

The Mediatization of Politics: Political Themes in Contemporary Scandinavian Film and Television

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Abstract

The increased mediatization of society since 1960 (Hjarvard 2013) has led to a discussion of the mediatization of politics, the role of media for political debate and democracy. Jürgen Habermas (1962) discussed the rise and potential decline of the public sphere, and especially the role of television, audiovisual media in general and the internet in modern societies, democracy and politics have been in focus in media sociology from Joshua Meyrowitz (1985), John B. Thompson (2000), Corner & Pels (2003) to Keane (2013). Audio-visual media and the new digital media have increased the visibility of all parts of private and public life and changed the relation between media, public figures and the citizen. In American film culture the line from Robert Drew's *Primary* (1960) via Errol Morris' *The Fog of War* (2003) to the Netflix series *House of Cards* indicates the development. In this presentation I will discuss main positions in theories on the mediatization of politics. I will also discuss and analyze three types of film and television genres that reflect this mediation of politics in Danish film and television culture: *the political documentary* (Guldbrandsen's *The Road to Europe* (2003), *the political drama* (DR series *Borgen* (2010-)) and *the cosmopolitan film* (Bier's *In A Better World* (2010) and Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012)).

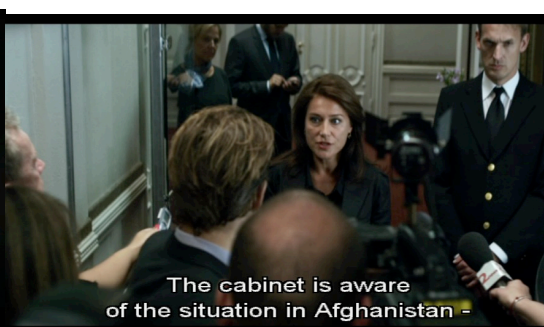
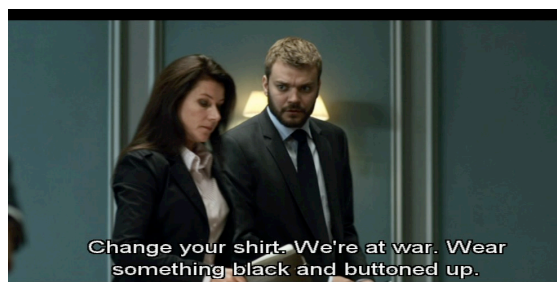
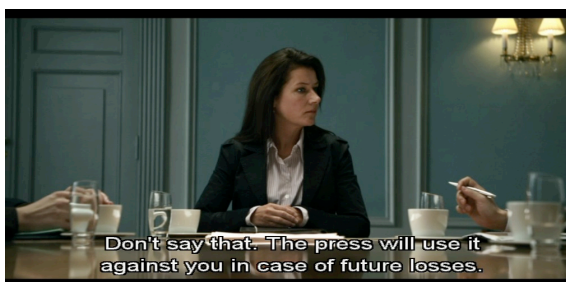
Let me start with a definition of mediatization, a concept, which is of course crucial to this presentation. The definition is by a colleague from my department, but I quote it because I think it is the best among those available on the academic market:

Mediatization is used as the central concept in a theory of both intensified and changing importance of the media in culture and society. By the mediatization of culture and society we understand the process whereby culture and society to an increasing degree become dependent on the media and their logic. The process is characterized by a duality, in that the media have become *integrated* into the operations of other social institutions and cultural spheres, while also acquiring the status of social institutions of their own right. As a consequence, social interaction – within the respective institutions, between institutions, and in society at large – increasingly take place via the media.'

(Stig Hjarvard: *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (Routledge 2013: 17))

Based on this definition I think it is fair to say that one of the social domains of society most influenced by mediatisation is politics, politics as an institution in society, politics as a kind of public discourse and politics as a central part of the day to day news reporting. But as I will try to demonstrate, politics is not just part of a news discourse, but also very much an area or a theme that dominates documentary television and filmmaking and the more popular form of film and television drama. Politics is mediatized over a wide range of media and genres, it has become embedded in both journalistic public discourses and wider forms of popular discourse.

One way of illustrating the mediatisation of politics is to look at how it is reflected in a modern drama series like *Borgen*, which I will return to later, but take a look at these four screen shots from *Borgen*:



What we see here is both the spin-doctor acting backstage to secure not just the right message in a difficult situation, but also the right personal appearance. We also see the constant exposure to the aggressive ever present press, which is part of modern politics. Maybe that is why Paul Krugman in NYT in 2005 gave some

advice on how to avoid the 'style' of politics and how to focus on the content of politics – in vain of course:

- ❖ *Don't talk about clothes*
- ❖ *Actually look at the candidates proposals*
- ❖ *Beware of personal anecdotes*
- ❖ *Look at the candidates records*
- ❖ *Don't fall for political histrionics*

However one could also argue that it is impossible to completely separate emotion from rationality, the personal from the political. As George Lakoff has argued in *The Political Mind* (2008) – based also on his embodied concept of language and metaphors and the link between emotion and reason – the Enlightenment concept of politics and the way citizens relate to politics may be rather far away from reality:

According to Enlightenment reason was assumed to be conscious, universal, disembodied, logical, unemotional, value neutral, interest based and literal (...) but voters don't behave like that (...) Language gets its power because it is defined relative to frames, prototypes, metaphors, narratives, images and emotions. Part of its power comes from its unconscious aspects (Lakoff, 2008, p. 16)

Documenting politics as it unfolds

In 2004 the Danish documentary film director, Christoffer Guldbrandsen, received the European Broadcasting Union prize *Golden Link Award* for *Fogh bag Facaden/On the Road to Europe* (2003). As reason for the prize the EBU points to the way in which the program has managed in 'bringing politicians down from their pedestal and closer to ordinary people and simultaneously do this with discretion and professionalism (Bondebjerg 2006: 48). The film is in the tradition of the observational cinema, that is we follow the unfolding of a real story and event by observing the characters and listening to their conversations and negotiations, occasionally also with clips of interviews and comments to the camera. But there are no authoritative voice over or experts analysing what we see, and the director's voice over only gives basic information on time, place, procedures and the role of an interaction between main characters. As viewers of this film we are so to speak

placed in medias res of a rather dramatic political event in the history of then European Union, the enlargement of EU through the inclusion of the former communist countries.

