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Front- and backstage in ”social media”

Starting with two cases, in which bloggers reveal way too much about things that should be kept hidden, I will ask: What is it in “social media” as media and in the communicative situation of the person using them, that constitutes front- and backstage and the boarder dividing them?

In the paper I will analyze the cases mentioned above using some of Goffman’s concepts, the already-mentioned frontstage and backstage and also expressions given and expressions given off. I will also compare what might be called computer-to-computer interaction with face-to-face interaction by initially using the “model” of talk that Goffman developed in his article “Replies and Responses” (reprinted in the book Forms of Talk 1981). This “model” consists of eight different so called “system requirements and system constraints” (1981: 14-15).

I will also draw on results from an earlier study on mobile telephone calls in public places, where I gathered data by eavesdropping on, or rather overhearing, such calls (results published in Persson, Anders 2001 “Intimacy Among Strangers”, in Journal of Mundane Behavior (Vol. 3, No. 3, October 2001) and in Persson, Anders 2003 Social kompetens. Lund: Studentlitteratur (a book in Swedish)). The tendency to reveal too much about private, sometimes intimate, things is evident in such calls – but to whom are the callers revealing them? Has this intimacy among strangers something to do with peculiarities of the mobile phone as a medium? According to Zygmunt Bauman (The Individualized Society, Polity Press 2001) the mobile phone gave the final blow to the connection between spiritual affinity and physical nearness. Or is it the communicative situation of the caller and his/her being an absorbed communicator that explains the tendency to reveal too much?

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