocaust as a point of departure to encourage a discussion about humanity, democracy, and equality. The other site represents a revisionist ideology that regards the Holocaust as a myth, and is not prepared to accept the official depiction of the Holocaust.

As a background to the empirical data, the method will be described, followed by a short discussion about some issues related to hypertext as data.

Textual Analysis of a Relationship
When we want to affect someone to bring about a change, no matter if it is in an official speech, through advertising or in an everyday argumentation, a knowledge of rhetorical mechanisms and tools is useful to us. Cassirer (1997:104) catches the core of rhetoric in the following question: “Who says what, where, to whom, when and in which way, with what effect?” This formulation could also correspond to the description of a classical linear communication process, in which the sender transfers a message through a channel to a receiver with the intention of changing behaviour or attitude (Fiske 1997). Linear transfer models of communication, as well as rhetoric, propose that the communication, or persuasion, process can best be understood step by step. Successful communication takes place if the message arrives at the destination as intended – when the effects seem to correspond to the sender’s expectation or aim. Certainly, in approaches like these, the process is greatly simplified and many dimensions of interaction are excluded. The transfer models treat communication as a “from-to” process, which, according to Linell (1999), also can be seen as monological. He emphasises the necessity of a dialogical perspective to understand communication as a “between process” – a process in which the parties share knowledge, mutually provide evidence, and establish an intersubjectivity.

Karlberg and Mral (1998) declare that rhetorical analysis has a holistic perspective. Its aim is the production, the contents, and the reception of a persuasive message, but the social context and the rhetorical situation serve as points of departure for the analysis. The purpose is to understand the construction of speech, or text, with a persuasive function, by taking into account the wholeness. Rhetorical analysis does not offer any standard procedure to follow – each single analysis has to be adjusted according to the prevailing conditions. Karlberg & Mral present a model for analysis that can be used on various media texts.

The process of persuasion presupposes human interaction. In the following textual analysis, rhetoric is used as source of inspiration, but some of the ideas of dialogism also serve to emphasise the dialogue and the actors’ influence on one another. For instance, concepts from Bakhtin and Goffman have encouraged the dialogical approach. Further, rhetorical analysis is an interpreting method that does not exclude the impact of other theories, and this makes it possible to use rhetoric in a more exploratory way.
Where Is the Text in Hypertext?

The strongest attribute of the World Wide Web text is its ability to use links and to move from one point in a text to another. Today, links between words, or segments of text, appear natural in this context (Mitra & Cohen 1999).

Conventional text printed on paper has a clear axis of development, from beginning through middle to end. Hypertext, however, does not have this dominant axis and does not flow in a single direction.

The term "hypertext", coined in 1963 by Theodore Nelson, was first used to refer to "non-sequential writing". In science, except for medicine and psychology, the prefix "hyper-" connotes extension and generality. According to Snyder (1997:24), hypertext initially encompassed "texts that are minimally or maximally non-linear and tightly or loosely structured" meaning in a broader sense that all texts could be regarded as hypertext. A more appropriate definition today might be that "[h]ypertext is essentially a network of links between words, ideas and sources that has neither a centre nor an end" (Snyder 1997:18).

The hypertextual structure, or rather lack of structure, promotes intertextuality. Fairclough (1998:84) describes "intertextuality" as the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth". This approach does not especially allude to hypertext or the hypertextual structure, but obviously the connections between intertextuality and hypertextuality are strong. When texts become interrelated, the meaning of a single text depends on other texts, and on the links that have been used. The same text can be understood in several ways. One aspect of this phenomenon, expressed by Landow (1992:53), is that electronic linking also "disperses 'the' text into other texts", and that this process weakens any sense of textual uniqueness.

Bakhtin (in Fairclough 1998:84) has chosen the chain as a metaphor to illustrate intertextuality: "[texts] always constitute additions to existing 'chains of speech communication' consisting of prior texts to which they respond". Further, these chains are attached to the historical, cultural, and institutional settings in which they appear. If a single utterance, or a single text, actually consists of a multitude of voices, Bakhtin's fundamental question seems legitimate: "Who is doing the talking?" However, since there might be a lot of different voices involved, the answer is probably quite complicated. This approach focuses on the dialogicality, and multiplicity of voices, in speech and text.

The meaning of a text is not fixed, or "there"; instead the production of meaning is grounded in a process of dialogicality, which takes place in interactions: On the one hand, it takes place in the sender's struggle with thoughts, words and formulations, involving the interplay with other texts. On the other hand, it takes place in the receiver's efforts in assigning meaning and creating an understanding, which somehow fits the contexts given, and the purposes, which are relevant to him or her (Linell 1998).

The dialogical approach, in which many different voices can be seen, apparently fits in on hypertext, and today Bakhtin's ideas are discussed in a new context. Hypertext on the World Wide Web, with its intertextual character, illustrates the complexity of different voices, the interplay between these voices, and the co-production of meaning.

A analysis of hypertext brings up questions concerning limitation, direction, and order. Further, the transient nature of hypertext has to be considered - in some regard, hypertext might be closer to speech than to written text. Hypertext printed on paper to facilitate the analysis is comparable with a snapshot in which a frozen and strictly demarcated moment has been caught.
A Description of the Empirical Data

In an attempt to catch some hypertextual aspects in the analysis, texts from two interacting web sites are analysed and compared. The relationship between these sites, both between the actors and between the texts, has been examined with the intention of taking in consideration the dialogue, or the multivoiced orientation, present in the text.