(Clip from *On the Road to Europe*)

The film is shot with a rather small, handheld digital camera, adding to the feeling of being close to an unfolding event both frontstage and backstage. In 2003 Denmark was the chair of EU and the then Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, was in charge of all the whole process leading up to the enlargement, and the final summit meeting in Copenhagen. The film opens with a triumphant front stage celebration of the enlargement, using the hymn of the EU (theme from Beethoven's 9th Symphony) and with Anders Fogh Rasmussen, flanked by all the heads of state announcing: 'Our new Europe is born.' In the film we follow the Danish chairmanship, with Anders Fogh Rasmussen as the central character, from early autumn 2002 to the final meeting in December 2003. We actually get very close to the internal political processes and conflicts, we see some very high ranking European politicians (French President Jacques Chirac and German Gerard Schröder for instance) in often rather informal backstage sequences, and we also see clear examples of power games and manipulations to get things moving. But we also enter a more psychological and emotional space of politics, a space where values and human dimensions and qualities play a role: either as part of a strategic national play or for the audiences and voters out there or the media, which are present throughout the program in the form of clips from international news broadcast, or on a more personal and interpersonal level. We see strong psychological reactions from several political characters through the program, not least from Anders Fogh Rasmussen and his group of people.

Christoffer Guldbrandsen has defined his intention for making the film was that he wanted to open the EU for ordinary people and to show that political actions and human relations are intertwined (Guldbrandsen 2004). Part of the reaction to the film, both in Denmark and in the rest of the EU was in fact exactly that people were

fascinated by the close up images of European politicians in action as both politicians and rather ordinary human beings. But the film also shocked in some parts of Europe, for instance France, because the style of political communication in some European countries and the link between politicians and citizens is more formal and distanced. A leading article in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* (January 2004) discussed the image of politicians, with direct reference to Guldbrandsen's film and the public image of Anders Fogh Rasmussen:

Those who emphasize that leading politicians should have respect for 'soft values', and that a strong drive to act is linked to empathy and compassion and emotions in general see the same competences that make him a strong leader of the government as something negative. Lately, it seems as though Fogh Rasmussen's advisors have realized that a softer styling is needed.

The quote indicates a clear move in the mediatization of modern politics: politicians to a much larger degree and more instantly are not just judged by their ability to solve political problems, but very much also on style, performance and psychology. In one way this is not at all new, since the ancient Greeks the rhetorical tradition has pointed to the interaction of logos, pathos and ethos in communication. Politics has always been a drama, where the actors are judged on all parameters. But where politicians in older times could control when and how too a much larger degree, could control and decide the public agenda, the speed and complexity of modern communication has made this much more difficult. Entering the stage: communication experts, spin-doctores and special and personal advisors.

Mediatization of politics: a historical perspective

Guldbrandsen's film on EU politics can be seen as a rare example of a film trying to go into a transnational, political space, working on the difficult relation between citizens feeling a part of a national public sphere, but sceptical about EU as a central political agency in modern politics. Guldbrandsen followed up on this intention of getting close to European politics and politicians in his film *The President* (2011) following the process in the European Council of electing the first European president. The film follows the same strategy, but this time with European main characters much more at the centre, not least Romano Prodi, the

former Italian Prime Minister. The film succeeds in getting very close to both the characters as politicians and their role and attitudes towards the election, and to the politicians in a more personal way, often expressing rather sincere and open critique of how things work in this EU election process.

(Clip from *The President*)

Guldbrandsen's other portraits of politicians, for instance *Lykketof Finale* (2005) about one of the four most powerful politicians in the Danish Social Democratic party, not only deal with the front and backstage of politics but also to a large degree with mediated politics. *Lykketof Finale* clearly deals with the schism between communicating political substance and communicating in ways suited to the fast and often more person and process oriented forms of modern media. Politics has become drama and narrative. Politicians use spin doctors to formulate agendas and to influence the media stories, and media and journalists get closer to politicians as both political and private characters. The media keep chasing stories and conflicts into a deeper and deeper backstage of politics.

The films of Guldbrandsen reflect a situation where the media landscape has changed dramatically. In the digital media culture search machines can access and digest information in a very short span of time. Everything seems very much out into the open, and both the citizens in general and politicians are online around the clock on social media. We seem to live in what John Keane (2013) has called the 'age of communicative abundance' (p. 2) and which he illustrates with a dense graphic illustration of global Internet traffic. Keane treats this development with a sort of sceptic pragmatism. The new media culture can be seen as an empowering of the citizen, as a democratization of information. On the other hand the new information society is also dominated by centralized power. The erosion of traditional distinctions between private and public lead to relentless 'muckracking' of public figures (40f), the rise of what he calls 'unelected representatives' (55f) and the increased importance of transnational or cross-border publics (64f). As always, when social and technological transformations happen, we see new trends

and tendencies in public and private communication, but also a continuation of established power structures.

Online technologies do not in themselves point to a new space for democracy, but they open up for the fight for public debate and access to the public in a new media environment, where access for the first time in history is very easy for the average citizen. But it is still very much the same old fight with old and new players positioning themselves in relation to a new media culture. (Bondebjerg 2010: xx)

Guldbrandsen's films are part of, but also critically represent dilemmas of modern politics and democracy in an era of almost overload of media. But the development of this of course has a much longer history. I can only briefly touch upon the 1960s and the development of television as the main medium for the presentation and debate of politics. Television news play an important role in in this development of course, however I will mainly focus on the role of film (both documentary film and fiction films) and television drama for the way modern audiences experience and look upon politicians and politics in general.

