

## A King without E-mail

### *Reflections on New Media and the Royal Court*

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In mid-June 1996, the Swedish royal court went virtual. Prior analogue information strategies had been deemed old fashioned, and it was time for something new – the Internet. During the mid-1990s, the World Wide Web communication protocol transferring information on the Internet had become increasingly popular. Sun Microsystems launched the slogan “The Network is the Computer”, and in 1994, the new Web browser Netscape Navigator was released. By 1996, almost 80 per cent of people surfing the Web used the Navigator browser. So did the Swedish court, and the Royal Information and Press Department – hereafter the Press Department – bought a Web domain: [www.kungahuset.se](http://www.kungahuset.se). The court was thus digitally upgraded and soon the royal family was online with a dedicated homepage. Because of the great interest from English-speaking countries, half a year later the three sub-sites “The Monarchy in Sweden”, “The Royal Family” and “The Royal Palace” were also released in English versions at [royalcourt.se](http://royalcourt.se). Of these, “The Royal Family” attracted most attention. Complete with colour portraits, the king, the queen and the crown princess were presented with biographical details. The entire Bernadotte Dynasty was even displayed in the form of a graphical family tree. However, visitors seeking to get in touch with the court must surely have been disappointed, as the site specifically stressed in bold letters: “We would like to point out that His Majesty the King of Sweden does not have an e-mail address.”<sup>1</sup>

No e-mail. For most of us today this sounds like an anomaly. But the Internet in 1996 was poles apart from today’s multilayered Web of converging media forms. Not only has the Web witnessed the fall of Netscape Navigator, and its subsequent replacement by Microsoft’s Internet Explorer as the default Web browser, but the World Wide Web has also gone through numerous changes and lately even been socially upgraded to the so-called Web 2.0. According to Tim O’Reilly, Web 2.0 is “the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the Internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. Chief among those rules is this: build applications that harness network effects [which get] better the more

people use them.”<sup>2</sup> The upgrading of the Web can also be described as a shift from websites with static information to new sites working more as interlinked, dynamic computing platforms. Contemporary visitors at the sophisticated and elaborate royalcourt.se can, for example, go to the media centre and experience the court in moving images; they can read all official press releases, listen to the king’s speeches and browse through the royal diary.

With applications such as Wikipedia, Facebook, MySpace and blogs, the “do-it-yourself” revolution of the Web is, indeed, a fact. In a Swedish context, Bengt Wahlström has argued that four new scenes or arenas constitute the basis of the virtual society: blogs, social networking sites such as Facebook – as well as sites with media like YouTube – virtual worlds such as Second Life, and collaborative systems like Wikipedia. Wahlström claims that these arenas have an increased influence in areas of society such as politics, culture and trade – “power 2.0” in his terminology.<sup>3</sup> As a new asset, Web 2.0 is fundamentally bottom-up driven; it is the people using software and creating content who are in charge. This, however, has led to a number of dilemmas. The act of publishing, for instance, has more or less ceased to exist as a semantic concept, as there are basically no gatekeepers within the digital domain. Anyone can “publish” a blog on anything, and there is a risk that critical examination will be neglected. Then again, blogs and user-generated content are regularly distributed for free or under a creative commons license. Besides, content is often uploaded to social networking sites with characteristics different from those of traditional media such as newspapers, radio or television.

Given the rapid and converging changes in the contemporary media landscape, the purpose of the present article is to reflect on the role of new media and Web 2.0 in relation to the Swedish royal family, as well as to present a sketchy survey of more or less controversial instances involving the court and new media.

## Mediated Proximity

Traditionally, the media have been important for the court; being visible in mediated form has after all been almost an imperative for a king. In addition, there is – and has been – a tremendous public interest in the royal family. In 2003 alone, more than 7,000 articles appeared in the press dealing with the Swedish court.<sup>4</sup> Today, that very same interest has also gone online. On YouTube there are hundreds of clips with reference to the Swedish royal family, and recently Swedish Television (SVT) launched a specific sub-site devoted entirely to the court – “Kungahuset”. However, the mediated symbiosis between the royal family and mainstream media has also been challenged by user-generated content on the Web as well as by the court’s own usage of digital technologies, notably their recently upgraded Web page. Apparently, King Carl XVI Gustaf takes an interest in development of the homepage, and even “chatting with the king” has been on the agenda.<sup>5</sup>

During the summer of 2007, a profile of the king appeared on the social networking site Facebook. “Carl XVI Gustaf”, it seemed, had already gathered a few friends and supposedly started the group “We who rule Sweden”. The profile, however, turned out to be a fake, and in August, the tabloid *Afton-bladet* reported that “a Web fraudster had stolen the king’s identity”.<sup>6</sup> As it turned out, the Swedish king was in good company; the prime minister also had a fake profile as well as Mona Sahlin, the leader of the Social Democratic Party. In fact, when reporters checked the site more carefully, they discovered that Princess Madeleine had several fake profiles on Facebook. The director of the Press Department, Nina Eldh, was very upset and promised to take action to eliminate these profiles. The event sparked frequent comments within the blogosphere.

Ultimately, the various royal profiles were removed. A year later, however, the king is now back on Facebook, boasting more than 300 friends. The old profile “Carl XVI Gustaf” has been reinstated with the new profile “Kung Carl Gustaf”.