Living History and True History

In January 1998, Living History, in Swedish Levande Historia, opened a web site to inform people about the Holocaust and the Nazi terror during World War II. The initiator of this information campaign was Prime Minister Göran Persson, and the Swedish government supported it. According to the information in English, the project consisted of four parts: political manifestations, information to parents and the general public, activities in schools, and support for universities and the research community. The purpose was “to encourage discussion of issues relating to humanity, democracy and equality, using the Holocaust as a point of departure”. Part of the campaign was also the distribution of a book, entitled “Tell ye your children…” (... om detta må ni berätta...). The book is offered free, and parents of schoolchildren in particular are invited to order it.

The web site offers a comprehensive selection of information about the Holocaust, including facts about the Nazi terror, the testimony of survivors, life-stories of victims, research findings, recommended literature, issues to discuss in school, addresses of individuals and organisations working with the project, and links to other web sites of interest to the readers. The aim is also to establish a stimulating meeting place for teachers, students, and anyone else interested in the subject. Consequently, interactivity on the web site is promoted in different ways, for example e-mail contacts with people involved in the project and the exchange of ideas between teachers at seminars.

Later, in the autumn of 1998, someone plagiarised the site on the World Wide Web. The plagiarism was named True History, in Swedish Sann Historia, but had chosen an almost identical web address as Living History, only the final part differed. Living History used the address "www.levandehistoria.org", while the plagiarism used "www.levande historia.com". Furthermore, the design, typography and colours (black and yellow) were strikingly the same, but the aim was quite different. In the plagiarism the Holocaust was questioned and revisionist ideas were expressed. Survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust were pointed out as liars and their stories were criticised and questioned: "Our well-researched evidence is supported by irrefutable scientific documents, whereas their evidence is based on unreliable stories from traumatised war-time witnesses". The name True History also showed a certain degree of self-confidence.

When the plagiarism was detected, Living History successfully tried to stop it. A warning on the original, and a press release, informed readers about the purpose of True History and its revisionist ideas. Even so, after being removed from the World Wide Web, the web site emerged again, now in blue and yellow like the Swedish national flag. The same web address, www.levandehistoria.com, was used, and still is.

The size of the Living History web site, compared with the site of True History, was quite imposing. In February 1999, the plagiarism contained about 10,000 words, but Living History was at least eight times that as long.
In Search of a Dialogue
Three objects from each of the two sites have been chosen. These texts are connected in different ways, and will be analysed in pairs with one from each site, to look into the relationship between the texts. Different aspects are examined in the analyses: the change in meaning when some of the original words are replaced, the presentation of self and of the other, and the usage of isolated text segments from the other site.

First, the pages that rhetorically serve as introductions to the sites are analysed. True History plagiarised most of its contents from Living History, and this page could be seen as the actual plagiarism. Consequently, the texts Living History and True History present on these pages are very similar, but the words that do not correspond make a great difference. After the description of the two pages, the plagiarism is compared with the original text.

In the second case, a press release from the Living History site, together with the explanation True History gave of why the site was removed, have been chosen as objects for the analysis. The emphasis will be on the self-presentations and on the descriptions of the other site.

Finally, Living History presents a testimony from Emerich Roth, one of the survivors of the Nazi camps, and True History criticises the authenticity of this testimony in an open letter. The letter is addressed to Living History, especially to Emerich Roth, and it calls in question not only his testimony, but also the entire Holocaust. True History invites Emerich Roth to publish a reply, or rather an apology, on their web site. The quotations and arguments used by True History are emphasised in the analysis.

Genre and Relationship Between the Sites
Living History belongs to a genre one could to describe as information, or enlightenment. The web site provides the readers with facts, experiences, research findings, literature and films, issues to discuss et cetera. Survivors and witnesses from World War II play important parts. The message is that within a few years, those who experienced the Holocaust will be gone, and we have to listen to them now. There is also an element of justice involved in Living History: On the one hand, accusing the Nazis of one of the most carefully organised ethnic cleansings in modern times, and, on the other, defending and protecting the authenticity of the material, as well as issues of democracy and humanity.

True History presents itself as “opposed to Living History”, and by exploiting revisionist ideas, True History questions Living History. The criticism is directed at the Swedish government, as promoter of the campaign, and especially at the Prime Minister as the initiator. Further, accusations are made against survivors, witnesses, researchers, and others maintaining the Holocaust myth. The issue of freedom of speech is also on the agenda. True History declares that “free speech generates healthy debate”, but what kind of debate do they encourage?

True History is linked to Living History in various ways. Obviously, the plagiarism presupposes that the original is available on the World Wide Web. The presence of links to Living History, and the fact that the project is mentioned several times in the texts, indicates this. However, the relationship is not interdependent. The mission of True History would certainly not be the same if Living History were to disappear, while the existence of Living History is not dependent on True History, though each is influenced by the presence of the other. In the press release, Living History calls attention to the plagiarism, an act that might even favour the other side. Consequently, the two sites interact.
more or less deliberately: when True History attempts to start a dialogue about ideas, and arguments, Living History just touches upon the relationship in its press release. The desire for a dialogue is definitely not mutual, and the contributions to the dialogue might be unbalanced or asymmetrical, since the actors are aware of each other and their acts are affected by the other part. Dialogues can be seen between the two actors, but also in separate texts, in which different voices appear.