A forerunner for Guldbrandsen's films is clearly Robert Drew's *Primary* (1960), one of the few direct cinema documentaries made by the ABC network, a film following the democratic primary between Kennedy and Humphrey in late winter/early spring. It is a documentary that confirms the power of documentary film to capture moments of authenticity, history as it unfolds, but also one of the first examples of how the persona, the ability to communicate with the new medium makes a difference – the Kennedy charisma vs. Humphrey's more ordinary look and communication. It is one of the first times an American audience witness politics without an authoritative mediator and interpreter, simply by following both the frontstage and backstage events. Robert Drew continued this in *Crisis: Behind a Presidential Commitment* (1963) where the conservative south (impersonated by Governor George Wallace of Alabama) and the liberal North East (represented by the Kennedy's) clash over racial politics. By showing not just the public political conflict, but also the deeper backstage of two very different forms of life, the film illustrates a new transparency and visibility in politics.

In his seminal book, *The Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (orig. German version 1962) Jürgen Habermas described the birth of a liberal model of a public sphere and the beginning decline and re-feudalization of this, due to the rise of dominant, commercial media. Habermas' 1962 theory is written just as a transformation of the media in most western countries developed fast, and his original historical model seems to be one of almost linear decline of politics, public debate and democracy. But in his later works he has clearly developed his understanding of the modern public sphere and the role of media in a more complex way.

In his 1962 book Habermas' originally saw the separation between public and private as much stronger and clearer than later media sociologists have described. Since he developed the model based on the early forms of democracy breaking out of a feudal society, the media were linked rather closely to the model of the enlightenment with the press and journals as the breeding place of the free thought – the citizens appearing as private individuals to reason on matters of common interest. Habermas' original model of the public sphere is based on a specific period of the birth of liberal, bourgeois democracy.

Society		State
Private sphere: where people meet like private individuals	Public sphere: where citizens meet and engage in public matters	State and public institutions: Where public figures (elected or mandated) with special tasks act on behalf of the people
Family Sphere Family, home, emotions, the personal	Cultural sphere Religion, art, literature, cultural institutions,	Laws, political negotiation, regulation
Social Sphere Private sector institutions Private economy Work	Political sphere Parliament Political parties Voters	Military Police Courts of Law Prisons Educational system Cultural system and media

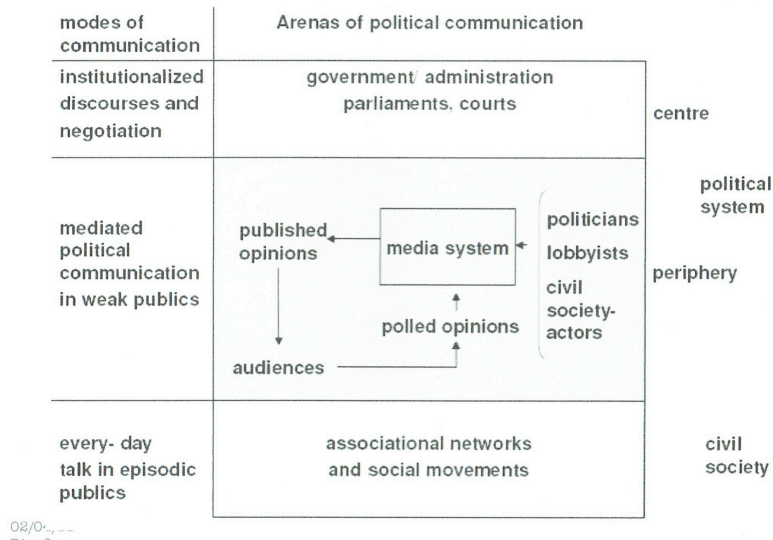
But the ideal form of this public sphere went into decline with the gradual development of a more and more commercialized media system opinion building and reasoning in public is infiltrated not just by commercial interests but also by professional management, lobbying and manufacturing of ideas and politics.

Habermas' term for this is 'refeudalization':

For the criteria of rationality are completely lacking in a consensus created by sophisticated opinion poninion-molding services under the aegis of a sham of public interest. Intelligent criticism of publicly discussed affairs gives way before a mood of conformity with publicly presented persons or personification; consent coincides with with good will evoked by publicity (...) The suppliers display a showy pomp before customers ready to follow. Publicity immitates the kind of aura proper to the personal prestige and supernatural authority once bestowed by the kind of involved in representation. Habermas 1962/1989: 195)

Already in his 1962 book on the historical rise and transformation of the public sphere, Habermas does actually deal with some aspects of contemporary society, for instance in one of the last chapters where he discusses the development of the European welfare state and the way it also influences the public sphere and debate, for instance through public service media with specific mandates and forms of obligations in the way culture and communication is organized. On the one hand he claims that the welfare state model of the public sphere has many of the same staged and manipulative forms of publicity, on the other hand he states, that it 'clings to the mandate of a political public sphere according to which the public is to set in motion a critical procdes of public communication through the very organizations that mediatize it.' (Habermas 1962/1989: 232). In 2006 Habermas talked to a broad European audience of media and communication researchers, and his speech shows us a new and much more complicated understanding of politics in a mediatized society.

