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NOTAT

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DRESSED FOR POLITICS

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Om notatserien

Ulike slag publikasjonar av mindre omfang, t.d. forprosjektnotat, papers, artikkelutkast o.a. Eit hovudføremål med serien er å stimulere til publisering og fagleg debatt i miljøet. Kvar forfattar er ansvarleg for sitt arbeid, og dekan skal vere orientert om utgjevinga på førehand. Manuset må vere gjennomarbeidd med omsyn til språk og struktur.

The winter of 2010 the public attention once again was heated by a set of photos of a posing politician. Now a political party representing the Christian values in Norway; The Christian People Party gained very much attention from the media. This contribution was not new at all in Norwegian politics; because we have seen a lot of politician dress up for photo opportunities the last during 25 years (Sivertsen 2006).



Facsimile 1 Politician Inger Lise Hansen posing in the magazine *Det Nye* wearing dresses and underwear once again started a debate about how to be dressed for politics.

What triggered the attention of news papers and television was the fact that the politician Inger Lise Hansen came from a

Christian Party, the fact that she was posing in underwear for the glossy magazine *Det Nye* (April 2010) and that she stated that she dress sexy to be provocative. Long before the magazine was on street for sale, the tabloid *VG* (20.3.2010) published the photos starting once again a debate about the dressing of female Norwegian politicians. By May 2010 the posing of Hansen for the magazine produce over one million hits on Google. This kind of attention from the media and this kind of debate the Norwegian public have been living with for quite a long period.



Facsimile 2 Politician Erna Solberg was arranged by Marie Sjøvold from VG Helg (22.10.2005), and several people taught this photo was a result of digital manipulation and not a typical photo from the 80.

Five years ago, in 2005, the politician Erna Solberg, from the Conservative party, triggered a debate whether a

photo session with her for tabloid VG Helg, a week end magazine, was manipulated or not by the photographer was discussed for weeks in Norway (Sivertsen 2006) . The reason why the question was raised was because she dressed in a beautiful dress while standing in a pond with flowers. The staged photo of Solberg resulted in a discussion about digital manipulation in Photoshop or a real staging because of a comment made by Professor of Media Studies, Hans Fredrik Dahl (Dahl 2005:31): *“Erna was never in the pond. The tabloid VG article ‘The blue mermaid’ last Saturday is a piece of digital photomontage, strikingly done, but is a fake. This way you never saw Erna before, says the picture to me. Certainly, you must answer, because it is invented. The photo is lying.”* However, this was wrong, and Dahl had to admit he was wrong in an interview with journalist Lars Christian Wegner (Wegner 2005). The photo was made the same way as many photos staged in Norway during the 80’, because the photo journalist Marie Sjøvold had staged Solberg as was very usual way of framing politicians at that time (Sivertsen 1987).

Once again, the posing politicians wearing nice dresses are not new in Norway. Because when several politicians posed for the glossy magazine *Henne* in 2002 it started a debate with the help of tabloid VG: *“Wearing six car tyres, the Cabinet minister proved herself to be very professional*

as a poser and a very professional model in this week's number of the fashion magazine *Henne*. Great fun, but the worst part was avoiding revealing what was not supposed to be revealed, admits Skogsholm to VG. It was particularly difficult to bend her knees dressed in the striking rubber creation in black with its regulation tread, according to the Transport Minister from the Liberal Party”(VG15.9.2002).



Facsimile 3 The spread *Dressed for Power* in *Henne* (10-2002), which set the agenda for the press and TV in week 38.

During one week in September 2002 the fashion magazine *Henne*

managed to do what other magazines can have difficulty in achieving: it set the agenda in a number of media because the magazine had got together a handful of prominent female politicians and styled, staged and photographed them in a variety of surroundings. Just like other politicians they wanted attention, they were vain, they wanted to be noticed, and *Henne* provided them with the opportunity to do just that. The graphic designers who are responsible for the pages of glossy magazines and tabloid papers are looking for strong significant contrasts, often based on clichés. *Henne* (10-2002) was able to present the new face of politics. The magazine had done this before, but without the media storm that followed on this occasion (Sivertsen 2002).