The Senders and the Receivers
The communication process includes a sender and a receiver, and both can participate in the construction of meaning. In this case, the senders are called "actors" since they are actors on the World Wide Web.

The Swedish government supports Living History, and that makes correctness and accuracy of particular importance. Influential representatives of Swedish society, including leaders of all the parliamentary parties, are said to be involved to further strengthen credibility. To facilitate contacts the web site contains several names, addresses and links to engaged individuals, associations, parishes, project groups et cetera. However, a project "supported by the government" does not give any guarantee of trustworthiness.

Except from the signature on the open letter to Living History, True History does not mention any names of individuals involved in the project. Individuals or organisations supporting the site do not come forward. However, one single group is mentioned: Sann Historia Free Speech Committee, but in the absence of further information this group remains quite insignificant. Comments can be sent to a webmaster10. Names presented in the texts are usually used to identify survivors and witnesses as liars. There is also a list of names, in alphabetical order, of victims who are persecuted in their native countries, or somewhere else, but what they have in common seems not very clear.

The receivers, or the readers, of a web site can be divided into two groups. Karlberg (1998) has noticed that there are those who are just passing through on their way to something else, and those who are looking for something specific they want to know more about. To catch the interest of the first group might be difficult, because the incidental guests can be more interested in the links than in the content. Living History probably wants to catch both groups of readers. Readers who are very interested are able to enter deeply into the subject, and those with only a passing interest can browse the pages to form an idea of the contents. True History seems to focus on the interested, or already convinced, group of readers – the introduction to the site indicates this: "If the content of the present web site displeases you, we invite you to surf elsewhere".

Analysis 1: Small Changes Make a Great Difference
The excerpts below, one from Living History and one from True History, show some of the problems related to hypertext on the World Wide Web. Since True History has borrowed some 85 percent of the words in the original text, there is no doubt that the plagiarist is familiar with Living History. Just a few words are changed, but they make a great difference. Both the contents and the design on the Living History page have been extensively plagiarised.

Initially, the text from Living History is analysed, and then the plagiarism is compared with the original to see how these small changes might affect the general impression. In the following excerpts, the corresponding words are in boldface.
**Living History (Levande Historia)**

Emmerich Roth, Magda Eggens and Sofia Taikon have all survived the hell on earth – the Nazi concentration camps during World War Two. Their experiences – which you can read about on this web site – give a terrifying picture of what can happen when there is no respect for human worth and when democracy is dismantled.

The Holocaust is frightful evidence of what can happen if we do not keep alive the debate about democracy and human equality. Through knowledge and discussions we can ensure that nothing like this ever happens again.

For this reason Prime Minister Göran Persson has taken the initiative for a general information campaign about the Holocaust. History must be kept alive.

**Text in Swedish:**


Förintelsen är ett skrämmande bevis på vad som kan hända om vi inte håller debatten om demokrati och människors lika värde vid liv. Genom kunskap och diskussion kan vi motverka att något liknande händer igen.

Därför har statsminister Göran Persson tagit initiativ till en bred informationsinsats om Förintelsen. Historien måste hållas levande.
True History (Sann Historia)

Mel Mermelstein, Elie Wiesel, Simon Wiesenthal, Rudolf Vrba and Filip Müller have all survived the "hell" on earth as "eyewitnesses" of the gas chambers in the Nazi concentration camps during World War Two. Their experience which you can read about on this web site - give a terrifying picture of what can happen when there is no respect for the truth and when democracy is dismantled.

"The Holocaust" is frightful evidence of what can happen if we do not keep alive the debate about truth and falsehood. Through knowledge and discussion we can ensure that nothing like this ever happens again.

For this reason our unsuspecting Prime Minister Göran Persson has not taken the initiative for a general information campaign about our version of the "Holocaust" paid for by the Swedish taxpayers' money.

Text in Swedish:

Mel Mermelstein, Elie Wiesel, Simon Wiesenthal, Rudolf Vrba och Filip Müller har alla överlevt "helvetet" på jorden som "ögonvittnen" till gasningar i nazisternas koncentrationläger under andra världskriget. Deras öden - som du kan följa på denna hemsida - ger en skakande bild av vad som kan hända när respekten för sanningen upphör och demokratin monteras ner.

"Förintelsen" är ett skrämmande bevis på vad som kan hända om vi inte håller debatten om sanning och lögn vid liv. Genom kunskap och diskussion kan vi motverka att något liknande händer igen.

Därför har vår aningslöse statsminister Göran Persson inte tagit initiativ till en bred informationsinsats om vår version av "Förintelsen" för svenska skattepengar.
Living History – Description

Living History has circular portraits of seven individuals with their first names placed below. On these photographs, two of the individuals portrayed, a man and a woman, appear to be much younger than the rest. According to the information on the site, these two did not survive World War II. The black background, with yellow and white text, connotes that this refers to a sad and gloomy time. At the bottom of the page, a straight yellow line, broken by what look like heartbeats on an ECG-monitor, reminds us of life.