Habermas, 2006



Some of the challenges in this new public sphere is clearly linked to a development which Bennett & Entman in their edited book on *Mediated Politics* (2001) points to as a kind of migration from and dissolution of the traditional boundaries between more clearly demarcated sectors in the public sphere. In their general definition of the modern public sphere they see it as a much more loose and all comprehensive type of public sphere, in fact they see it as 'any and all locations, physical or virtual, where ideas and feelings relevant to politics are transmitted or exchanged openly' (s. 3). A public sphere in the modern, highly mediated network society is thus characterized by 'the profusion of communication channels and permeability of boundaries separating the political from the non-political and the private sphere from the public sphere.' (ibid.). In their analysis they also point to a number of tendencies in this new media landscape that have profound influence on the modern forms of politics in a mediatized democracy (Bennett & Entman: 13f):

- The decline of truly massive, national mass media audiences
- Growth of advertising on the Internet and computer networks
- Convergence
- Segmentation

- Increased professionalization of political communication

Media and the transformation of the public sphere

Habermas' original theory of the origin and transformation of a public sphere in modern democracies has given rise to a whole new sociology of the media and their role and development, not least for the area of politics. In 1985 Joshua Meyrowitz published an influential study, *No Sense of Place. The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior*. He did to a large degree use Goffmann's theories on how we all present ourselves in everyday life (Goffman 1959), the kind of stages we play on and the kind of roles we perform. Crucial to this theory – as for Habermas' theory of the public sphere – is the notion of the divide between public and private. In a chapter in the book called 'Lowering the Political Hero to our Level' Meyrowitz defines the new visibility through television, and later other forms of visual media, through its eroding of the 'barriers between the politician's traditional back and front regions' (p. 270). Describing the performance of social roles as a kind of 'multi-stage drama' (p. 270) he defines the new social structure and behaviour through modern visual media as exposing the different regions, as showing us political figures moving between stages. The clear boundaries between onstage and backstage become visible because the media gradually enter regions that used to be hidden. This in turn creates new spaces, a kind of 'middle region' where public figures speak from a position mixing onstage and backstage, private and public, and a deep backstage where public figures try to evade – often in vain:

The television camera invades politician's personal spheres like a spy in back regions. It watches them sweat, sees them grimace at their own ill phrased remarks. I coolly record them as they succumb to emotions. The camera minimizes the distance between audience and performer. (p. 271)

Politics in many ways become a drama, a drama unfolding on many platforms and stages, almost like a long running series, where political characters invade our everyday life, just as the media invade the life of political characters. This new kind of close up portraits of politics and politicians can be used with artistic strength as Errol Morris has showed us with his fascinating and multi-layered portrait of

Robert MacNamara in *Fog of War. 11 Lessons From the Life of Robert S. McNamara* (2003). It is a documentary not just creeping closer and closer into the MacNamara character but also his central role in American Politics since the 1960s. Here the intense portrait of a central, political character is not based on a premise to enter at private backstage universe, but to enter a backstage political scene in order to understand the working of a political mind, whose thoughts and actions has had great implications for American and world politics. The documentary scrutiny of McNamara, which almost seems to make him sweat during the film, is a form of scrutiny where the man and the politics are actually clearly linked. The focus on McNamara as a person is however part of a wider political context in which the film also places him. At the same time McNamara's personal history becomes relevant and integrated in the film – as a man born in 1918 he is – like all of us formed by fundamental structures and happenings in his life and upbringing.

(Clip from *Fog of War*)

But the mediation of modern politics also increasingly creates a permanent state of what John B. Thompson has called 'the politics of trust' (Thompson 2000: 115), and to political coverage as a never-ending drama with scandal as the central plot. Thompson's book *Political Scandal. Power and Visibility in the Media Age* is based on the hypothesis that traditional, ideological politics is declining, and that citizens are increasingly uncertain about how to relate to the more complex problems of the modern world. In this situation both the media and citizens are in need of testing the trustworthiness and credibility of politicians. The increased visibility of all stages behind politicians, the stronger role of personal credibility and communicative charisma, makes scandals and credibility problems much more dominant than earlier. The media coverage and surveillance of the political process calls for stories and drama, especially on the 24 hours news channels. In his book Thompson define three main types of political scandals: sex scandals, financial scandals and power scandals. However all types of scandals have one thing in common:

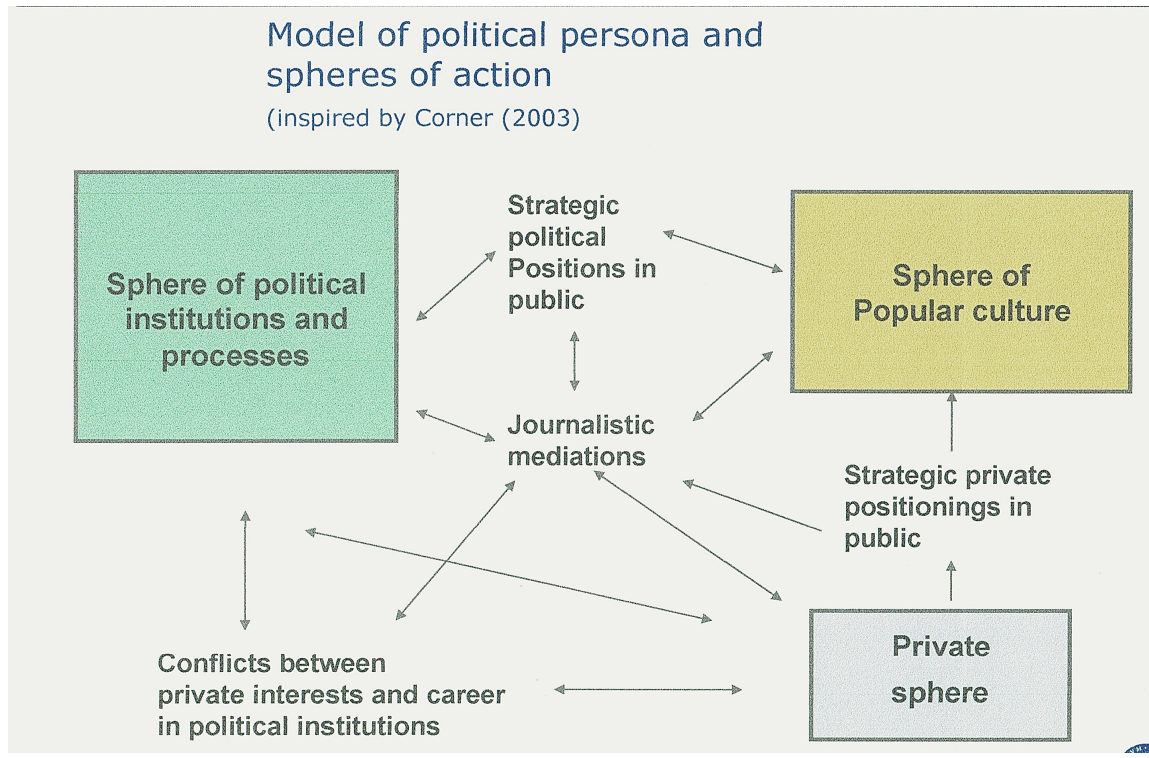
Mediated scandals provide us with a new and unsettling view of the world which in the routine of flow of day to day life is generally hidden