In Transport Minister Torhild Skogsholm's debut as a photo model we were able to see her half-naked, but covered up, standing inside a pile of car tyres. Social Minister Ingjerd Schou – balancing on a tightrope – was photographed posing as a bohemian diva in a hospital operating theatre. Minister of Culture Valgjerd Svarstad Haugland, the most experienced photo model, was pictured in the firing line balancing an apple on her head. Member of Stortinget, the

Norwegian Parliament, Inga Marte Thorkildsen was styled and made up as a cheeky model with a cigar, but not afraid to say her opinion, according to *Henne*. Some weeks later she was photographed wearing boxing gloves and the picture was used on the cover of tabloid *Dagbladet's* weekend supplement *Magasinet* (3.8.2002), because together with colleague Ine Marie Eriksen she had launched an attack on the domineering techniques adopted by male politicians in Stortinget.



Facsimile 4 Inga Marte Thorkildsen (Socialist Left) posed for the photographer from *Dagbladet's* weekend supplement *Magasinet* (3.8.2002) in such a way that there was a follow-up of the attack on male Norwegian parliament members' power games.

Member of the Norwegian Parliament Karita Bekkemellem Orheim posed in a figure-hugging dress, exotic shoes and with a hair-dryer in her hand, but with the right to make decisions. Leader of the Finance Committee Siv Jensen had also posed for the magazine earlier and was photographed this time in borrowed plumes - draped in bank notes. Member of the Norwegian Parliament Afshan Rafiq –

ready to fight for women's rights – was styled and photographed wearing clothes from two different cultures. The photographs reveal the quality of the photographer's own imagination, which can at best be characterized as uneven.

Even before *Henne* (10-2002) was put on sale on the shelves of the newsagents, the largest Norwegian tabloid *VG* (15.9.2002) had a full-page item on the posing politicians under the headline "Government ministers do a model cover-up". *VG* is and always will be quick to present the news, including this type of news.



Facsimile 5 Two items about the politicians' photocall in *Henne* (10-2002 from VG (15.9.2002) and *Dagbladet* (18.9.2002).

NRK, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, followed up the VG item and presented the story on their TV debate programme *Standpunkt* (17.9.2002).

And to arrange a debate you need to establish a conflict with clearly opposed front-lines and a plot. Some weeks earlier, film-maker Margreth Olin's criticism of editor Ellen Arnstad in *Henne* had caused a media storm, because she had not been

allowed to be photographed naked on the cover of *Henne* in connection with an interview. Therefore a meeting between the two of them was the source of the plot in *Standpunkt*. Karita Bekkemellem Orheim was also invited to the studio because it was her posing in the magazine that had been linked to the previous conflict. Olin fired the first salvo by claiming that women are their own worst enemies. *Henne's* treatment of her, women in general and women politicians in particular is an expression of the oppressing nature of the idolisation of beauty,

she blasted, before leaving to take part in the media researchers' autumn conference in Oslo. There her film "My Body" was shown to the media researchers, whose discussion revealed that they also have an image to build and positions to defend. But the debate on *Standpunkt* sidetracked the discussion about the politicians' photocall with *Henne's* photographer, because it ended up being all about the way female politicians dress.

VG's tabloid rival *Dagbladet* devoted two pages to a comment on the photo of Karita Bekkemellem Orheim, as well as to the photocall that the other politicians had taken part in. As soon as Bekkemellem herself had remarked that she did not give a damn about the attacks on the way she dressed, the main focus was guaranteed, but she was also able to comment on political issues and the conflict in the leadership of the Labour Party. This particular week she was everywhere to be seen and heard in the media, and she had a perfect week judged by the standards of PR-loving fellow politician Erik Solheim.



Facsimile 6 Cavalcade of the spread in *Dagbladet* (21.9. and 22.9.) during week 38 2002.

The following day she received the support of former Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland because she had been attacked in *Dagbladet* (19.9) for her dress sense (or lack of it).

fashion magazine *Tique*, Tone Skårdal Tobiassen, allied herself with the editor of *Henne*, making the claim that it is women who have to pay the price for being styled, stage-managed and photographed, whereas men are never criticised. This was clearly meant as a message to the three leading male politicians “calendar man” Jens Stoltenberg, “boob watcher “ Thorbjørn Jagland and “footballer” Kjell Magne Bondevik, who had all been spared any criticism.



Facsimile 8 A stunt by journalist Synnøve Svabø in TV-program *Weekend Globoid* on NRK in 1998 with Social Democrat Thorbjørn Jagland, where the goal was to get him measure her breasts, checking if they were 36,9. Photo: SCANPIX.