Three Rhetorical Aspects

To begin with, the posture, tone, and demeanour of the actor will be described\(^1\). The readers have to be convinced that the actor is reliable. If we rely on the actor, or the source, we will not question the veracity of the message.

Living History wants to be seen as a serious source of information, and the text is carefully written. Mentioning the Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson as the initiator probably strengthens its credibility. The presentation of the names of three survivors from the Nazi camps might arouse the readers’ confidence. Today these survivors live in Sweden, and the Swedish reader might meet them in the street. Some survivors are mentioned in the opening to catch the interest of the readers. When the background to the project is explained, the pronoun “we”, which could refer to all human beings, is used. This gets the readers involved in the text: we share responsibility, and we all have to realise what might happen if issues related to democracy and equality are not discussed. We also need to remind ourselves about the core of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Everyone is born free and equal in dignity and rights. Finally, in the text, the involvement of the Prime Minister is emphasised. In his position, he represents the Swedish people, and by promoting the project he shows concern about human relations and about the future.

The next aspect of the analysis focuses on the actor’s appeal to the common sense and critical judgement of readers\(^2\). The aim is to educate, enlighten, and inform them (Karlberg & Mral 1998). The text is quite short, and since this page also constitutes an introduction to the rest of the site, the facts presented are not very extensive. The survivors and their experiences serve as proof that the Holocaust really did happen. When reading the text the readers are supposed to have some knowledge about World War II. In the text, Nazi camps are described as “the hell on earth” (helvetet på jorden), but to get a slight idea of what this refers to we have to use the links, and click on the portraits or names to read more about it. This is a way of arousing the readers’ curiosity, and of encouraging us to active reading and commitment. Hypertext makes further explorations on the site quite easy, and offers a lot of other options as well. The main argument seems to be to convince readers that only through knowledge and discussions we can prevent human beings from repeating the same mistakes.

The third aspect of this analysis concerns the actor’s ability to play on feelings and so influence the receiver\(^3\). By using descriptions like “terrifying picture” (skakande bild) and “frightful evidence” (skrämmende bevis), Living History tries to arouse the readers’ emotions. The Holocaust is used as a warning, exemplifying all the terrible things human beings are capable of doing to each other under certain conditions. Living History can evoke our fears – we have to bear in mind that this could happen again – but it also inspires hope. Hopefully, knowledge and discussions will prevent a recurrence. Never to forget is another important message. History must be kept alive and so act as a deterrent in the future.
Living Words in Living History

In the text, figures of speech combine aesthetics with rhetorical purposes like explaining, elucidating, and emphasising. These figures might also be used to arouse emotions, for instance, by provoking the readers (Karlberg & Mral 1998). Some use of the figures can be comparable with a conceptual sport, a game about meaning (Nash 1989). Analysing them requires knowledge of what shared values and conceptions they are based on, but also an understanding of what kind of idea the actor has of the readers (Karlberg & Mral 1998).

The names of three survivors mentioned in the opening on the Living History page, give a concrete form to an abstract phenomenon. They represent the witnesses who have "survived the hell" (överlevt helvetet), which might be seen as a paradox. Further, the expression “hell on earth” (helvetet på jorden) is a metaphor for Nazi camps, nothing worse than hell could be imagined. Metaphors like this are built upon the principle that expressions are transferred from one context to another, but of course there has to be some kind of similarity between the contexts.

Two expressions in the text, illustrate a quite common form of personification, which ascribes "personality or agentive power to parts of the body, to psychological events, or ... to any of the contingent facts of our lives" (Nash 1989:126). Noun phrases such as "terrifying picture" (skakande bild) and "frightful evidence" (skrämmande bevis) give inanimate things, like the picture and the evidence, traits that remind us of living beings. Personifications often have affinities with metaphors, and can be seen as metaphorical as well. One more example of personification is found in the text: “History must be kept alive” (Historien måste hållas levande) – “history” is referred to as some kind of organism, something that needs care to be able to survive. The same reasoning is also applicable to the debate about democracy and human equality. The name of the project, Living History, gives the impression that we have to make the history lifelike to understand the importance of it.

The text Living History presents is correct and clear. Decorative aspects of style, for instance, figures of word order and syntactic patterning, seem unnecessary. Above all the message must be convincing and unambiguous. However, the phrase "what can happen if... " (vad som kan hända när/om) is repeated to elucidate and strengthen the presence of threats against our deceptive security. In figures of speech of this kind, the words keep their literal meaning, and different types of patterns, structures and schemes give the text variation and rhythm (Karlberg & Mral 1998).