from view. They are windows on to a world which lies behind the carefully managed self-presentation of political leaders (...) mediated scandals (...) involve acts of transgression and the expression of moral disapproval, they also provide us with an occasion to reflect on questions a moral and practical kind (...) mediated scandals provide a rich source of conversational subject matter (...) a personal focus, a cluster of motives which are relatively easy to understand and an open ended plot which may change from one day to the next; but they are also good topics of conversation because they often raise ethical questions about which individuals may disagree. (Thompson 2000: 86-87).

Thompson's book on mediated scandals shows a very dark side of politics, but also of a shift in public and media attention to the personal and the drama – and not always the most important drama of political contents and ideological positions. Before we rush to the conclusion that what we are witnessing is modern media causing the decline of serious politics, we must however bear in mind that politics has always been full of drama, scandals and of personal dimensions. What have changed is the intensity of mediatisation and the structural complexity of the relation between media and politics. In his brilliant article, 'Mediated Persona and Political Culture' (Corner 2003) John Corner starts with a little anecdote of Roosevelt and his political use of a staged photo showing him as a man of action capturing thieves. This is an early example of a self-conscious, political and strategic use of media.

Such an act from a politician on the one hand once more reminds us of Goffman's theory of *The presentation of the self in everyday life*. We are all playing on stages and posing differently according to which kind of social, public or private stage we are on. For politicians mediated persona behaviour however has much wider implications than for the average citizen. Corner is aware that staging and personalisation of politics are often factors seen as distractions from what politics is all about. But Corner at the same time wants to focus on the fact that it is impossible to neglect the *political persona* in politics, historically or in the present. We cannot escape the personal, emotional and dramatic elements in politics, these factors are simply imbedded in human communication and interaction. They are part of the cognitive and emotional dimensions of politics. But this doesn't mean

that we cannot be critical about the mechanisms and structures through which the modern mediatisation of politics take place.



Narratives of power: the political drama on film and television

There is a long tradition for political documentaries, both in the US, in Europe and in Scandinavia. As already indicated the Scandinavian documentary tradition has a strong trend connected to a more critical investigation into the world of politics or a more observational reportage from political institutions, events or politics as a profession. This is the kind of tradition Christoffer Guldbrandsen is a clear example of - tales from inside the political power room, nationally or transnationally. But he has also made highly critical films about particular political issues, for instance in his film *The Secret War* (2006) dealing with the change in Danish foreign policy and military intervention in connection with the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. The film divided the nation politically and raised a huge debate connected with the role of globalization in modern national politics.

Seen from an American perspective, this kind of debate is of course much more common, but for Denmark as a small nation and with a very short history of a more activist foreign policy – this debate was a game shifter. A number of films and television documentaries have since followed this development and increased focus on the politics of globalization. In 2010 for instance Janus Metz' film *Armadillo* following a group of soldiers in the Helmand province in Afghanistan or in 2006 *Enemies of Happiness* Eva Mulvad's portrait of the first Afghan female politician Malalai Joya, , and her fight against a male dominated feudal clan system and for democracy (quote Mulvad's intention with the film). Another example of documentary films entering into conflict areas of globalization is Anders Østergaards *Burma VJ* (2008) – nominated for an Oscar – which takes us into the democratic uprising, through the eyes of the activist and small digital cameras and mobile phones. What we see in films like this is what I have called 'cosmopolitan narratives' (Bondebjerg 2014), that is films and stories that address global issues by entering into global spaces and telling stories that expand our mental, social and cultural understanding of global relations and conflicts, seen not just from 'our' perspective, but also from that of our many global 'others'.

Most likely neither documentary films, fiction films or television drama can change the world and the course of our life and politics. But films of all sorts can most certainly influence our social imagination and mental frameworks. But let me also, before I turn to fiction and politics, mention two very ambitious documentary projects dealing with global politics. The Danish main TV-station DR together with BBC and the NGO organisation Step Stone in 2007 launched the documentary project *Why Democracy?*, followed in 2012 by the project *Why Poverty?*. The bold motto for the project was 'Great stories can change the world', and what they did was that in each of the two projects they asked ten independent documentary filmmakers to make a film of their own choice on the theme, addressing it from each their angle. The project can thus be seen as a clever and advanced form of global dialogue, and to make the dialogue possible, they launched the films through 50 broadcasters reaching more than 180 countries on all continents. They also created a web platform with not just the films, but also additional material, and

they hooked up the radio, newspapers etc. around the world. In underdeveloped areas they made the films available through mobile technology. Perhaps this is an example of the positive aspects of the mediatisation of politics, the fact that it has become easier to reach out globally through multiple media platforms.