The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook profile for 'Kung Carl Gustaf'. The profile is set to 'Sweden' and has a 'Mini-Feed' displaying 10 stories. The feed includes posts from August 5 and May 15, such as 'Kung and Erik Mickelsson are now friends' and 'Kung and Anton Winblad are now friends'. A photo of the king is shown with the caption 'Erika O'Shea tagged Kung in a photo. 2:53pm' and 'Tagged in: Djurgårdens IF'. The profile also shows a list of friends, including Johan Axelsson, Lisa Marie Gustavsson, and Urban Von Ulitzen. The left sidebar contains a search bar, application links (Photos, Groups, Events, Marketplace, Video, Super Wall, Movies), and an advertisement for 'Elitefashion.se'.

A faked profile of the Swedish king at Facebook.

The Web, of course, promises a mediated proximity, and social media depend on interactions between people using technology as a conduit. In fact, Facebook recently became the most popular global social networking site; as of June 2008, Facebook had 132 million unique visitors, thereby dethroning

MySpace.<sup>7</sup> The site facilitates “being friends” with people, and there is also a possibility to effortlessly approach celebrities as well as to get in contact with former friends using applications such as “discover people you may know”. Networks of friends’ networks, then, generate an almost infinite range of potential contacts.

Even so, the “Kung Carl Gustaf” profile is quite obviously a fake. Apart from photographs of the king himself, ads for female underwear and site-generated comments, so-called mini-feeds (for example, “Kung and Lisa are now friends”), reveal the profile as a fraud. Then again, the Press Department has lately received e-mails on a regular basis asking whether the king actually is present on Facebook.<sup>8</sup> One of the complicated things about social media is, thus, the underlying uncertainty as to whether or not information is reliable. Without editorial control, basically anything goes. However, Wikipedia has also proven that “false articles” are re-edited – sometimes within minutes of their appearance.<sup>9</sup> Still, critique of the social Web concerning its trustworthiness and reliability is significant; it remains an important issue that one should not too easily brush away.<sup>10</sup>

Stealing someone’s identity on the Web is, of course, a little too wicked and malicious. However, the existence of a fake king also generates questions regarding the lack of a royal presence in various social networking communities. If the court is having problems with fake royal identities, why not simply create a few official profiles? Using Facebook is easy, and the Press Department could quickly have fashioned a profile and demonstrated royal progressiveness with regard to Web 2.0. The Swedish Institute, for example, has revealed the numerous political and public advantages of being present online. The head of the institute, Olle Wästberg, has claimed that the 400,000 Swedish kronor spent on the Second House of Sweden in Second Life is one of his greatest investments. During the inauguration of the virtual embassy in May 2007, Wästberg stated that it “is a real pleasure to see that so much media, above all the foreign press, has recognized how progressive Sweden is. The great interest that this has generated in the media is estimated to have already paid off tenfold.”<sup>11</sup>

The royal court, however, has confirmed their seeming lack of interest in the social Web. On a query from *Aftonbladet*, as to whether the king had any plans of creating his own Facebook profile – let alone a blog, Nina Eldh answered that she did not think this would interest him.<sup>12</sup> This has left the digital field open, so to speak, and the court has had to cope with various more or less unpleasant incidents. At a number of occasions, the royal family has been offended by what they regard as media infringements; intrusions that arguably have become more common with the arrival of the Internet and the Web. On the photo-sharing site Flickr.com, for example, a search for “Crown Princess Victoria” generates 184 hits with pictures of her taken by various people. These are all unofficial photographs of a royal celebrity, images totally beyond the control of the court. At present, however, most of them are nice and agreeable. One example among many is the signature Snow Kisses Sky – a Chinese male living in Yunnan – who in December 2005 took a fine portrait of Princess Victoria at the Swedish embassy in Beijing.



“HRH Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden. Photo taken in Royal Swedish Embassy in China.” Uploaded to Flickr by Snow Kisses Sky in December 2005.

Tagging it with keywords such as “princess”, “celebrity”, “Victoria”, “Swedish”, “Scandinavian” etcetera, this image has as of August 2008 been viewed 1,653 times, and most comments on the photo are positive: “Wow. I love your portraits”; “What shot you made there :)” or “Great photo! She is so beautiful!” In the comments list, the photographer himself has also stated that “it was a rare opportunity for me to meet such a celebrity. My colleagues were interviewing with her [sic] when I took this shot.”<sup>13</sup>

The policy of Flickr and the community guidelines stipulate that “if you are offended by a photo or video you can either click away or you can mark it as poorly moderated by clicking on the ‘Flag this photo’ link. [...] If you think there’s immediate cause for concern, you can report content and/or someone’s behaviour to Flickr staff via the ‘Report Abuse’ link.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, there is an editorial staff in place to prevent various infringements. However, there is no Flickr policy for someone who wants a “normal” image of him- or herself to be deleted. The obvious lack of control over images is actually a defining characteristic of the social Web. User-generated content – often uploaded anonymously as with the signature Snow Kisses Sky – makes it hard to criticize and reprove accusations in visual or textual form. Articles appearing on Web blogs – the glossy tabloid *Svensk Damtidning*, for example, has no less than three “royal blogs” with all the latest gossip surrounding the court – are dynamic, active

and constantly up to date. Texts can be transformed, altered and changed, and the same applies to videos. *Svensk Damtidning* also has a Web-TV application with numerous short video clips showing the court, in general, and the royal children as well as events with royal presence, in particular.