On Sunday 22.9 *Dagbladet* was finally able to draw the topic to a close with a full-page spread where they seized on a loose end from the earlier TV programme

Standpunkt. Academic and newspaper columnist Erling Dokk Holm had also taken part in that programme, and he appealed to politicians to give up their roles as “Saturday clowns”. The appeal was addressed to both male and female politicians, and as such did not concern Bekkemellem Orheim’s wardrobe, but rather the fact that Dokk Holm was seriously worried about the effect of all this on democracy. The same double-page spread brought comments from parliamentary leader for the Socialist Left Kristin Halvorsen and Minister of Culture Valgjerd Svarstad Haugland, who both emphasized that they took part in shows like “The big school reunion” all in the name of winning the voters’ confidence. Politicians were queuing up to play the clown on this popular Saturday evening entertainment show on NRK because they wanted to show the public other aspects of their personalities.

The politicians and the political stylists in the wings clearly have a different analysis of the situation that the one Dokk Holm presented. But he left a loose end for the *Dagbladet* journalist to pick up, because the week after he got the news paper to write the provocative headline *Get Stenstrøm off the screen*¹ (25.9). Single combat is not to *his* liking, but politicians love it. Holm cropped up everywhere in the media: on the radio, on TV and in the papers. That sort of thing does not pass unnoticed; it gets you a cactus from *Se & Hør*, and a portrait interview in the financial daily *Dagens Næringsliv* (5.10).

In fact, it is not quite over yet. *Dagbladet.no* invites readers to an online debate about posing politicians with the question: *Should politicians turn up for a portrait interview wearing a tight skirt and high heels? Karita Bekkemellem Orheim does not give a damn about the fuss about her dress. Let's hear your opinion!* There is even room for a small online opinion poll, where readers can choose between the following three alternative answers to the question: *Do you lose respect for politicians who show themselves off in glossy magazines? Yes, it is not serious enough. No, I get to know them better. Doesn't bother me either way.* These kinds of opinion polls are meaningless, even though they are very common in forums like this. In the meantime we are eagerly waiting for women's weekly *Kvinner og Klær*, perhaps we shall soon be treated to the sight of a politician posing completely naked.

With their spread "Dressed for Power", *Henne* has set the agenda and created a media storm. *Henne* has deliberately exploited the dominating media logic, which paid off handsomely in the other media and no doubt increased its sales. The political agenda in week 38 focused for the most part on with this topic. This is a completely new situation. The strategy that *Henne* adopted was a success, there is no doubt about that. It is something we may like or dislike, in the same way as we may like or dislike posing politicians. But the strategy is not unlike that used by *Samtiden*, a journal for culture and society, every time a new issue appears on sale in the newsagents'. Glossy magazines have a safe card in their hand to guarantee their being the topic of discussion in other media: articles on politicians accompanied by spectacular photographs,

¹ Host of the controversial TV debate programme *Holmgang*, (which means 'single combat' in Norwegian).

and the more well-known the politician, the better. Because those single-copy newspapers that are sold on the street really want photos of posing politicians, but supplied by other photographers than their own. For some years now they have been rather loathe taking these kinds of photographs themselves.



Facsimile 9 Kristin Krohn Devold posed in *Kvinner og Klær* (2-2002) and when the interview set the agenda in *VG* (11.1.2002), these clothes were described as “the Defence Secretary’s ‘sympathy outfit’” by which she intended to show that she was thinking of the victims of the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers on 11 September.

The fact that glossy magazines set the agenda in the papers is not nothing new, nor that it is photographs and posing that help them to achieve this goal. But *VG*’s photographers do not stage-manage the politicians in the same way as they used to back in the 1980s. True enough, *VG* always have a page ready to reproduce pictures of politicians photographed by weekly magazines, and will most probably have again the next time a politician poses for a magazine photographer. We have seen similar articles about Kristin Krohn Devold after she returned from a trip to America shortly after 11 September: “This eye-catching USA-inspired leisure wear was bought by Kristin Krohn Devold on Venice Beach in California just a few days after the terror attack on 11 September and is the Defence Secretary’s ‘sympathy outfit’ ”, *VG* was able to tell its readers on 11.1.2002. The photo of “the sporty, attractive Norwegian Defence Secretary” was taken by photographer Marcel Lelienhof. She had been interviewed by *Kvinner og Klær*, and

VG's journalist had got hold of the photo because this was an ideal subject for VG. The other big national tabloid *Dagbladet* works by and large according to much the same logic as VG. *Dagbladet* is also ready to clear its columns whenever politicians pose in a racy manner for glossy magazines or behave like clowns on prime-time TV on Friday and Saturday evenings.