Globalization has been a strong theme in modern Danish and Scandinavian documentary film, and cosmopolitan narratives seem to focus more than before on the links and conflicts in global politics and between developed and developing countries. The same can to a lesser degree be said about contemporary film drama, and let me illustrate some of the tendencies with Danish Susanne Bier's films and Swedish Lukas Moodysson – other examples could have been chosen. For both directors we see a move from rather national, in Moodysson's case even local films, to films dealing with global issues and taking place in more international settings. Moodysson's film debut *Fucking Åmål/Show me Love* (1998) is a classical coming of age film, with two teenage girls going through life in small town Sweden. The film was a big hit in Sweden, and so was his second film *Tillsammans/Together* (2000) a portrait of the 68 generation and their kids. In 2002 Moodysson shifted gear in his film production with *Lija 4-Ever*, even though it is also a film about a teenager, Lija, it is set in the post-Soviet, suburban Russia, a dismal story about the harsh realities of global transformation with the mother seeking happiness in the west and leaving her daughter to a tragic end. The film is of course not directly about politics, but it is a strong narrative taking us to the centre of the darwinistic forces of globalization. The film puts images and narrative substance behind a deeper understanding of the barriers and antagonizing forces in a global world.

This global narrative and conflict is even stronger in Moodysson's first international movie *Mammoth* (2009), a Swedish, Danish, German co-production following the life of a successful New York couple (Leo and Ellen, played by Garcia Bernal and Michelle Williams) and the parallel life of their Philippine nanny Gloria (Maria Necesito). The characters and their lives are linked into a classical 'us' vs. 'them' relation with the NYC couple living the busy jet-set life, and especially Leo (a web-designer) living the modern global life, while the nanny has left her children

back home, trying to earn money by taking care of others kids, to improve the life of her children and family at home. We all too well recognize the patterns of our global world and its deep differences, and of course it ends in more or less disaster. The film raises a relevant issue, but the film was not a success, neither abroad nor internationally, perhaps because the plot and conflict seems a bit to constructed as a well meaning cosmopolitan film. New York Times for instance wrote:

The plight of mothers forced to neglect their children so they can support them is familiar and depressing and as old as the world, or rather human civilization. Most filmmakers working in fiction tend to ignore this kind of struggle unless they can use it for melodrama or tragedy, as Mr. Moodysson does to increasingly blunt effect by fingering his villains and hanging halos on his martyrs. It emerges that Leo and Ellen have blood, or at least blame, on their hands. Their privilege marks them as exploiters, however casual and naïve, never more overtly – or comically – than when Ellen apologizes to Gloria for a jealous outburst (over Jackie), a self-serving act of conscience that Ellen delivers while Gloria scrubs the family's toilet. (NYT, Nov. 19, 2009)

There are clear similarities between Moodysson's and Susanne Bier's development, only Bier has managed to move from a very successful national director to a just as successful international director. Her early films were national Scandinavian films, family dramas, love stories or comedies, for instance *Den eneste ene/The One and Only* (1999, still one of the most watched Danish films ever). She grew aesthetically with her Dogma95 film *Open Hearts*, but in her 'global trilogy' *Brødre/Brothers* (2002), *Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding* (2006) and *Hævnen/In a Better World* (2010), she developed a formula for cosmopolitan narratives, which we also find in Moodysson's *Mammoth*. The formula is not so much about entering a remote, global space throughout the three films in such a way that this global space is dominant in a narrative sense of the world. It is not like the cosmopolitan documentaries actually moving us into a completely different global space, letting us experience it from the inside. What the films try to do is to illustrate how global issues and globalisation influence and to a large degree determine our own lives, or that structures or conflicts found in a global context can also be found in our own backyard. The films point to a kind of universal human dimension in a world of social and cultural differences.

In *Brothers* the war in Afghanistan influence and is mirrored in the triangular family drama between Michael (Ulrich Thomsen), his wife Sarah (Connie Nielsen) and his little brother Jannik (Nikolaj Lie Kaas). When Michael is sent to Afghanistan, taken prisoner and presumed dead, Jannik and Sarah have an affair. When Michael returns, all the devastating things in his Afghan experience is repeated in his own life and family conflict. In *After the Wedding* we find the same formula, but this time the global-national link is tied to the main character Jacob's (Mads Mikkelsen) running of a children's home in India. Summoned to Denmark by his ex-wife's (Sidse Babett Knudsen) new husband Jørgen (Rolf Lassgård). Jørgen wants to donate a huge sum of his fortune to the child home - as it turns out, because he is dying of cancer, and wants to do some good with his huge fortune. So the film theme carves directly into our role as charity given nations vs. the bigger questions of what it would really take to overcome global differences.

In the Oscar, Golden Globe and European Award for Best European Film, *In a Better World*, tightens the plot and the ethical agenda. The almost banal theme of the film seems to be that we cannot expect a better world in a big global context if we are not better ourselves in our own life. The way we treat others in our own local community has direct implications for our global politics. Again the local family story about a crisis in the marriage between Anton (Mikael Persbrandt) and Marianne (Trine Dyrholm) and a problematic relation between Anton's son Elias and Christian (whose mother has just died of cancer) leads to violent actions - even terror. These local conflicts in an idyllic Danish province mirror Anton's experience of conflicts in Africa, where he is stationed in a refugee hospital.

Television drama and the mediatization of politics

Both the cosmopolitan, documentary and film narratives are political in a much broader and looser sense than the documentaries and models I developed first in this paper. These models and documentaries dealt with the mediatization of politics seen from a more classical, national and public sphere context. They deal with and try to analyze political processes connected to the triangle between politicians as

public figures, the media and the institutionalized processes of national politics. This is the classical focus of politics, and it is still very much tied to a national public and its institutions. However, transnational politics and institutions are of rising importance – for Scandinavia not least in relation to the European integration, the move towards perhaps not a federal Europe, but at least a strong European network of nation states.