True History – Description

The first impression of True History might be almost the same as that of Living History, but there are indications of ideas that do not correspond at all. The design of the plagiarism is very similar. Before the True History site was removed, the similarities were even more striking. Later, the background was changed from black to blue, and the heartbeats replaced by a pulsating multi-coloured line. Changing the colour on the re-emerged True History was an interesting move, since a yellow text on a blue setting connotes nationalism, but in this case possibly also xenophobia14. One more thing is different: the contents shown in the circles. Living History has photographs of survivors in them, while the plagiarism has the Hebrew word “shoah” in capital letters, meaning Holocaust, or originally catastrophe.
**The Image of Truth**

In the text, True History begins with presenting five persons, most of them quite well known. Elie Wiesel is a Nobel peace prize-winner, Simon Wiesenthal dedicated his life to finding the Nazis who escaped after the war, and Rudolf Vrba wrote the first report from the concentration camps in 1944, trying to warn the Jews of what was happening in the camps. To True History they are not witnesses, just "eyewitnesses" in quotation marks. Expressions like "human worth" (människovärde) and "human equality" (människors lika värde), used on the Living History page, are exchanged. Instead True History uses "truth" (sanning) and "falsehood" (lögn), and in so doing, they are questioning the witnesses as well as the entire Holocaust. The picture, of what could happen if we lose respect for the truth, obviously does not refer to the Holocaust as an event. Instead it refers to the construction of the myth about the Holocaust, regarded as a product of people's imagination.

The arrangement used on True History is very similar to that on Living History. As was mentioned earlier, some 85 percent of the words are the same, but the final sentence, in conformity with Living History, is missing. Instead, we find an accusation directed against Living History. The campaign is not regarded as broad enough. Criticism of the official depiction of the Holocaust should be included as well, especially since this project is financed by Swedish taxpayers. Prime Minister Göran Persson is described as "unsuspecting" (aningslös), probably because the version maintained by True History has not even been touched upon.

**The Irony of the History**

In True History small changes in the text give rise to some interesting figures of speech that are not present in the Living History text. The most remarkable is the irony, in the form of sarcasm, created by quotation marks. The sarcasm can be described as a scornful irony, which "says what it does not mean and means what it does not say" (Nash 1989:118). The use of quotation marks, "hell" ("helvetet"), "eyewitnesses" ("ögonvittnen"), and "the Holocaust" ("Förintelsen"), considerably alters the meaning, questioning the original denotations, almost regarding them as jokes. True History uses the expression "true and falsehood" (sanning och lög), an antithesis which includes countering propositions, to show what the Holocaust-debate actually should be about. Finally, two untranslatable alliterations in Swedish (vår version... svenska skattepengar) lay stress on the criticism of narrowness directed at the Prime Minister.

Figures of speech might also be seen as "literally 'attitudes' ... [l]ike human postures they are expressive of meaning" (Dixon 1971). In the two texts analysed above, the presence of figures of speech adds an extra dimension that brings out the differences in meaning and positions.

**Analysis 2: Presentation of the Self and the Other**

Two web pages are examined in this part of the study: the press release from Living History, which was produced after the plagiarism had been discovered, and the explanation from True History, which was written when the site emerged again after being removed from the World Wide Web. In this analysis, focus will be on the presentation of the self and of the antagonist. Neither Living History nor True History would have published these texts without an antagonist representing the other.
The sender’s, or the actor’s, representation of his or her identity does not necessarily have to be connected to the character of a real person. Sometimes, especially in advertising, simulated persons are used to personify a company or an organization. A person, real or simulated, might strengthen the impression of character and trustworthiness of, for instance, a company (Karlberg & Mral 1998). Above all, the intention is to engender confidence in the receivers and make them favourably disposed to the sender (Johannesson 1992). On a web site the text as well as the entire design are part of the presentation of self.

When True History presents itself, the identity is described in excluding terms – behind True History there are no neo-Nazis, no racists, and no anti-Semites. But who are they? True History talks about itself as “we”, in the first person plural. Later in the text “we Swedes” (vi svenskar) is used once, but what is their definition of a Swede?

In the press release Living History talks about themselves as Living History (Levande Historia) or the Living History Project (Informationsprojektet Levande Historia), never using any pronoun. The information is given principally in chronological order, which also strengthens the impression of correctness. In the end, there is a telephone number for those who want some more information about Living History.

None of the web pages in this analysis provide any stimulating layout, both have centred headings and the text organised in one column with an uneven right-hand margin. Since these pages were created as contributions to a dialogue, or act within the framework of an ongoing conflict, the quite simple layout might also give the impression of an official message or an open letter to the reader.

True History: Speaking through the Antagonists

The headline “We are back!” (Vi är tillbaka!) serves as an opening to the explanation. On the True History web page, the character of the text looks like a speech for the defence, and gives the impression that True History is acting from a weak position.

In the text many antagonists can be seen: Those who threaten freedom of speech by closing down the web site, those who do not defend democracy, those who do not stick to the truth, those who profited from people’s suffering during World War II, and so on. The identification of the other helps us to form an idea about the sender. However, the primary antagonist’s official name is not mentioned, just paraphrased. The expression “our antagonists” (våra motståndare) undoubtedly refers to Living History, and representatives of similar ideas. Expressions like “certain elements in Swedish society” (vissa element i det svenska samhället), “powerful interests” (mäktiga intressen), and “certain groups in society” (vissa grupper i samhället), also make one think of counteracting parties allied to the Living History project.

