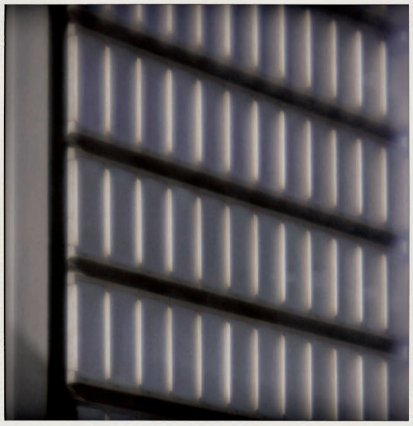
Critical Perspectives on the European Mediasphere



edited by
Ilija Tomanić Trivundža
Nico Carpentier
Hannu Nieminen

Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt
Richard Kilborn
Tobias Olsson
Ebba Sundin

The Researching And Teaching Communication Series

Critical Perspectives on the European Mediasphere

The intellectual work of the 2011 ECREA European media and communication doctoral summer school

Ljubljana, 2011

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE EUROPEAN MEDIASPHERE.
The Intellectual Work of the 2011 ECREA European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School.
Edited by: Ilija Tomanić Trivundža, Nico Carpentier, Hannu Nieminen, Pille Pruulmann-Venerfeldt, Richard Kilborn, Ebba Sundin and Tobias Olsson.
Series: The Researching And Teaching Communication Series
Series editors: Nico Carpentier and Pille Pruulmann-Venerfeldt

Published by: Faculty of Social Sciences: Založba FDV
For publisher: Hermina Krajnc

Reviewer: Mojca Pajnik
Book cover: Ilija Tomanić Trivundža
Design and layout: Vasja Lebarič
Language editing: Kyrill Dissanayake
Photographs: Ilija Tomanić Trivundža, François Heinderyckx, Andrea Davide Cuman, and Jeoffrey Gaspard.
Printed by: Tiskarna Radovljica
Print run: 400 copies
Electronic version accessible at: http://www.researchingcommunication.eu

The 2011 European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School (Ljubljana, August 14-27) was supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme Erasmus Intensive Programme project (grant agreement reference number: 2010-7242), the University of Ljubljana – the Department of Media and Communication Studies and the Faculty of Social Sciences, a consortium of 22 universities, and the Slovene Communication Association. Affiliated partners of the programme were the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), the Finnish National Research School, and COST Action IS0906 Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies.
The publishing of this book was supported by the Slovene Communication Association and the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA).

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

316.77(082)

ECREA European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School (2011 ; Ljubljana)
Critical perspectives on the European mediasphere [Elektronski vir] : the intellectual work of the 2011 ECREA European Media and Communication Doctoral Summer School, [Ljubljana, 14 - 27 August] / [edited by Ilija Tomanić Trivundža ... [et al.] ; photoghraphs Ilija Tomanić Trivundža ... et al.]. - El. knjiga. - Ljubljana : Faculty of Social Sciences, 2011. - (The researching and teaching communication series (Online), ISSN 1736-4752)

Način dostopa (URL): http://www.researchingcommunication.eu

ISBN 978-961-235-583-8 (pdf)

1. Gl. stv. nasl. 2. Tomanić Trivundža, Ilija, 1974-

260946432

http://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/zalozba/

The Broadcasting of Authenticity: How the media transform public politics into personal feelings

Jens E. Kjeldsen and Anders Johansen

It is often said that politicians attempt to appeal to the "ordinary person", trying to persuade everyone, using the lowest common denominator approach. However, what has really been happening, we believe, is that the politician has, rhetorically speaking, been turning him/herself into an ordinary person. This strand of (simulated) egalitarianism can be found in the 'ordinary guy' rhetoric of United States presidents such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. The background, reasons and diagnoses for this state of affairs in the US – as well as other changes in political rhetoric in the age of broadcasting – have been described in several publications (e.g. Sennett, 1974; Atkinson, 1984; Meyrowitz, 1985, 2006; Jamieson 1988).

However, in Scandinavia, which probably consists of the most egalitarian countries in the world, the politician not only presents himself as an ordinary guy – or girl (cf. Kjeldsen 2008), it also seems as if the politician's construction of ethos has been taken one step further: from the role of politician, to that of ordinary person, and finally to the true and authentic individual who happily shares himself and his inner emotions. The broadcast media have played a decisive role in promoting the forms of expression and appearance that support this development, while making other forms less advantageous. The result is that, in order to be a successful political operator in this day and age, one should appear neither as a politician nor as an orator – at least not in Scandinavia. Today, political credibility is built on personal character and authenticity.