One could argue that in the case of a controversy surrounding the court, more articles or videos rather than apologies will in all likelihood appear on the Web, not least because the blogosphere is full of both anti-royalist writers and celebrity spotting aficionados. In some ways, then, new digital media function differently from traditional media. New media have, for instance, replaced the “one-to-many” broadcasting model of traditional communication with the possibility of Web-based “many-to-many” communication. In fact, the very foundation of Web 2.0 is based on the latter model – or more precisely on “many-to-few” communication. Web pages, blogs, file sharing and social networking sites are media forms that function according to a logic whereby information and announcements are communicated by numerous people, but often only noticed by a few. However, new media are also distinguished by interactivity and their networkable nature, and owing to their binary character they are regularly described as manipulable. In relation to the Swedish court, the latter is certainly the case as evidenced by the many forged images circulating on the Web. Common retouching and editing of royal photographs, in fact, caused numerous readers to mistakenly believe that images published in the press of Princess Madeleine after the Nobel celebrations in 2002 were digitally manipulated because of her low-cut décolletage.<sup>15</sup>

Generally speaking, it is, thus, fair to state that through digital upgrading, royal media coverage has become more intrusive than before. This, in turn, has led to a number of controversies. Most of them are related to paparazzi-like methods, yet some also have a more critical posture. In October 2002, Queen Silvia, for example, was interviewed in the public service programme “Pip-pirull” – a radio programme that has been available online ever since. Polite as always, she answered questions concerning the condition of elderly care in Sweden. The interview, however, was filled with references and allusions to Nazism, concentration camps and gas chambers, implicitly referring to the fact that the queen’s father, Walther Sommerlath, became a member of the German National Socialist Party already in 1934.

The king allegedly found the interview “distasteful”.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, it was thought of as satirical and humorous by the originators, alluding to the fact that neither the queen nor the mainstream media have really dealt with the compromising past of the Sommerlath family.<sup>17</sup> In the annual report from the court, however, the radio programme was referred to as “the macabre interview with the queen.” It is said to have been one of three media events during the year in which the Press Department had to deal with countless questions from the public.<sup>18</sup> As polls often indicate that 70 to 80 per cent of the Swedish population have positive attitudes towards monarchy as a system of government, most enquiries expressed support for the queen.<sup>19</sup> In fact, making fun of the court is often double edged. In terms of satire, there remains a division among Swedes



who, on the one hand, regard the royal court as sort of a ridiculous antique institution, and Swedes who, on the other hand, see the royal family as part of Sweden's true cultural heritage. As a consequence, mainstream media often display a servile and fawning manner when interviewing the court. This is most apparent in the yearly SVT programme on the royal family, usually screened at prime time during the Christmas holidays. The producer Inger Milldén at SVT has stated that, "the programme we are making upholds a tradition; it follows the royal family during the year. It is not a critical or an examining programme, and neither is it produced by that type of journalists."<sup>20</sup>

One might argue that the servile manner of journalists has to do in part with the personal distance kept by the court. No one is allowed to come close, and therefore somewhat paradoxically, the critical questions never seem to be asked. In January 2008, the SVT programme "Debatt" actually discussed the very issue of journalists fawning on the court. A number of reporters were critical of how the media approached and described the royal family, and the programme host, Stina Dabrowski, had invited the king himself to give his opinion. The court's Press Department initially approved of the programme. They did want someone from the court to take part. Carl XVI Gustaf, however, put in his veto and, basically, prohibited anyone from participating. As a consequence, Dabrowski – a TV personality with a long career – went public during the programme with these quite extraordinary circumstances. The Press Department, then, suddenly backed the king, and in an interview in *Expressen* the day after an offended Dabrowski claimed: "I sometimes get the impression that [the court] does not want to have ordinary journalism near the royal family. As soon as [the Press Department] suspects something that resembles such reporting, it tries to keep them away."<sup>21</sup>

One of the more interesting opinions expressed in the TV programme "Debatt" came from Annette Kullenberg. She claimed that journalists working for tabloids or the gutter press often acted and performed in a similar way as the court itself did. Journalists too, are dependent on the symbiosis between media and monarchy, and have to follow the rules of the game; that is, they need their job, and their job is to fawn on the court.<sup>22</sup> A case in point during spring 2008, more or less proving Kullenberg's claim, has been the TV programme about the fiancé of Crown Princess Victoria, Daniel Westling, entitled "His Royal Highness Westling". Originally scheduled to be broadcast in mid-April, the programme was removed from the TV tableaux due to uncertainties about the archival material used. According to an article in the trade journal *Resumé*, the Head of SVT's event department, Kerstin Danielsson, had stopped the film by maintaining rights to archival footage that SVT could not use without permission from the court. Furthermore, and citing an anonymous source, *Resumé* claimed that the event department "more or less acted as the court's branch at SVT; responsible for a great many interferences in programmes or features with the royal family. All programmes produced by the event department are [therefore] obedient and submissive."<sup>23</sup> As is mentioned in the introduction to this book, "His Royal Highness Westling" was finally screened in June 2008. However, the court then

complained about and objected to the title; officially Daniel Westling was not (yet) part of the court, and hence not dignified as a royal member.