Facsimile 10 Kristin Krohn Devold (Conservative) in the rear seat of a limousine where she posed for the photographer from *Henne* no 2 1999.

There were not the same headlines when Krohn Devold was photographed by *Henne* a few years ago in connection with a portrait interview, but even so this article was referred to during the debate we witnessed in week 38. On that occasion she had been styled as a luxury escort girl, placed in the back seat of a limousine and photographed. However, maybe the latent message, conveyed by the limousine, of the USA as the backdrop to this story, was not as clear here as in the case of the Stars and Stripes above. Nor were there any bold fonts when, together with a number of central politicians, she was part of a cavalcade of photos presented to

celebrate *Henne's* fifth anniversary. This anniversary edition also included a series of photographs of *Dagbladet's* political commentator Sissel Benneche Osvold, this time as a posing journalist. She concludes her well-informed comments in the Saturday edition 21.9.2002 by saying that we must allow politicians the freedom to act in this manner and that the voters must accept it, adding that the criticism ought rather to be addressed to the political stylists hovering in the wings of the political stage. While her former colleague in *Dagbladet*, Hilde Haugsgjerd, arrives at completely opposite conclusions as editor of national daily *Dagsavisen* (21.9.2002), the former party organ of the Norwegian Labour Party. In Norway's largest newspaper *Aftenposten* (20.9.2002) Kristin Stoltenberg, with her far sharper tongue, leaves no doubt about her opinion when she says: "This is politics on its deathbed. There is definitely something very wrong when the voters are yawning in boredom at all the PR-loving politicians, while the people's elected representatives cannot even be bothered to discuss politics."

The events of that September week confirm and strengthen the view I expressed in a feature article in *Aftenposten* (Sivertsen 2001) during the general election campaign in 2001. My claim was that now, when the politicians wish to expose themselves to photographers in an attempt to display aspects of their personalities that they believe the voters deserve to see, a shift of stage and lenses has taken place whereby the politicians have ignored the newspapers and turned to the glossy magazines of the weekly press and to prime-time entertainment shows on TV. Politicians have long since shown a far greater preference for the exposure offered by the media than that available to them in the Norwegian parliament. They never say no to the chance to take part in panel discussions on live TV debate programmes like *Holmgang* and *Redaksjonen*, *Standpunkt* or *Tabloid*. They are ever more frequent guests on the many chat shows, and appear far more often on TV, joining in the fun and frolics and generally clowning around in front of an audience (Sivertsen 2006). For in the course of the 1990s they have become far more conscious of how they look in the living images conveyed on TV screens, and far less concerned about their appearance in the more static still photos of the newspapers. Politicians are seeking out new types of cameras. And yet nor do they say no to *Se & Hør*, *Kvinner og Klær* and *Henne*. They are to be seen much more frequently in glossy magazines, and

politicians willingly pose as photo models on the terms dictated by the glossy magazines. They have finally understood that it is not just votes that count in politics. The politicians' self is expanding, managing your image is becoming systemized and the scope for exposure in the media has been broadened.



Facsimile 11 The Norwegian freestyler skier Kari Traa posed for *Ultra Sport* in December 2001 and was photographed by Johan Wildhagen, *Ultra Sport*.

Posing as models usually takes place under the direction of glossy magazines, where the field is dominated by photographers with plenty of experience from advertising and the world of fashion and where photographers who have worked in the daily press are few and far between. The way that TV programmes are directed is similar to the way glossy magazines are edited. But in the case of the weekly magazines it is an advertising dramaturgy and an entertainment dramaturgy rather than a news dramaturgy that basically decides

the way politicians are photographed (Sivertsen 2006).

While Torhild Skogsholm posed half naked above the waist for the glossy magazine *Henne*, Norwegian international freestyler skier and athlete Kari Traa posed half naked from the waist down for the sports magazine *Ultra Sport* (VG 21.12.2001). Traa had simply accepted the relay

baton handed on by athletes overseas, where it has become a trend to pose naked in front of the camera in order to finance your sporting activities. Exposure in the media is growing, and so is the ego. When we shall see female Norwegian politicians posing fully naked from top to toe is difficult to predict. For my own part it is not a day that I look forward to. But the politician, who is the first to do so, will certainly put other politicians in the shade for a while. Whether this strategy really increases trust is a moot point. Those people whose trust they are seeking to win are already wondering what really counts in politics these days, and some are asking the question: Is it really cameras that decide what is the right focus?

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