

## THE DISCURSIVE STRATEGY OF A SUBVERSIVE GENRE

### THE INTRODUCTION OF THE INTERVIEW IN US AND EUROPEAN JOURNALISM

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During the twentieth century, interviewing became the most important practice in journalism. Today it is the 'key to most stories you will write', as a well-known textbook for future reporters puts it.<sup>1</sup> Speech is reported in the majority of newspaper articles, either directly (between quotation marks) or indirectly, as a paraphrase. Reporters depend on people who want to talk to them in person or by phone, and who can supply them with new facts. As an outsider, the journalist needs well-informed insiders who can reveal the background of an event or a development. Managing to speak exclusively to an important source increases an article's importance and attractiveness.

Besides being a discursive practice, the interview is also a much used genre. This textual form represents a conversation – although some people might consider it an interrogation – between a journalist and an interviewee. The explicit or implicit presence of questions and answers in the text allows the reader to recognize the structure of such an engagement. The interview as a journalistic form presupposes an exchange of ideas and opinions. Both the interviewer and the interviewee have to commit themselves to a certain extent. An interview is never informal – it is comparable to a chess game. The two persons involved do not know each other's intentions. After each question or answer they have to evaluate the other person's reaction and challenge its validity and sincerity.<sup>2</sup>

An interview challenges the boundary between the public and the private spheres. In this struggle for power the journalist wants to reveal as many new facts as possible, facts that were private before. The interviewee might want to share information or views with a counterpart and the public because it is profitable to do so for one reason or another. However, certain subjects are to be left untouched. As a result of this game of hide-and-seek, it is hard if not impossible to stick to an exchange of facts. Both participants have to show what they are made of. They can score with intelligent ques-

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<sup>1</sup> Brooks, *Telling the Story*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Schudson, 'Question Authority', pp. 74–76.

tions, clever arguments or interesting information about a subject or a person (including themselves). By doing so they both have a public in mind.

One has to distinguish between the news interview and the personality interview. The first is chiefly a practice reporters use to retrieve information from sources. The conversations that news stories are based on are in most cases not recognizable in the text. Questions and answers might be missing and information might not even be attributed to sources. In the case of a personality interview the name of the interviewee is of course of crucial importance. Readers are interested in the views and statements of a politician, a celebrity or some significant person. It is especially in these personality interviews that the boundary between the public sphere and the private sphere is blurred. It is for this reason that this contribution will focus on this kind of interview.

The interview became a common practice in American journalism in the 1870s and 1880s. Soon its use reached epidemic proportions, with some newspapers even hiring special interviewers. Readers liked the new genre. Well-chosen quotations brightened news stories, and the attribution of speech increased their credibility. Attractiveness and authority were important marketing tools for newspapers that wanted to reach the masses. Nevertheless it took almost half a century before the genre migrated to Europe. In Great Britain, journalists began to use it more frequently in the 1880s, in France, Germany and Austria in the 1890s, and in the Netherlands around 1900.<sup>3</sup> After the First World War the interview came to be widely used in Europe.

The late introduction of the interview in Europe, on the supply side, had to do with differences in the economic and professional development of journalism. On the demand side, the cultural context of journalism in the United States differed from that in Europe in general and the Netherlands in particular. Though there were some early protests against interviewing, the new genre was accepted by public figures and the public much faster in the United States. In Europe the journalistic form of the interview went against the codes of class society, and especially the bourgeois cultural conventions that were dominant in the old world. The interview was considered a subversive genre which could undermine the social structure of society. In this article I will argue that the emergence of the interview was the result of new journalistic strategies which aimed to enlarge the public sphere. By intrud-

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<sup>3</sup> *The Penguin Book of Interviews*, p. 7; Albert, 'La presse Française de 1871 a 1940', p. 279; Grzella and Pfingsten, *Genese einer journalistischen Darstellungsform*; Pöttker, 'Comments on the German tradition of News Journalism', p. 141; Abeling, *Interviews uit Nederland*, pp. 9–10.

ing into the private lives of public figures, journalism gained professional autonomy and authority, as well as commercial success.