The decline of the traditional politician has been accompanied by a curtailment of the traditional political speech – both in terms of importance, length and extensiveness. Only on very rare occasions do we hear – or see – a political speech in full. The only time the media in Scandinavia seem

to allow politicians to deliver an uninterrupted speech is after election debates, when each party leader makes her or his one-minute final appeal to the viewers. This abbreviated oratorical genre is the last remnant of traditional political speech-making.

In this chapter we intend to offer an explanation as to how and why broadcasting has radically changed Norwegian political oratory and has transformed hour-long speeches into one-minute appeals. We use this curtailed oratorical genre as an example of the abandonment of traditional political oratory in favour of televised presentations of personal credibility and authenticity.

1. THE AGE OF BROADCASTING

No one gives speeches on the radio anymore – or on television. Broadcasting has led to new forms of political communication: the news interview, the studio talk, discussion programmes and television debates, talk shows and personal conversations.

All these genres are conversationally based and are adapted to the situation of the viewer. The audience is not a crowd assembled in one specific place, but made up of individuals and of families or friends scattered all over the nation in their private homes. The lengthy political monologue has become as out-of-place on the television screen as it would have been in the living room.

Political speeches are still given, of course, at party conferences and May Day celebrations. However, these are rather minor events, taking place on the fringes of the larger public sphere. In the main arena of public communication, television, traditional political speeches are not allowed. They are simply not good television.

News broadcasts only allow us an 8- to 12-second clip – one or two sentences taken out of context. This is far removed from the journalistic practices of a century ago. Back then it was considered an obligation to pay careful attention to the speaker's words. Often manuscripts were published in their entirety, or the reader was provided with long, detailed, almost verbatim accounts (Johansen & Kjeldsen, 2005: 247). In contrast, journalists of our time prefer to present their own angle on things; they want to "do a story". The politician who seeks to grab the attention of a journalist must be able to offer soundbites and exciting photo opportuni-

ties. This means that, in the news, the visual rhetoric of action and agitation has acquired a decided advantage over the spoken word (cf. Johansen & Kjeldsen, 2005: 597 ff. and 650 ff.).

So, the political orator has lost control over the main arena of public communication. In Norway the last bastion of political speeches – except for the prime minister's New Year speech – seems to be the final appeals to voters presented by politicians during the conclusion to an election campaign: the televised party leader debates. Here the politician is allowed to speak directly to the nation, without being interrupted by journalists. Each politician is allocated the same amount of time to deliver this speech, i.e. one minute.

We will return shortly to the party leader debate and the final appeal in order to illustrate the new rhetoric of intimacy and authenticity that now dominates much of political oratory in Scandinavia. First, however, a few words concerning the connection between this particular form of rhetoric and television as a cultural and technological constraint.

As far as political communication is concerned, television is often blamed for making form more important than content, appearance more decisive than issues, emotions more influential than reason (e.g. Postman, 1985). The history of Norwegian political speech-making tells a different story. It shows clearly that appeals to form and appearance were no less important prior to the age of broadcasting. Bias and non-objectivity are not new inventions; today, they just work in other ways.

Even though form, appearance and emotional appeal were equally important before the advent of television, the old oratorical space differed in marking a sharp divide between the private and the public. On the rostrum, the politician was a public figure, and this figure was separate from the private individual. What the politician was like in private, what kind of person he *really* was, was not only irrelevant, but also completely inaccessible. Ordinary people almost never saw politicians or other public figures. And on the rare occasion that they were able to actually see the politician in person, it was mostly as a distant figure, far away on the rostrum – an elevated character, whose private persona was kept out of view.

This is what television has changed so radically. Today – on the screen – we meet our politicians so often, at such close range, and in so many informal settings and situations, that we almost feel we know them personally (cf. Meyrowitz, 2006). The feeling of being close to other people creates a

desire to get familiar with the whole person; we want to know what the politician is *really* like. And so, a politician in the television age has to present his true self. Broadcasting invites a form of public intimacy – a sort of closeness-at-a-distance – that forces the private individual onto the public stage (Johansen, 2002).

Before radio and television, the relationship between the private and public character of a politician was more or less like the relationship between a role and an actor. The task of the speech-giver was to dramatise the matter of the speech. As a speaker, one was not expected to be oneself in a "true way". The point was not to behave "naturally", as one would amongst friends and family. Instead, voice and body should bring the message to life in a manner one would never adopt at home. Everybody knew that oratory was a kind of acting. In the older communicative situation, there was always a distance to overcome, like the one between the actor on the stage and the audience in the auditorium. This called for a kind of theatrical behaviour; every expression had to be magnified and intensified. In order to reach a large crowd, without the use of a loudspeaker or microphone, one had to use the voice as an instrument, the mouth as a megaphone (cf. Johansen, 2002).