In the last part of my talk I will however return to more classic forms of political dramas dealing with the modern forms of mediated politics and the public sphere. My two examples are Nikolaj Arcel's film *Kongekabale/King's Game* (2004). The interesting back ground story to this film is actually that it is based on a novel by journalist, spin-doctor and political commentator Nils Krause Kjær, and that it is very much based on true events and the story of a fight for power in the Conservative party in DK in the 1990s. The ImdbPro summary of the film goes like this:

Three weeks before general elections, the leader of one of the country's largest parties, the Centre Party, is involved in a severe car accident. The political scene is thrown into disarray. At the same time, young, ambitious journalist, Ulrik Torp, is given the opportunity of a life time and made Dagbladet's correspondent in Parliament. Before long, Ulrik gets caught up in a ruthless struggle for power headed by the party's two successors to the leadership, chairman Erik Dreier and spokesman Lone Kjeldsen. Ulrik barely gets to dip his toes in the water, before all hell breaks loose. Speculation in the press and calculated lies fuel the controversy at great personal cost to many of the people involved. Ulrik slowly uncovers a cynical plot that involves the country's incumbent Prime Minister. He becomes obsessed with learning the truth. But no one will listen to him, be it politicians or colleagues in the press corps, and as election day draws near, Ulrik has to face the power elite on his own.

So this is indeed a film about the mediatisation of politics, both in the sense that the press feeds into and help create the drama and in the sense that politicians and spin-doctors cleverly play on the press in order to further their own case. It is therefore also about the ethical dilemma of the political press that lives day and night in parliament to a degree that they almost become part of the establishment and thus loses the role of the critical, independent press.

(Clip from *King's Game*)

In the intense and dramatic finale of the film, these two somewhat disillusioned, critical journalist, fighting for a more ideal role of journalism, actually manage in the last instance to bring down the prime minister to come, to expose his foul play on live television. The film thus in a way shows the decline of modern journalism in the haze of spindoctors, politicians manipulating the press, the public and their opponents, but also celebrates the lone, critical journalistic hero that goes against the system. It is a sort of Danish Watergate-story.

What is concentrated in this one and very prototypical film on the mediatisation of modern politics is much more unfolded and contextualized in the drama series *Borgen*. And it is not just the case that politics play a major role in this series, we also see in in other Danish series since 2002, for instance *The Killing*, where politics and political plots are intertwined with the other plots, just as it is the case in crime series like *Ørnen/The Eagle* or in *Livvagterne/The Protectors*, or in the Swedish-Danish *Broen/The Bridge*. In these series politics is of course not the central theme and we see different sides of politics: in *The Eagle* and *The Protectors* for instance very often plots related to global politics and in *The Bridge* politics linked to transnational activists and terrorist groups.

But *Borgen* is, as my colleague Eva Novrup Redvall has said it in her new book *Writing and Producing Television Drama in Denmark* (2013) 'a series about political power play, dealing with the personal costs and consequences of the struggles of people at the centre of the political world in Denmark and of the media covering it' (Redvall 2013: 135). The three seasons follow a classical dramatic structure: Birgitte Nyborg's rise to power, the years in power as prime minister, the fall from power and the fight to start a new party and regain power.

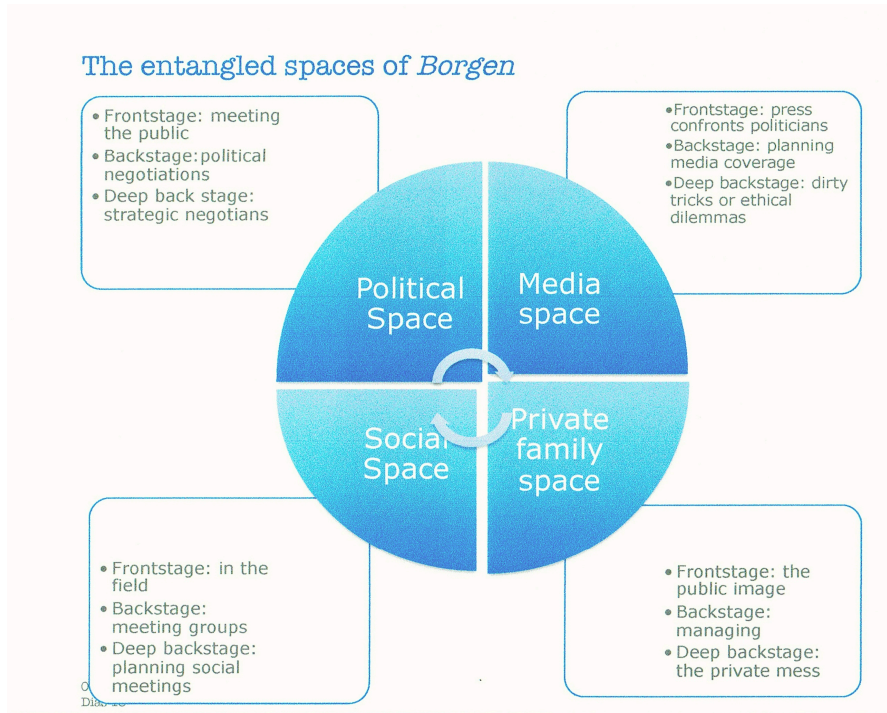
The creative team behind *Borgen* had seen and were partly inspired by the US series *The West Wing*, but there was some scepticism about whether a series wholly

dedicated to the political games in parliament could catch a large Danish audience – and when the series was produced, the expectation of an international audience was simply not taken into consideration. But the series was developed with a focus on the idea of double storytelling that has become fundamental for Danish TV-drama. On the one hand the series should have a clear dramatic conflict and narrative structure, that could carry on throughout the series, on the other hand the series should raise deeper themes and structures related both to politics as a democratic battle for ideas, for moving society towards a better society.