*The interview and the journalistic field*

There are economic and journalistic reasons for the emergence of the interview. The mass press needed entertaining, readable and 'real' human interest stories to attract readers, while at the same time journalism freed itself from political ties. In the 1830s the American press grew into a press for the masses. The spread of literacy and technological innovations in newsprint production, printing and distribution created profitable conditions, while the growth of mass democracy, urbanization and the rise of a consumer society increased the demand for news. Editors leapt to supply the needs of the 'democratic market society' that had emerged.<sup>4</sup> Circulation figures rose and the number of newspapers grew rapidly as publishing became a profitable business. The partisan press of the early years of American journalism before the Civil War was decisively replaced by one which was market oriented. In metropolitan areas, especially in New York, fierce competition began between newspapers. Editors such as Benjamin H. Day and James Gordon Bennett tried to win over as many readers as possible. 'News not views' was their slogan, and in order to sell as many papers as possible each day they needed attractive stories.

The interview was 'invented' in the mid-nineteenth century. As with many new practices and genres its origins cannot be traced back to one person or one 'magic moment' in history, though many press historians point to a Bennett crime story in 1836.<sup>5</sup> However, it indisputably has its origins in the innovative popular press. The genre became more common during the Civil War of 1861–1865 when these 'conversations' with politicians and military leaders produced sensations. After the war, the newborn practice was continued and commonly adopted in the 1870s.<sup>6</sup> The last quarter of the nineteenth century was an era of unlimited expansion for the newspaper market. Both of the journalistic paradigms that were emerging around the end of the century – the 'journalism of action' employed by the yellow press, and the detached and impartial style of the 'quality papers' – embraced the interview as a genre.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Schudson, *Discovering the News*.

<sup>5</sup> Dickens-Garcia, *Journalism Standards in Nineteenth-Century America*, p. 261; Stevens, *Sensationalism and the New York Press*, pp. 48–49.

<sup>6</sup> Hudson, *Journalism in the United States from 1690 to 1872*, pp. 563–564; Schudson, 'The objectivity norm in American journalism', p. 156.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Campbell, *The Year that Defined American Journalism*.

It was first and foremost used to please the readers. Dramatic interviews were a selling point. They were helpful in fulfilling the public need for 'the real thing' – the 'state of mind of the nineteenth century', as an 1887 commentator wrote.<sup>8</sup> American journalism became fact centred. The conviction that a good reporter was an investigator was firmly grounded in professional ideology.<sup>9</sup> Journalists tried to show 'life as it was' and the quest for news facts and active reporting were a prerequisite for doing so. News consumers enjoyed the interview because it revealed new facts, but they also liked 'the illusion it conveys of intimacy with celebrities and those who are the witnesses of momentous events'.<sup>10</sup> Human interest stories attracted readers, who were given an insight into the private lives and thoughts of public figures. The interview soon became the most important technique of the 'new' reporter. 'The idea took like wild-fire', a journalist wrote in 1879.<sup>11</sup>

The number of journalists grew sharply with the emergence of a mass press. Journalism became a distinct occupation with its own standardized professional practices, routines and conventions which facilitated quick and reliable production. One can argue that it was not just printing and the distribution of papers which became industrialized, as reporting also became organized along industrial lines. Writing had increasingly less to do with personal genius or literary talents, becoming 'a skill anyone could learn'.<sup>12</sup> Earlier generations of journalists, who were raised in the partisan news model, despised these new industrialized habits. In the 1850s influential reporters considered that interviewing involved 'poor journalistic conduct'. Washington correspondent Ben Perley Poore complained because the genre reduced the correspondent 'from interpreter to mere scribe'.<sup>13</sup>

However, interviewing was one of the practices which was helpful in the distinguishing of journalism as a separate field, independent of politics. Donald Matheson argues that in the early decades of interviewing, 'politicians and journalists alike had difficulty turning the personal statement made to a journalist into a text official enough to appear in a newspaper'.<sup>14</sup> Journalism needed new conventions and routines to interpret conversations with its subjects. Eventually it became more self-conscious and moved away from reproducing official statements in official language, to vivid and personal representations of reality. Interviewing was found to be an effec-

<sup>8</sup> Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, p. 20.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, 'Anglo-American Journalism', pp. 263–270.

<sup>10</sup> Silvester, *The Penguin Book of Interviews*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Schudson, 'Question Authority', p. 74.

<sup>12</sup> Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, p. 126.