One person is mentioned by True History: Prime Minister Göran Persson. But, the sentence, or rather rhetorical question, addressed to him has been put in brackets. Since True History changed the colours on their web site, they pose the question of when there will be a law against using the combination yellow and blue. Further, “our unsuspecting Prime Minister” (vår aningslöse statsminister) and “dear government” (kåra regering) are used in a patronising way.

Living History: A Press Release not Addressed to the Press

Living History’s press release is formal and full of facts, and the same text has been distributed to Swedish news media. The writing style is quite different from True History -
the text is short, impersonal, and informative. The aim is clear: Living History has been plagiarised, and the contents of the plagiarism do not belong to the same ideological tradition. According to Living History, True History presents a revisionist material on their site, which means that the official History of World War II, especially the Holocaust, is given a new version. A plan for dealing with the problem is presented: first, a warning about the plagiarism, and then contact with the American web hotel that houses the True History site. Living History informs their readers about the plagiarism and the ideology they are supposed to represent. This presentation of the other side also serves as a kind of self-presentation. Since the official addressees are journalists and other representatives of the press, the text is formulated in a special way, following a certain protocol. Members of the press might be the target group, but published on a web page, there are others receiving the message too, and certainly not by accident.

Who Is Doing the Talking?
Both texts are part of a greater context, and other voices have influenced the writing processes, for instance, survivors, victims, researchers, journalists, receivers, politicians, and antagonists. Bakhtin’s fundamental question: “Who is doing the talking?” deals with this issue of multivoicedness. In an utterance, spoken or written, there is always more than one voice involved, and these voices might include several identities associated with languages, activity types, professions, roles, and genres. Wertsch (1991:51) explains that the voice, or the speaking consciousness, “is concerned with the broader issues of a speaking subject’s perspective, conceptual horizon, intention and world view”.

The dialogic orientation in the two texts above seems obvious. The press release presented by Living History takes on a dialogic orientation toward True History and revisionist ideas, but also toward media and the public. In True History’s text the dialogic orientation become even more visible, because of the provocative and reasoning style. Through the text, True History are arguing with their imagined antagonists, and this gives an impression of multivoicedness. But, since the antagonists actually are not there to take part in the “conversation”, it will remain unbalanced and biased.

Analysis 3: Who Owns a Story on the World Wide Web?
Living History portrays seven individuals who have experienced the Nazi camps during World War II, though only five of them did survive. To the readers their stories provide a terrible picture of what people can do to each other. More than 50 years have passed since the war, and usually it is not possible to recall in detail everything that happened so long ago. But, although some of the details might have been forgotten or have grown fainter, these stories are still of great importance to posterity. To make the presentations and information accessible to the readers, the most illustrative events and stories have probably been chosen; the formulations of the texts as well as the design refer to strengthen the impression of seriousness and importance; and the content and form are adapted to the medium and to the context.

One of the survivors, Emerich Roth, describes to begin with the environment he grew up in, a small Hungarian town, and how the Jews were gradually deprived of their civil rights. He tells us about his arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau and the selection procedure in which the healthy adults, particularly men, were separated from the old, young and sick. Further, some glimpses of the camp life are caught, daily parades and selections, deficient food and destructive hunger, and punishments for attempted escape. In
graphic detail, he informs us about the death of his father during a march from one camp to another, not long before the end of the war. The last part of Emerich’s story deals with his arrival in Sweden in 1950. He briefly explains how life has turned out since then and why it is important for him to keep on informing people about the Holocaust and about his own experiences. In the text, personal experiences are mixed with observations and relevant explanations.

A narrator’s voice is present in the story – a voice interfering with the voice of Emerich Roth. This voice also supplies the picture captions that work as introductory texts to the different themes in the story. First the narrator’s voice presents Emerich on a colour photo probably taken quite recently, then there is a black and white photo of him as a young boy, and on the next he and his four sisters before the war – they were all sent to the Nazi camps. Railway tracks leading to the entrance to Auschwitz, working prisoners and a man killed by electric fencing wires, illustrate the stay in the camps. Finally, a picture of the alien’s passport Emerich got when he came to Sweden, symbolising a new era in his life – as an immigrant.

Creating an Image of Dialogue
True History tries to refute the story told by Emerich Roth. By using Emerich’s own words in quotations from Living History, his testimony is criticised in an open letter on their web site. Details are questioned, and Emerich is asked to prove their veracity, either by referring to documents or other witnesses, or by explaining the events more thoroughly, otherwise his story will be considered hearsay. An issue that seems rather essential to True History and the revisionists is the occurrence of gas chambers in the camps. Has Emerich seen the gas chambers with his own eyes, or can he furnish some proof of their existence? Further, the criticism deals with the description of food routines in the camp – True History has a link to a specification of what rations there should have been. Since Emerich did not see exactly how his father died, the report from the event is regarded as speculation. The open letter ends with a statement that Emerich is free to tell others about his experiences, but that he has to stick to the truth. Concerning the “TRUTH”, written in capital letters, it must be attested and not expressed in general terms.

The act of asking Living History for a response, might be seen, to say the least, a little presumptuous. According to the principal thesis of revisionists, the Holocaust is a myth and the truth about this fact has to come out. Different arguments to confirm the thesis are used by True History.