This etiquette in many ways goes hand in hand with the media's servile attitude towards the court, but class and good manners also matter. The royal family belongs to the upper class, and their private friends fit into a similar stratum of society. Aware of their privileged situation, the upper class, in fact, rarely express what could be regarded as politically incorrect opinions in front of cameras or microphones.<sup>24</sup> Traditionally, the media have thus had a deep respect for the royal family's status and privacy, probably linked to the general public support of the monarchy. After all, it was during the Olympics in Athens 2004 that a Swedish reporter for the very first time – instead of using the appropriate “Your Majesty” – dared to address the king in the second person singular. In various interviews, one can often notice a detachment or lack of involvement from the royals, which regarding the king also has to do with his official and apolitical role. He is, basically, prohibited from having an opinion, and hence in the media comes across to viewers or listeners as somewhat disinterested.

In light of the above, the 1996 Web declaration that “His Majesty the King of Sweden does not have an e-mail address” seems quite appropriate. Interviews and contact with the media are necessary, but the king apparently desires to limit communication to traditional channels. In contrast, Swedish politicians have, certainly, been more willing to accept new media in their occupation. Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, for example, has had a blog for more than three years. In fact, already in 1994 he began sending out a weekly e-mail to an interested public. This was two years prior to the court's announcement that it was not possible to get in contact with the king through new communications technologies. As a result, the court ignored new ways of communicating with admirers and royal enthusiasts. One might think, however, that the situation today would have changed, considering the court's new elaborate Webpage. However, the same inability to get in touch remains. The king still does not have an e-mail address – at least not an official one. Somewhat amusingly, it is stated that one “should write a letter to the Royal Court”, if one would truly like to receive a personal reaction from the king.<sup>25</sup> Thus, it seems that in the digital world, analogue communication is a way to keep a traditional distance as well as to filter unwanted messages.

## Soft Power

In a time of networked and personified communication, the inability to send the king a simple e-mail seems quite atypical and, frankly, uncharacteristic of the court. Historically, the royal family has always been user-friendly towards new media technologies. The nation's first and oldest X-ray image – dedicated to King Oscar II in 1898 – resides, for example, in the Bernadotte library. And Swedish film history even starts with him at the Stockholm exhibition in 1897.



Prior to being filmed, Oscar II is furthermore said to have been mesmerized by Edison's phonograph, and his funeral in 1908 was intensively mediated. The same year, the whole court, in all some 25 persons, gathered at the Stockholm Castle for a private screening on the 26th birthday of Crown Princess Margareta.<sup>26</sup> A similar approval and awareness of the media characterized the reign of King Gustavus V. And even if he initially objected to the radio broadcast of Princess Astrid's wedding in 1926, the king from then on became quite fond of the new broadcast medium. From the Stockholm Castle – he never cared to go to the studio of Swedish Radio downtown – he was a regular radio speaker to the whole nation during the 1930s, and especially throughout the Second World War.

Thus, if the royal family by tradition has been a rather conservative ideological bastion, it has developed a truly modern approach to the mass media. The current King Carl XVI Gustaf is, of course, well aware of the great public interest surrounding him and his family.

Ever since his marriage in 1976 – a televised event with some 400 million European viewers<sup>27</sup> – he has, for instance, had press assistant Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg at his side taking care of the media. By the time she left the court in 2004 – an event that in itself made the news – she had built up an impressive public relations machinery. As a spokeswoman for the court, in general, and the



Approximately 400 million viewers watched the Swedish royal wedding in 1976. Cover of *Röster i Radio-TV* 1976 (26).

king, in particular, Tarras-Wahlberg controlled the image of the royal family for almost 30 years. She has often been controversial, but apparently quite skilled. Today she often lectures on how to handle the media.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, in interviews conducted after she left the court, she has stated that during the past decade it has been her duty to teach the royal children how to deal with the media. They have lately been the prime targets of particularly the tabloids. Browsing through the court's annual reports, one easily finds evidence of intense media coverage – which has sometimes prompted the court to take legal action. In 2003, for example, a number of German tabloids – with a regular interest in the Swedish court – insinuated that the royal couple's marriage was coming to an end. Together with digitally manipulated images and a photo montage, speculations were made as to whether a divorce was to be filed. Because these accusations were false, the court sued some of the tabloids, which were consequently later forced to publish apologies.