This way of communicating excluded all the intimate shades and nuances the voice affords at close range and in private conversations. The difference between the role of the politician and the private person was a difference you could hear: the difference between talking in private and speaking in public. The difference was also visible. In order to make an impression on a large crowd, you had to resort to overt and declamatory gestures.

In the age of television, it is more convincing when the politician tries to hold back his or her emotions. As viewers, we are persuaded when we sense that the emotions are withheld, but are nevertheless so strong that they force themselves through the restrained body language. It is then that we know for sure that the emotions are authentic and true.

It was not possible to notice these things before the age of television, and it was thus impossible to ascribe any meaning to them. If you stand more than five metres away, such symptomatic signs are unnoticeable. These were the conditions that prevailed in the days of traditional oratory. Under such circumstances, more conventional and – in a way – more impersonal signs and shows of emotions worked better than tiny nuances in

the instinctive – and often involuntary – body language, which today's television viewer has learned to look for and interpret as psychological symptoms. Not until the introduction of the TV close-up did such nuances and symptoms gain any rhetorical importance. The intimate way of expression is not assessed according to traditional criteria. Personal credibility is not only won through honesty and competence – as in the old days. Today the politician has to – as genuinely, naturally and spontaneously as possible – give the impression that they are truly "themselves".

This requires a simple, moderate and toned-down style. The language use is not so very different from that of everyday communication. It has the style of a heart-to-heart talk between two people: not too fluent and eloquent, not too modulated, and not too evidently well-prepared and literarily ingenious. The body is best kept calm and still; people making violent gestures on television are – at best – perceived as eccentric. The traditional rhetorical presentation, which sought to make an impression on a crowd, nowadays seems crudely unnatural and uncomfortably obtrusive in a close-up.

The powerful voice, the flowery language, the deliberate and finely tuned changes of rhythm and intonation and exaggerated body language – all entail the risk of appearing highly strung, unstable, excessively intense and maybe even hysterical or fanatical. When every small detail is revealed on the screen, anything but the most subdued appearance will appear to be an exaggeration (cf. Atkinson, 1984).

These criteria of authenticity and genuineness could not be applied to the great speakers of the 19th century or the ancient rhetoricians at the Greek agora or the Forum Romanum. If we were to assume that speakers in those times were "themselves" at the rostrum, or behaved at home in the same manner as when they delivered their fiery oratory, we would have to conclude that they were mad.

The modern sense of psychological interpretation has undermined the traditional expressive style. Now, it seems, only the most common and ordinary forms of presentation are acceptable. The most persuasive rhetorical means and artistic effects do not give the impression of being means and effects at all.

In the age of broadcasting and the Internet, persuasive rhetoric is anti-rhetoric. In Norway, this is obvious in the many new rhetorical genres

that have come to the fore since television became dominant. One of these broadcast genres is the final election debate between all the party leaders in the Norwegian parliament – usually involving around eight people. This television debate is normally broadcast a few days before the election. It concludes with a final appeal from each party leader. Each participant has one minute to deliver a prepared speech straight-to-camera, thus appealing directly to the viewers sitting at home.

2. THE FINAL ELECTION DEBATE AND THE ONE-MINUTE APPEAL

Despite certain changes in the party leader debate since the beginning of the 1960s, for many years this broadcast was an arena in which the politicians were in charge. They exerted a real influence over the arrangements for the debate; they were involved both in planning the format of the programme and in deciding on the principles for participation. Even the debate itself was controlled by politicians. Without interference from the moderator, every speaker could continue undisturbed for his or her allotted span of time.

This began to change at the beginning of the 1970s, when control began to shift from the politicians to the journalists. Then the public Norwegian Broadcasting Company (NRK) formally assumed responsibility for most of the debate programmes, but it was not until the mid-1980s that the broadcaster actually exercised full control over the party leader debate. The use of the stopwatch to ensure that everybody got precisely the same amount of talking time was abandoned. The debates were also divided into distinct themes and subjects, and more active questioning from the journalists was introduced.

In 1992, when NRK for the first time faced competition from the new TV2 television channel, debates became increasingly controlled by the journalists, as the demand for more entertaining forms of television grew. Only the party leader debate remained more or less the same. Even though the press often criticised the programme, it remained the most popular election programme. On average, it is still viewed by more than half of the Norwegian population.