It had to be a series about the soul and battle for the Scandinavian welfare state in a global and mediatized world. But the double storytelling also included a focus on psychology, everyday life, the private dimensions, all those areas where the cost of politics and the strong media attention could be shown in full. Each of the political issues and themes taken up in the series are often very directly inspired by true stories, and in that sense the series become a kind of reflexive revisiting of major political, ideological and social issues in Denmark since 2000 – and often with major reference to the intertwining of national, European and global agendas. In season one we have the American prisoner transport through Greenland, in episode 6 a controversial visit from a former Soviet republic. In season two we both have the episode '89.000 children' related to Denmark's involvement in Afghanistan and episode two with strong focus on EU. In the following I will analyze the episode '89.000 Children' more in depth in order to demonstrate how the series manage to bring together very different themes and narrative threads.

We can describe the narrative and thematic structure of *Borgen* very much in direct relation to the models presented for the modern, mediatized public sphere and the intensified relations between frontstage, backstage and deep backstage in the three spheres: politics/parliament – the media – family life – Social space (nationally/internationally)

(Clip 1, *Borgen*, Season 2 episode one, intro til '89.000 children)



The intro clearly sets the theme and connects the different spaces in the series, and throughout all the episodes of the series there is an intense, dramatic and narrative drive in the way in which we move between these spaces. It is not only the case that the series move between these four main spaces. The whole dynamic and construction of the story is based on a premise that modern politics is defined by how these spaces are linked and influence each other. Underneath the four main spaces we find the three different stages the characters are playing on. The front stage is of course the stage where the main characters face the public, either directly or through the media; the back stage is where everything that is to become part of a public performance is prepared, negotiated and discussed, this is also where political or private battles are fought. Deep back stage then, is actually the space which is not really something we should be allowed into, because this is the space where psychological breakdowns take place, where all the moral and ethical questions haunt us, where we try to face not even our actions in public space but our actions dealing with the planning of our acts in the public space. This is the area of secret meetings in the dark corners of parliament or in private, it is those intimate, sexual moments that should not have happened, relations between people

which are unethical. They are all there in *Borgen* and even more in a cynical series like *House of Cards*.

(Clip 2 from *Borgen*)

In all four spaces we find these three stages represented, and they tell us about a public sphere, in which the mediatization of politics, have moved the borders between public and private. Both *The King's Game* and *Borgen*, as well as series like *House of Cards* or the British *State of Play* show us an x-ray of politics in modern democracies, and they show us power games and strategic games in which the media are both deeply involved and which the media also try to expose. But the image of politics is also a image of things in modern societies that go beyond politics and the ways in which professional media act, whether it is the tabloid press and media or more serious, critical media. The development of new social media and digital platforms have changed the ways in which and the intensity with which ordinary citizens interact and expose their life in public. The so-called virtual reality is very much a real part of our everyday life, so the erosion of the traditional boundaries between public and private, between front- and backstage is not just a political phenomenon.

Concluding remarks

The mediatization of almost all aspects of modern life is a development we cannot reverse, and it would be wrong to try to blame the media. As already Goffmann pointed out in 1959 humans have always played on different stages, regardless of the presence of media. It is part of the way we socially interact and communicate, it is both in our biology and our social genes. The omnipresence of all types of media clearly enhance our ability to follow politics both front and backstage and a series like *Borgen* in a very convincing and realistic way tells us about the professional and personal games and costs of modern politics. But just as the media have always come in many forms, from tabloid media speaking into forms of popular culture to high quality media for elites, politics express itself in different discourses and practices. We may well side with Ellen Goodman in her 1998 San Francisco

Chronicle comment: ‘Every Generation gets the Thomas Jefferson it deserves (..) The Jefferson today is one of sex, scandal and hypocrisy’, especially because her statement refers to a very tabloid affair in American politics. In a historical perspective the Lewinsky affair was no doubt a sign of the most vicious consequences of the mediatisation of politics and the breakdown of reasonable lines between public and private. But we must not generalize from spectacular cases and politics is certainly more than scandals, even today.

It would be overly pessimistic to just talk about the total decline of serious politics and arguments, and it would be too easy to just blame the media. The media have certainly influenced the way contemporary politics is communicated and understood, and the rise of audio-visual media have made it impossible to escape the personification of politics. On the other hand, modern media have also greatly increased the scope and knowledge of politics and in many ways moved politics closer to everyday life and the ordinary citizen. Politics has become a strong part of many genres and narratives on film, television, print media and on the internet, the cultural and symbolic power and importance of politics for the future of our life and our society have moved deeper into popular culture – for better and for worse. In Michael Schudson’s marvellous book *The Good Citizen. A history of Civic Life* (1998) where he maps the historic layers of civic types in American history, he also in the last chapter addresses the question of decline and also the role of the media for democracy and political life. He is obviously not very convinced by laments about decline and he opens his last chapter with the words: ‘Citizenship in the US has not disappeared. It has not even declined. It has, inevitably, changed.’ (Schudson 1998: 294). He goes through six different ways of measuring the quality of public life, one of them being the quality of public discourse. Although not uncritical of the media development, he nevertheless points to overwhelmingly positive aspects of what he calls ‘the greater openness and rawness of public talk’ and the greater access to news and media in general (Schudson 1998: 304f). On the other hand many have talked about ‘the crisis of democracy’ (see Jan Werner-Müller 201: 202f) in *Contested Democracy* in a chapter with the title ‘Antipolitics, and the Sense of an Ending’. At the same time Habermas has revised his theory of

refeudalization, but maintained the threat of what he now calls ‘the colonization of our lifeworld’. The debate continues in our mediatized democracies and societies.

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