Apparently the court receives more than a hundred requests every month regarding various events that people, organizations or companies want the king or the royal couple to inaugurate or otherwise be part of. Carl XVI Gustaf's main occupation is, actually, taking part in such events. During 2007 alone, he participated in almost 150 gatherings. Various forms of media coverage make him an attractive figure, and companies are, naturally, keen to engage him, because their chances of getting media attention increase tenfold. Thus, even if the king has an official and apolitical role, the Swedish monarchy is certainly an institution with influence on many levels. For example, Carl XVI Gustaf's very personal speech in January 2005, shortly after the tsunami catastrophe, in which he explicitly referred to his own loss of his father – who died in a plane crash in 1947 when the king was an infant – was publicly appreciated as words of comfort. The primary reason was the expression of personal and private mourning from an otherwise somewhat reserved king. Thus, at least to some extent, the royal family makes use of what Joseph Nye has called “soft power”. Nye's notion refers to the media's ability to politically influence people through conceptions, thought patterns and mediated ideals. In order to establish positive attitudes, Nye has argued that various mass media content is almost as important as how a country's domestic and foreign politics are being run.<sup>29</sup>

The notion of mediated soft power in relation to the court is, however, more constructive when describing the Swedish royal family's relation to media prior to 1950. It is important to remember that King Gustavus VI Adolphus – who in October 1950 succeeded Gustavus V – actually was the first Swedish king without any formal political power whatsoever. Gustavus V, however, deliberately used media in various political ways. Film cameras, press reporters and radio microphones constantly followed him; Swedish Film Industry alone depicted him on more than 500 occasions. This symbiotic relation seems to have created an insight into the power of especially visual media. In fact, already around 1900, members of the Swedish royal court – for example Prince Wilhelm, later a devoted filmmaker – understood and became conscious of the power of the media and the desirability of offering their mediated image to ensure popular-

ity and position. Of Sweden's ten oldest surviving films, nine depict monarchs and members of royal families.

These films, as well as innumerable features in the press, suggest that the decrease in actual royal power during the first part of the twentieth century due to parliamentary democracy stands in direct proportion to the increase in royal exposure in contemporary mass media. The same argument has been made by Franziska Windt in a book on the mediation of Wilhelmine Germany. Wilhelm II, for example, is sometimes described as Germany's first film star, and countless actuality films depict him, not to mention the innumerable photographs – a “Majestätische Bilderflut” – with hundreds of thousands of coloured reproductions of him.<sup>30</sup> The potential of modern media was obvious to various courts, and the mass culture of modernity identified as a source of soft power. Using media became a way to implement political and social influence. Just as public persons today know the value and advantages of media coverage, monarchs of the past would permit press photographers, phonographic and film companies to attend various events, because they knew the importance of being documented and mass produced in image, sound and film.

Hence, the symbiotic and “soft power” relation of media exposure so apparent today with regard to celebrities and public persons in fact developed during the first decades of the twentieth century. Media representatives would predominantly use royal fame to increase commercial popularity, and the courts took advantage of the public attention caused by the mediation. Obviously, this symbiosis had a precursor in royal courts' relations to artists and painters. However, the difference with regard to modern mass media was the public scale, dimension and range of the royal mediation. A royal portrait in an art gallery around 1750 might have been seen by a thousand people. In comparison, millions of people saw royal films in cinemas.

Moreover, the courts' modern management of and attitude towards public relations stand in sharp contrast to parties and politicians who (apart from in the US) saw film, for example, as lowbrow and cheap entertainment. Compared with conditions today, where politicians have been keen to use new media, we see an inverted relation to media participation. In the past, the press was of course important for political parties, but other media were often deemed politically uninteresting. The Social Democrats in Sweden, for example, despised the new medium of film – even though cinema audiences were dominated by the working classes. Up until the mid-1930s, the Swedish labour movement was, actually, more hostile towards the different mass media of modernity than was the bourgeoisie or the aristocracy. A true paradox, indeed, because most of the movement's prominent representatives like Hjalmar Branting and Per Albin Hansson initially worked with media as newspaper editors.<sup>31</sup>

Today the situation is different; while the Social Democrats are present on YouTube, the royal court tries to ward off social media with aloofness and seeming disinterest. In response to a direct question put forward to the Press Department as to whether the court had any plans of using new media apart from the Web, the answer was negative.<sup>32</sup> However, one reason might be that

the Press Department itself has lately been the subject of an online media debate concerning whether it is using the right communication strategies in a new digital environment. For example, on several occasions during spring 2008, the trade journal *Dagens Media* published reports concerning the unease and discomfort caused by the new leadership of Nina Eldh. Six persons apparently left the Press Department during the spring, leaving only three persons to deal with media issues. At the same time, Eldh has also expressed concern about the decrease in royal publicity. Still, according to her, the Press Department “is not a campaign organization for the monarchy. It is a very special job, as it concerns the Head of the State and his family. Basically, it is our task to inform about the daily work of the king and the queen.”<sup>33</sup>

### “Kungahuset” & YouTube

On Sweden’s national day, 6 June 2008, Swedish public service television launched a sub-site entirely devoted to the royal family – “Kungahuset”. The purpose of the site is to offer viewers old archival material related to the court, as well as current reports on the royal family’s activities and whereabouts. Of course, SVT’s idea is to draw on the popularity of the court to generate user clicks on the company’s Webpage. A few days prior to the Web launch, the aforementioned TV programme, “His Royal Highness Westling”, was finally screened. Yet TV critics expressed reluctance and hesitation regarding SVT’s new royal media strategy. Some were exceedingly critical describing, for example, the Web launch as totally bizarre.<sup>34</sup> Yet as Bertil Mollberger in *Dagens Nyheter* stated: “it is a sign of the times. The film [on Westling] would have been unthinkable in public service the decade after 1968. Now, however, the swing of the pendulum is a fact, and our TV sets display one royal report after the other.”<sup>35</sup>

SVT’s site “Kungahuset” is, however, interesting, because it utilizes the TV archive as a digital source of content. The first film displayed in the list of the video application SVT Play under the heading “Kungahuset” is, for example, Prince Wilhelm’s short documentary *About a Naval City* (1937), a film about the city Karlskrona and its shipping legacy.