<sup>13</sup> Ritchie, *Press Gallery*, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> Matheson, 'The birth of news discourse', p. 563.

tive tool in acquiring a more autonomous position with respect to politicians and other public figures. As a joint enterprise, and also as a power struggle, this practice allowed a sense of equality to develop between interviewer and interviewee. One-way communication – reporting a speech without the possibility of interruption – was replaced by a dialogue which provided the opportunity for journalists to intervene, change the subject or even take the lead in the conversation. The interview gave journalists more control over public discourse.<sup>15</sup>

The European press had a belated beginning as a commercial force. This had much to do with its political orientation. Hallin and Mancini distinguish three media systems. The North Atlantic or liberal model includes Great Britain and Ireland and is characterized by the early development of a mass-circulation press, the early professionalization of journalism, and its neutral and commercial character. It is market-oriented and benefited from the state removing legal impediments comparatively early in the nineteenth century. The North European or democratic corporatist model differs because it traditionally had a strong party press, which was opinion-based and non-commercial. In addition, there was severe state intervention, with governments trying to keep newspapers away from the masses by levying taxes, prohibiting advertisements and employing strict censorship. The characteristics of this model were adopted in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium and the Scandinavian countries. The third, Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model had low newspaper circulation, strong political roots and weaker professional standards. There was also strong state intervention, which restricted the rise of a commercial press. Greece, Portugal, Italy, Spain and France are included in those countries that adopted this model, though France is a borderline case as it also had some characteristics of the democratic corporatist model.<sup>16</sup>

These models offer a broad, idealized and slightly teleological, though useful classification which can illuminate the differences in the speed of commercialization and the rise to a mass-circulation press in different countries. Close connections between newspapers and political parties or social movements, and severe press control by the government curbed this development. It can also shed light on the geographical diffusion of the Anglo-American news style and its practices, such as interviewing, which were closely connected to professionalization and the rise of the commercial press.<sup>17</sup> In both the North European and the Mediterranean models journal-

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<sup>15</sup> Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism*, p. 128.

<sup>16</sup> Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Høyer and Pottker, *Diffusion of the News Paradigm*; Broersma, *Form and Style in Journalism*.

ism used a reflective style. Newspapers were centred around opinions, analysis and, especially in France, literature. Reporting news facts – and interviewing was part of that – was held in low esteem. Professional journalists considered themselves literary artists or intellectuals rather than craftsmen. European newspaper writing wanted primarily to inform and educate. Articles were preferably written as essays, in contrast to the concise American news reports which used a summary lead which contained the most important news facts (the inverted pyramid).

The commercialization of the European press and the diffusion of American journalistic ‘innovations’, such as the interview, followed the stages of development described in Hallin and Mancini’s model. The process started in Great Britain, was taken up by the North European countries and finally reached the countries of the Mediterranean group. In most cases one newspaper, or a small group, took the lead in this process of so called ‘Americanization’. In the Netherlands, the popular daily *De Telegraaf* was a frontrunner, as were *Dagens Nyheter* in Sweden and *Le Matin* in France. Bourgeois papers and the party press followed reluctantly.<sup>18</sup> However, journalists and the public continued to demonstrate severe cultural resistance to the Anglo-American style of journalism. It was an ambiguous situation, a French commentator observed: ‘Le goût de l’information rapide, sèche, nette, est anglo-américain. Il plaît au goût français mais ne le contente pas complètement ...’.<sup>19</sup>

Journalists and the elite in most European countries distrusted Americanization which within this discourse was seen to be a terrifying consequence of modernization. It was linked to commercialization and sensationalism, and it was considered that both of these should be rejected.<sup>20</sup> Because American journalism was fact centred, it was considered stylistically poor and unattractive. Emile Zola, for example, wrote in 1894 that it was regrettable that ‘the uncontrolled flow of information pushed to the extreme ... has transformed journalism, killed the great articles of discussion, killed literary critique, and increasingly gives more importance to news dispatches, trivial news, and to articles of reporters and interviewers’.<sup>21</sup> American journalism was feared because it emphasized the spectacular and sensational and appealed to emotions. Interviewing was viewed as a ‘monstrous departure

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<sup>18</sup> Broersma, ‘Botsende Stijlen’, pp. 40–68; Ekecrantz, ‘News paradigms, political power and cultural context in 20th century Sweden’, pp. 98–99; Wolf, ‘An Anglo-American newspaper in Holland’.

<sup>19</sup> Albert, ‘La presse Française’, p. 278.