In this text, True History does not accentuate arguments related to their own identity – they rather appear quite anonymous. They talk about themselves as “we”, but who “we” really are is hard to know. The readers cannot see whether True History is some kind of formal organisation or movement, or just an unorganised grouping of individuals – there could even be a single person behind “we”. The letter is signed “Bertil Augustsson” – is he a real person or is it just an invented name? But despite the obscure identity, he seems to have given himself the right to act as an arbiter of the truth. Isolated quotations and details from the testimony are exploited in order to question the authenticity of the whole story.

Preferably arguments referring to facts, logic, and rationality are used – proofs are demanded. The reasoning seems logical: If the events cannot be proved, they have never happened – if the figures of recommended food rations in one camp do not correspond to the individual’s description, the latter is of no value. Did Emerich really see
the gas chambers or has he just heard about them? Some arguments are designed to play on the readers’ feelings. This kind of argument can be seen in a question directed to Emerich: “Do you have any idea about what calories an ‘ordinary’ German had in 1944?” (Har du någon aning om hur många kalorier en “normal” tysk fick i sig under 1944?) This question was probably asked to emphasise that other people were suffering too, not only the camp prisoners, and to arouse compassion. Throughout the letter there is a reasoning about the importance of telling the truth, which appeals to the readers’ morality. What has actually been seen or heard, or what could be hearsay or pure speculations? At a higher level, this reasoning also refers to the creation of myths about the Holocaust. Imagine what it would be like if the official history, the one written down in schoolbooks, has been constructed on doubtful and unattested grounds.

True History is probably aware of that most events and details in the testimony can never be attested because the majority of the witnesses died in the camps. Further, time has covered up many of the tracks after the deeds, and there would simply be no evidence at all good enough to shake the conviction of True History.

A Chorus of Faceless Web Voices
In storytelling, the teller “embed[s] in his own utterances the utterances and actions of the story’s characters”, says Goffman (1981:152). This reasoning leads to the Bakhtinian question again: Who is doing the talking – in the open letter to Living History? Obviously several voices are seen in the letter, the most striking is the voice of Bertil Augustsson, representing True History and the revisionist ideology, and the voice of Emerich Roth, representing the “survivors” and the ideas spread through Living History. But, there are other voices as well. Since the letter is an open letter, published on a web site, we also find the voices of the receivers, or readers, some of them are addressed: Living History and especially Emerich Roth. There are unaddressed, or indirectly addressed, receivers as well. The visitors on the web site are not invited to take part in the discussion, nevertheless they do play an important role. When True History has taken on the responsibility of being a prosecutor, the readers are expected to be on some kind of jury to judge whether the Holocaust is a myth or not. Goffman (1981), principally referring to encounters face-to-face, talks about a peculiar condition between ratified participation and bystanding. The expression “imagined recipient”, is used to describe a simulated person in the audience, a single listener or viewer, to whom the broadcaster styles his talk. What idea do Living History and True History have of their imagined recipients?

The letter is a product in which many voices can be seen and between these voices are dialogical processes. When looking at all these different voices in the text, aspects of time and place have to be included. Experiences from a historical event are transferred to present times, and from one cultural setting to another. Consequently, voices from a bygone Eastern Europe, from a chaotic wartime, from Jews and others who were persecuted and arrested during the war et cetera, are there.

Discussion: A Dialogue without Mutuality?
In the three analysed cases, some kind of “hypertextual dialogue”, bringing the texts together, can be seen. This phenomenon on the World Wide Web is called hypertextual dialogue because the structure of hypertext and the character of the medium make it possible. From a structural point of view, the dialogue consists of texts linked to one an-
other like a web, no matter the content. At another level, the hypertextual dialogue concerns a discourse related to a certain topic or issue. Web actors take part in this discourse and relate themselves to other actors and their ideas. The latter level includes the content as well as the design, and there are several opportunities for interacting and being part of the dialogue.

To start with, the first analysis, the plagiarism of Living History: Both the text and the design have been “borrowed” by another actor. Initially the original, as well as the plagiarism, give the impression of being quite serious, both want to shed light on historical events, but through the analysis crucial differences become visible. The plagiarism considerably alters the meaning of the message, and an outstanding feature is the sarcastic tone, sarcastic because changes in the text alienate it from the original meaning and open up totally different interpretations to the readers. According to Bakhtin (in Wertsch 1991:55), sarcasm is an example of “shift in accent”, in this case meaning that the text takes on a dialogic, or multivoiced, orientation toward other texts. True History transmits what Living History has said but does so with a shift in accent, by using quotation marks around some words, changing a few expressions and adding a new sentence at the end.

The second analysis, the press release from Living History, and the explanation from True History, show that both actors, more or less deliberately, have to relate to one another. Even Living History is bound to mention True History and the ideas they represent. In some way, this act might even favour True History, especially since Living History is quite moderate in their criticism.

Instead of emphasising their own character and trustworthiness, the antagonist or the conflicting ideas are placed in focus, and the actors present themselves in relationship to the opposite party. In the Living History press release, the dominating features are correctness, authority, and dissociation. The situation is explained briefly without any words loaded with subjective judgements. The text presented by True History could be described as provoking, patronising and contentious, and the antagonists are paraphrased and spoken about in a condescending tone. It might look as if True History disclaims and denounces everything connected with the ideas of Living History, which are regarded as threats against democracy and freedom of speech. But since Living History is the prerequisite of the True History site, simultaneously they are trying to initiate a dialogue with them.