Just underneath in the list, one finds an archival portrait focusing on King Gustavus VI Adolphus, *The King in Close-Up* (1962).<sup>36</sup> None of these films, however, are listed with their correct title – an apparent consequence of archival negligence. On the Web, however, these films are re-used as archival content. The Internet as well as the Web is in fact gradually changing the very forms of media in an archival direction. An archival mode of online media is evident both in new forms of television and radio – “More than 2,000 hours of free TV: whenever you like!” is, for example, the logo for SVT Play – as well as in the enormous media clusters shared in the P2P networks.

Sites such as SVT’s “Kungahuset” are, thus, changing or altering media forms in archival directions, and one of the explicit visions for “Kungahuset” was actually to upgrade archival content into digital formats. “This is an idea we



Prince Wilhelm remediated at SVT's website "Kungahuset" in the summer of 2008.

have had for quite some time", Eva Landahl from SVT stated in an interview. "We have tremendous amounts of [royal] material since way back in time. The idea is to make a site like 'Öppet arkiv' but more topically oriented."<sup>37</sup> The open archive, referred to in the quotation, has been SVT's platform for archival online material since March 2005, and "Kungahuset" in many ways resembles the strategies deployed by the former site. However, the purpose of "Kungahuset" is also to upload new content to the video blog "Kungahusbloggen". In mid-July 2008, for example, a short video clip from Crown Princess Victoria's birthday celebrations was added to the royal video blog. The three-minute clip looks almost like amateur footage; there is no voice-over commentary and the camera zooms rapidly in and out. Only towards the end of the clip, with a number of images of the audience, does one get the feeling that this is a professional feature.

According to Wikipedia, a "blog" – a contraction of "Web log" – is a site "with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. [...] Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs".<sup>38</sup> Thus, if a video blog such as "Kungahusbloggen" is to remain true to its kind, entries do have to follow the established aesthetics of that specific media form. However, publishing amateurish footage on the national public service broadcaster's Webpage is somewhat odd. Naturally, people at SVT know how to make TV programmes. Consequently, the idea behind the royal video blog remains peculiar, not least because some material is obviously re-runs of former televised features.

One way to grasp and comprehend SVT's royal blog strategy is to connect it to current developments in the contemporary audiovisual media landscape, notably YouTube. Regular news on svt.se, for example, has moved from a



programme structure to a clip format. The latest news attraction online, Play Rapport, is a specific application with a long list of short audiovisual news items. The programme structure is defined by the user, and SVT's blended media strategy also allows users to copy content to their blog, while still being in control of the code. This means that whenever someone looks at a SVT clip from any blog whatsoever, the SVT click frequency increases. As Martin Jönsson has stated in a blog entry on Play Rapport, the new SVT media strategy is quite astonishing.<sup>39</sup> Only two years ago, SVT threatened to sue YouTube for copyright infringement. Now they have their own channel on YouTube with more than 250 clips, and in addition their media material is spread out through the blogosphere. Public service is, thus, being distributed in completely new ways.

Despite everything, the driving force behind current changes in audiovisual media distribution is naturally YouTube. Only three years after its foundation in 2005, YouTube has become the very epitome of digital culture. Seemingly outpacing cinema and television in terms of popularity, this brand-name video distribution platform promises endless new opportunities for amateur video and political material, as well as entertainment formats and viral marketing. Attracting a global mainstream audience and activating users to form communities and share audiovisual material, YouTube likewise seems to redefine moving images, audiences and producers. What this actually implies is a question currently pervading industry boardrooms, university classrooms and popular culture alike.

Numerous videos including the Swedish royal family have been uploaded on YouTube. Some of them are made by users themselves, and some consist of archival material that has been illegally posted. A four-minute video about the royal family preparing for Christmas during the 1980s quite obviously derives from SVT. The signature Ducinek, in addition, runs the YouTube community "Royalty forever" with numerous videos of European princesses and princes. Most of them are structured as a photo montage with added music. The video "Princess Madeleine 'Pretty Woman'", for instance – viewed 46,254 times – consists of hundreds of images of Princess Madeleine accompanied by a soundtrack of Roy Orbison's hit single. Other films look more like traditional so called "mash-up-videos", films that use low-resolution video material gathered from various online sources without any considerations of copyright whatsoever. Furthermore, 21 videos on YouTube have been tagged with "kungafamiljen" ("the royal family"), and among them are a number of sketches from the TV4 production "Hey Baberiba", a show with regular comic imitations of the royal family.