In an age of increasing journalistic hegemony, this grand debate has stood the test of time and has remained the last bastion of the politician. In some ways the final appeal of the party leaders has remained as a kind of fragmentary reminiscence of the oratory of days long gone. In the years be-

fore the age of broadcasting, politicians used to go on for hours on end, addressing an audience of thousands. Nowadays politicians speak for a minute or two, but address literally millions of viewers sitting comfortably at home but completely separate from one another.

The golden age of television began in the 1970s. At this point, more than two-thirds of the population had a television set. The programmes, formats and genres of NRK, which had a monopoly position, developed quickly. So too did the politicians' handling of the medium.

One example of this is Erik Solheim – at least in the speeches he made from the late 1980s onwards when he was leader of the Socialist Left Party (1987-1997). He proved to be a very adept television rhetorician, well aware of how to exploit the conditions of the medium. He had studied how other politicians failed or succeeded on television, and realised the importance of personality. As he observes in his memoirs:

> *Television is not about ready-made effects and prepared lines; it is about relaxing and being yourself, believing in your message and displaying your emotions. Television is not, first and foremost, a medium for the intellect, but for the emotions.* (Solheim, 1999)

Solheim was probably right when he wrote that in 1989. In the years that followed, the Socialist Left Party became the most professional party on Norwegian television. However, the most advanced feature of Solheim's rhetoric was that he did not appear as a professional rhetorician, but rather as a very committed human being. This was also the case in his final appeal during the party leader debate that preceded the 1994 referendum on EU membership. Here is the full one-minute speech:

> *I think that everyone understands that the truth is not completely on one side or on the other side of this debate, and that there are arguments for both voting yes and no.*
> *You have to decide for yourself what is the most important thing for the development of society. For me it is the environment. I think that this is the most important question of all in the 21st century. Consequently we should say no to a union that is based on uninhibited economic growth.*
> *Therefore it is about creating a society with small social differences; because this is a society that will have less crime. It will have more quality of life. Things will be better between people in such a society. So, we should say 'no' to the heavily right-wing dominated economic policy that the EU is built on.*
> *It is therefore about democracy, because that is the best protection of the weak interest groups in our society, whose voices are not easily heard in other channels.*

> *For these three reasons, the environment, solidarity and democracy – for these reasons, I believe that I would recommend people to say 'no'. I think that this is the safer thing to do, when we remember that we will not be isolated. We can trade, travel, and cooperate. We are – even if we vote 'no' – the most international country in the world. 94 percent of the world's population is outside the EU, and then I think that the people of Norway … I would recommend the people to vote the way I think most of them want to: No on the 28th.*

Solheim begins his appeal by saying "I think" and goes on to repeat it a further four times in one minute. When he does not "think", he is content to "believe" or "recommend". He does not say that the viewer should vote 'no', because there is no doubt that this is the best thing to do. He says "for these reasons, I believe that I would recommend people to say 'no'". Nothing is sure, there are arguments in favour of both views. The voters must decide for themselves. Instead of agitating, he just mentions what is most important for *him as a person*. The word Solheim uses most is 'I'.

While other politicians look directly into the camera during their final appeals, Solheim looks at the moderators. Thus he does not even appear to be addressing the viewers directly. Rather than getting the feeling that a politician is trying to persuade them, viewers are left with the feeling that they have not been seen but have overheard a sort of confession that is not really meant for them. Without a manuscript, and with a few self-corrections and inversions, he does not really come across as a politician determined to persuade by means of a well-prepared speech. The person who does not seem intent on persuasion is, however, the most persuasive of all.

Solheim was probably the first politician in Norway to use this kind of anti-rhetoric, which now dominates much of the political communication in the Socialist Left Party. The next leader of the party (1997-2012), Kristin Halvorsen, has personified this style and rhetorical strategy more than anyone else. During the 2001 election campaign, Halvorsen employed all her energy and resources. The interest surrounding her person had grown to almost overwhelming dimensions. Behind the scenes, on the other hand, the party leader was tired, stressed and irritable.

Her associates gave her invigorating advice and suggestions during the preparations for the debate. But it was to no avail. She did not want to go on television. In the taxi on the way to NRK, her adviser, Roger Sandum, tried to cheer her up and make her collect her thoughts. "*What is on your mind today?"* he asked. "*Nothing*", she answered. "*Today I am just happy if I survive*".

She did not perform at all well. The next day the newspapers wrote that she seemed tired and uninspired. Most Norwegian papers grade the performances of politicians on a scale from one to six. In this case the biggest tabloid, VG, awarded her three points, the second biggest tabloid, Dagbladet, awarded her only two, and a regional paper, Bergens Tidende, awarded her three on style and two on substance.