By calling attention to the antagonists’ bad character and by claiming that they have taken advantage of their prominent position, True History want to convince readers about the unfair treatment they experienced when their first web site was removed. The main aim of this act seems to be to dissociate readers from the other site rather than make them favourably disposed to their own.

A notable difference between these two web pages is the usage of language and the style of writing. Living History is strikingly more well-written than True History. The press release seems not to consist of any redundant information – the text is full of facts, but at the same time kept to a minimum. Rhetorical ornamentation or decorations are cut out. True History has a verbose style, and they do not express themselves very well. The message is badly organised, lacking an observable disposition. The hypertextual dialogue concerns the identity and the ideas of the actors. Both these pages presuppose a counterpart, and through the relationship with the other, one’s own mission is explained.

In the third analysis, the major part of True History’s text consists of quotations from Living History. The sequences of the testimony they want to criticise have been picked out, and True History hold the power to use them for their own purposes. Words and
sentences are isolated, reproduced, and used in a new context. Goffman (1981:145) states that reciting a text or reading aloud from a script "allows us to animate words we had no hand in formulating and to express opinions, beliefs, and sentiments we do not hold". This reasoning could be appropriate for quoting as well. Again, we can see the shift in accent when one actor transmits the words from another actor - out of context and together with critical comments.

The style used by True History is argumentative and questioning – proofs are demanded, otherwise the incidents are considered as pure speculation. Living History and Emerich Roth are notably present in the open letter, both in the quotations and in the rest of the text, but in this hypertextual dialogue the revisionist voice of True History dominates and sets out the conditions for the dialogue. It is likely that this treatment will not encourage Living History to answer the letter from True History.

**Conclusions: Dialogue, Links, and Intertextuality**

On the World Wide Web, the phenomenon called hypertextual dialogue can be seen in several ways, for instance, as links between texts, as references in the text, as plagiarism, in quotations and comments, and in discourses related to a certain issue. Certain aspects, especially concerning the text, but also the design, have been examined in this study. At a structural level, True History has links to Living History, further the web addresses can cause confusion because of their deceptive similarity.

The plagiarising act might be the first step in establishing a position on the World Wide Web. It is not simply a question of borrowing text and design, as this act could confer reputation, status, and authority, factors that might give credibility to the desired message. When some kind of position has been established, the contents are further brought in line with one's own ideology and purposes. After the plagiarising act, True History continues to relate to Living History, and obviously they need this ideological antipole to be able to put forward their message.

Living History and True History show how strikingly unequal actors are able to play on the same ground, and that, sometimes reluctantly, they are influenced by one another. Is there really a dialogue going on between them, or is there principally just the intertextuality? When comparing the sites in this study, the plagiarising act is in some way fascinating because True History has really taken advantage of the situation and the conditions on the World Wide Web. Quite successfully, thanks to Living History, they have established a position, and have even been observed in other media as well. This looks almost like the biblical encounter between young David and the giant Goliath20 - without making any further comparisons between the characters. On the World Wide Web small and insignificant actors are able to challenge those who otherwise would be strong and superior.

The readers’ accessibility to both the sites is the same, and it is up to the readers to judge the credibility. This will require more advanced reading than a superficial browsing allows for.

**Notes**

1. This metaphor is used by, for instance, Abel (1998) and Godwin (1998).
2. Historical revisionism could be an honest process, so the term "revisionist" is misleading. However, the Holocaust revisionists consider themselves to have scientific ambitions - they want to find out about the truth. The goal for their "research" is to show that the depiction of the Holocaust is very much exaggerated; some of these revisionists even deny the entire Holocaust (Lööw 1998).
3. See, for instance, Lasswell’s formula, or Shannon and Weaver’s basic model of communication.
4. The strategic use of all kinds of symbols, not only spoken or written words, might be included in rhetoric (Karlberg & Mral 1998).
7. A new Internet-distributor was found.
8. By copying most of the web text into a Word-file, the proportions of the sites were roughly estimated. Nearly 200 pages were printed out on paper, exclusively with text (Times, 12 p, single spacing). Partly this was done to support the understanding, and description of the site as context.
9. The second version of the plagiarism also has another introductory page.
10. The e-mail address webmaster@sannhistoria.org might cause some confusion because it ends with ".org", like the location of Living History, http://www.levandehistoria.org.
11. This aspect corresponds to the rhetorical concept "ethos".
12. The rhetorical concept "logos" can be used to describe this aspect.
13. This aspect corresponds to the rhetorical concept "pathos".
14. Groups in Sweden, with pronounced National Socialist or racist ideas, sometimes use the colours, blue and yellow, which correspond to the colours of the Swedish national flag. In these cases, the combination of colours rather accentuates a desire for racial separation and racial purity in the Swedish community.
16. In rhetoric, this aspect corresponds with ethos.
17. Until 1939 the town belonged to Czechoslovakia.
18. This aspect refers to the rhetoric term "logos".
19. Arguments emphasizing this aspect are referred to pathos.
20. The Bible, the Old Testament (1 Sam. 17).

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