One interesting aspect of YouTube, related to the way videos tend to circulate on the Web, is the statistics and data flap available for all videos next to the commentary field. The video "Princess Madeleine 'Pretty Woman'", for example, is linked to five different URLs.<sup>40</sup> One of them is a Danish tabloid's Webpage, where the video has been seen almost 200 times. Audiovisual media, thus, tend to circulate more and more in similar ways as photography has done on the Web for quiet some time. The video "Princess Madeleine at Charlotte Kreuger's wedding" can be found on YouTube, as well as on the Web-TV application at



svenskdamtidning.se. In fact, together with *Svenska Damtidning* the latter has even developed a “Swedish Royal Channel” on YouTube.<sup>41</sup>

The screenshot shows the YouTube channel page for 'The Swedish Royal Channel'. At the top, there is a banner image featuring two women in royal attire and a large building, with the text 'THE SWEDISH ROYAL CHANNEL' overlaid. The YouTube navigation bar is visible at the top, including 'Sign Up', 'QuickList', 'Help', 'Sign In', and a search box. Below the banner, there are links for 'Videos', 'Groups', and 'Subscriptions'. The channel's profile information is on the left, showing a profile picture of a woman, the name 'svenskdam', and details such as 'Style: Broadcaster', 'Joined: February 20, 2008', 'Last Sign In: 3 days ago', 'Videos Watched: 604', 'Subscribers: 37', and 'Channel Views: 2,347'. It also mentions the channel was developed by Svensk Damtidning and provides contact information. On the right, there is a video player showing a news report with the text 'Bettina Bernadotte berättar öppenhjärtigt för Svensk Damtidnings reporter, Chris Cederlöf, om sin far, Lennart Bernadottes, drivkraft över Mainau och livet ...'. Below the video player, there is a description box for the video, 'Exklusiv intervju med Bettina Bernadotte', and a footer with the channel name and a link to the website.

“The Swedish Royal Channel” on YouTube in the summer of 2008.

The channel has had almost 2,500 views, yet only 37 people are active subscribers. In comparison, the “Royal Channel” of the British monarchy on YouTube has 21,830 subscribers with almost 1.6 million channel views.<sup>42</sup> Still, as with the case of Play Rapport, the main purpose of establishing such channels is to use a blended distribution strategy that facilitates and simplifies the circulation of moving image content on the Web.

## Conclusion

The “Swedish Royal Channel” on YouTube is one example of how new media are used in relation to the court. Media material produced for one specific site is circulated and re-used on other domains too. Basically, SVT’s “Kungahuset” deploys the same strategy, albeit with their own archival material. The public impact, however, is almost negligible – not least if one compares with

international examples. The most viewed clip on the British “Royal Channel”, for example, has been seen almost one million times by YouTube users.<sup>43</sup>

Even if new media content has led to some controversies regarding the Swedish court, notably the faked royal profiles on Facebook, one of the conclusions of the present article is that the traditional media still cause most concern for the court. Media debates about the Swedish royal family during the past years have predominantly concerned features in mainstream media, such as public service TV and radio programmes. The main reason is, on the one hand, the continued mass effect of traditional media forms. The new media do not replace the old media; instead media forms exist in parallel as long as the commercial potential exists for the old media. Thus, even if Web-based television, for example, is increasingly popular, its viewing rates can scarcely be compared to traditional TV broadcast figures. On the other hand, the royal court’s management of public relations still emphasizes public service, because there remains a possibility to control output. Anti-royalist blogs, however, are impossible to restrict or regulate.

As a consequence, the mediated symbiosis between the royal court and mainstream media is now being confronted by various new forms of user-generated content. Traditional broadcast media, however, belong to the twentieth century, and in due time they will be replaced by the Web’s “masses of media”. Blogs, Flickr, YouTube and Facebook are forerunners – with numerous amateur features on the royal family that are beyond the control of the court. However, because these features do not receive a great deal of public attention, the court does not really care about them – at least not at the moment. Because niche media (still) belong to the margin, this is also the reason why the royal family – apart from its homepage – has not been interested in participating more extensively on the social Web.



Just before finishing this text, the Royal Court announced on 24 February 2009 that Crown Princess Victoria and Daniel Westling were engaged. The marriage is set for the summer of 2010 and news of the engagement triggered numerous reports and commentary in traditional and new media. Interestingly, the announcement from the Court was made through a five-minute video, posted both on YouTube and on the website of the Court. Three days later, as these final lines are written, the video on YouTube has been seen by more than 200,000 people. Comments have been disabled for the video, since almost a thousand users have posted their opinions on the event. Thus, it seems as if the Swedish Court has finally realised how usage of new social media can be a way to reach and interact with a substantial audience, while at the same time remaining in charge of both the message and the medium.