In their ranking of the debaters, the newspapers placed Halvorsen last, or last but one. However, an opinion poll amongst the viewers provided a very different result. When asked "Who did best?", they placed Halvorsen as the clear winner: 44 percent thought she performed well, and only 3 percent thought she performed badly.

Undoubtedly, she was not the sparkling, high-spirited person she had been in the other debates during the campaign. So why did the viewers perceive her to be superior to the other debaters? An important aspect of the answer, we believe, is to be found in her final appeal, which expresses a certain connection between the issues and the person involved in the debate. As Halvorsen observed:

> *[…] anyone who has followed this debate can see that we have managed, partly, to get the others to talk about the issues that are of concern to us.*
>
> *Now, we have done all that we could have. We are rather worn out, but give me one or two good nights' sleep, and a few hours with my own children, then we'll be ready again to go on fighting […].*

In everyday and down-to-earth language, Halvorsen tells us about the things the Socialist Left Party is fighting for, but she does not really put forward any arguments.

Her appeal does not have any clear structure. It seems improvised, with formulations such as "anyone who has followed this debate…". She says – almost casually – that the Socialist Left Party has done all that they can; she tells the viewers that she is "rather worn out", and that she wants more time with her kids.

Parts of this last precious minute – addressing the whole nation – are apparently thrown away commenting on insignificant, trivial matters. However, in this way the viewers may better understand why she has appeared so weary in this debate: she has done everything she could; she has expended all her energy, not primarily – it seems – so that her party may come to power. What this appeal makes the viewers aware of is that the party slogan

"Put children and young people first" was actually proclaimed by a mother. So no-one can be in any doubt that she really meant what she said.

In the TV debate at the end of the 2009 election campaign, Halvorsen made a one-minute speech heavily dependent on the repeated phrase: "You need us, we need you". The central part of that short speech contained a remark that makes absolutely no sense as a political statement; however, it succeeded in anchoring the theme of "needing each other" in a recognisable experience of an intimate kind:

> *"[…] You ladies who feel it is unfair that you receive a lower salary just because you are doing caring work or because you are working in a profession dominated by women, you need SV – and for sure I believe that the men living with those ladies are equally well served by SV doing well in this election, for satisfied women make for satisfied men as well […]"*

Once more, Halvorsen managed to give the impression of speaking as a complete person, not just as a politician, hinting at her life as a wife in much the same way she had hinted at her life as a mother a few years earlier. She delivered these remarks with her head slightly on one side and with a disarming smile, revealing that she is struggling with the same issues in her marriage as everyone else. And the good-natured chuckling of the audience indicated appreciation of such personal disclosures.

This is the way to communicate authenticity and personal credibility via an intimate medium such as television. It is so very far divorced from the way speech-making was practised in ancient times and even from the way orators spoke in Scandinavia before the Second World War. Norway's famous fiery orators - Henrik Wergeland, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Martin Tranmæl and many others like them - practised a completely different art.

The rhetoric of our times is one of anti-rhetoric, and the political issues have become more and more inseparable from the impression the speakers give of themselves as private individuals. They may be talking about a specific issue, but we interpret this as a sign of how they are really feeling. They argue for their policies; we, on the other hand, are looking for their underlying personal motives.

REFERENCES

Atkinson, M. (1984) *Our master's voices. Language and body language of politics.* London/New York: Routledge.

Jamieson, K. H. (1988) *Eloquence in an electronic age. The transformation of political speechmaking.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johansen, A. (2002) *Talerens troverdighet [The crediblity of the speaker].* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Johansen, A., & J. Kjeldsen (2005) *Virksomme ord: politiske taler 1814-2005 [Words that work. Political speeches 1814-2005].* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Kjeldsen, Jens E. (2008) 'Visualizing egalitarianism – political print ads in Denmark', pp. 139-160 in J. Strömbäck, T. Aalberg & M. Ørsten (Eds.) *Political Communication in the Nordic Countries.* Göteborg: Nordicom.

Meyrowitz, J. (1985) *No Sense of place. The impact of electronic media on social behavior.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Meyrowitz, J. (2006) 'Displaying the Body Politic. Televisual Exposures and Concealments', pp. 374-397 in L. J. Prellli (Ed.) *Rhetorics of Display*. South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press.

Sennett, Richard (1974) *Fall of Public Man*. New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company.

Solheim, E. (1999) *Nærmere [Closer].* Oslo: Millennium.