## Notes

1. The site [kungahuset.se/royalcourt.se](http://kungahuset.se/royalcourt.se) has been stored by the Internet Archive's application "Wayback Machine". See <http://web.archive.org/web/19961114055950/www.royalcourt.se/eng/index.html> (15 August 2008).
2. Tom O'Reilly, "Web 2.0 Compact Definition: Trying Again" – <http://radar.oreilly.com/2006/12/web-20-compact-definition-tryi.html> (15 August 2008).
3. See, Bengt Wahlström, *Guide till det virtuella sambället* (Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 2007).
4. "Året 2003 Kungl. Hovstaterna verksamhetsberättelse", p. 7. All the court's annual reports from 2002 onwards are available for download at <http://www.royalcourt.se/>.
5. Telephone conversation with Ann-Christine Jernberg at the Royal Information and Press Department 11 August 2008.
6. Mattias Carlsson, "Falsk kung utlagd på Facebook", *Aftonbladet* 26 August 2007.
7. Adam Erlandsson, "Myspace – en nöjd tvåå" *Svenska Dagbladet* 26 August 2008.
8. Telephone conversation with Ann-Christine Jernberg 11 August 2008.
9. For a lengthy discussion on Wikipedia, see Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), pp. 109-143.
10. See for instance, Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).
11. Olle Wästberg is cited from the article, "Sweden inaugurates virtual embassy" – [http://www.si.se/templates/CommonPage\\_\\_\\_\\_3365.aspx](http://www.si.se/templates/CommonPage____3365.aspx) (15 August 2008).
12. Carlsson.
13. Snow Kisses Sky is cited from the comments list at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/bmgallery/71712913/> (15 August 2008).
14. See, <http://www.flickr.com/guidelines.gne> (15 August 2008).
15. For a discussion, see Kerstin Nilsson, "Madeleine – hyllad för sin 'hylla'", *Aftonbladet* 12 December 2002.
16. Daniel Nyhlén, "Jag skall slå ner Palmlöf", *Aftonbladet* 26 October 2003.
17. See, for example, the interview with the "Pippirull" producer Olle Plamlöf in Elin Ekselius, "Ballaste killen i klassen", *Svenska Dagbladet* 5 December 2004.
18. "Året 2002 Kungl. Hovstaterna verksamhetsberättelse", p. 17.
19. According to the recent SOM study 2008, the public's confidence in the court is, still, high. The study's so-called "confidence balance" can vary between +100 and -100. Hence, the court's +25 situate the royal family on the same level of confidence among the public as, for example, the banking system or the United Nations. For a discussion, see Sören Holmberg & Lennart Weibull (eds), *Skilda världar: Trettiåtta kapitel om politik, medier och sambälle* (Göteborg: SOM-institutet, 2008), pp. 41-45.
20. Inger Milldén is cited from Anna-Klara Bratt's & Mats Deland's article, "Pressens olidliga hovsamhet", in Eva-Lotta Hultén (ed), *För Sverige i tiden* (Stockholm: Atlas, 2003), p. 47. The article is also available on the Web – <http://ceifo.soc.se/files/pressens.pdf> (15 August 2008).
21. Dabrowski is cited from Anders Sandqvist's article, "Hämnades på kungen", *Expressen* 18 January 2008.
22. The journalist Annette Kullenberg expressed these opinions in the TV programme, "Debatt: Fjäsket för kungahuset", screened on 17 January 2008 in Swedish Television. For a discussion, see also Lena Andersson, "Inställsamt om kungahuset", *Svenska Dagbladet* 5 January 2008.
23. Leif Holmkvist, "Hovet i konflikt med SVT", *Resumé* 15 May 2008. The programme's Swedish name is "Ers kungliga höghet Westling".
24. For a discussion on the Swedish upper class, see Susanna Popova, *Överklass: En bok om klass och identitet* (Stockholm: Lind & Co., 2007).
25. See <http://www.kungahuset.se/html> (15 August 2008).
26. Cinema programme for the Edison-Biografen cited from, Erik Lindorm (ed), *Gustaf V och hans tid* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1939), p. 11.
27. See, *Röster i Radio/TV* 1976 (26).

28. See, Ulrika Lundberg, "Han är mest allmänbildad i Sverige: Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg berättar om sina år med kungafamiljen", *Aftonbladet* 28 April 2006.
29. Joseph Nye, *Soft Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).
30. Franziska Windt et al. (eds), *Die Kaiser und die Macht der Medien* (Berlin: Jaron Verlag, 2005).
31. For a discussion on the topic, see Mats Jönsson & Pelle Snickars (eds), *Medier & politik: Om arbetarrörelsens mediestrategier under 1900-talet* (Stockholm: SLBA, 2007) pp. 13-47.
32. Telephone conversation with Ann-Christine Jernberg 11 August 2008.
33. See for example, Niclas Rislund, "Haveriet på hovet", *Dagens Media* 2008 (10), and Niclas Rislund, "Kaos på hovets presstjänst: Sex har slutat under våren", *Dagens Media* 24 June 2008 (Web version).
34. Andreas Gustavsson, "SVT startar sajt om kungahuset", *ETC* 9 June 2008.
35. Bertil Mollberger, "Folkets otåliga väntan", *Dagens Nyheter* 2 June 2008.
36. Swedish titles are *Kring en örlogsstad* and *Kungen i närbild*.
37. Eva Landahl is cited from Erik Esbjörnsson's article, "SVT startar kungasajt", *Resumé* 5 June 2008.
38. See the entry "blog" at Wikipedia – <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog> (15 August 2008).
39. Martin Jönsson, "Public service flyttar till bloggofären" 5 May 2008 – <http://blogg.svd.se/reklamochmedier?id=7045> (15 August 2008).
40. As of 15 August 2008, the video was available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iNxi1U-JGE&feature=related>.
41. See, <http://www.youtube.com/user/svenskdam> (15 August 2008).
42. Statistics taken from <http://www.youtube.com/theroyalchannel> (15 August 2008).
43. The video is entitled, "The Christmas Broadcast, 1957", and can be found at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBRP-o6Q85s> (15 August 2008).