<sup>20</sup> Broersma, ‘Botsende Stijlen’; Requate, ‘Protesting against “America” as the Icon of Modernity’, p. 205.

<sup>21</sup> Chalaby, ‘Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention’, p. 309.

from the dignity and propriety of journalism'.<sup>22</sup> Opinion leaders feared the appeal of the popular media to the masses. They believed it would lead to social upheaval, and were afraid that the standards of journalism would drop if the American focus on news was adopted.

However, these journalistic innovations also seemed to offer a method of reaching the masses. In the course of the twentieth century, one by one the European countries adopted the new practices, routines and conventions. They were adapted, modified and transformed within the confines of the bourgeois and political press, a process which took decades. Thus, the journalism we are familiar with today is an 'Anglo-American invention', as Jean Chalaby puts it.<sup>23</sup> In most countries the transfer of the Anglo-American news style and its adaptation to the respective national contexts was completed after the Second World War.<sup>24</sup> The process which at that time was despised as Americanization is ironically now characterized as modernization by many scholars.

*The interview and the conventions of bourgeois society*

In Europe the practice of interviewing was initially regarded with horror as was the genre generally. Dutchmen who visited the United States in the nineteenth century were stunned by the brutality of interviewers. 'They stop everyone, they hesitate at nothing, and they search the hotel registers for "prominent arrivals" to cross-examine them. Audacity is their motto and they do not pass over any source of factual knowledge.' C. J. Wijnaendts Francken was shocked, continuing: 'Nothing is sacred to them and they mention every detail of someone's private life; they have no mercy.'<sup>25</sup> A Dutch textbook on journalism stated disapprovingly that the interview was born out of 'a strange feature in the American national character that is the general curiosity about details of private life and the opinions of public persons'. Why should one want to know this? The writer of this book stressed explicitly that journalists should act with 'respectable politeness' with regard to private matters.<sup>26</sup> Impertinent questions were not appreciated and for that reason journalists in most cases did not ask them.

These invasive habits were not accepted in bourgeois society. In his influential book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Jürgen Habermas drew

<sup>22</sup> Silvester, *The Penguin Book of Interviews*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism*.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Wilke, 'Belated Modernization'; 'Vormgeving tussen woord en beeld.' pp. 5–32; Albert, 'La presse Française', p. 278.

<sup>25</sup> Wijnaendts Francken, *Door Amerika*, p. 233.

<sup>26</sup> Van der Meulen, *De Courant*, p. 31, p. 82.

attention to the dichotomy between the public and the private spheres.<sup>27</sup> Other scholars have argued that the civic duty of active participation in public life was accompanied by a private life behind closed doors. Personal matters, business affairs included, were not discussed in public. This was one of the most important principles of bourgeois society,<sup>28</sup> and until the First World War European journalists in general respected the strict dividing line between the public and the private spheres. The French newspaper *Le Figaro*, for example, wrote in 1886: ‘the interview is the worst feature of the new [journalism] – it is degrading to the interviewer, disgusting to the interviewee, and tiresome to the public’.<sup>29</sup> As representatives of a new profession, journalists desired to act responsibly because they were eager to earn respect from the bourgeois elite.

In the United States the interview was still a subject of frequent debate in the 1860s and 1870s. Influential critics called it an ‘unwarranted invasion of privacy’ or an ‘offence, a thing of ill savor in all decent nostrils’. This kind of ‘keyhole journalism’ was condemned as indecent and trivial. George T. Rider for example detested the interview’s ‘indelicate and offensive parading of personalities, of appearance, presence, and conversation’. It even intruded on the ‘sanctities of domestic life and marriage’. Interviewing, *The Nation* concluded in 1873, ‘makes fools of great men’.<sup>30</sup>

However, these complaints were quickly overcome, not just because of the fact that readers loved to read interviews and newspaper companies wanted to reach the masses. The political situation in the United States also encouraged the invention of the interview, with the coverage of politics being the core business for journalists. Furthermore, Frederic Hudson links the interview to universal suffrage and praised the possibilities of direct and fast communication with the people, suggesting: ‘Thus the executive powers of the world are placed in more intimate relations with the governed classes, and the result cannot but be beneficial for the general peace of mankind’.<sup>31</sup> Leading politicians had to be accountable to the public, and they also came to recognize the advantage of speaking directly to the people through widely read newspapers.<sup>32</sup> Contrary to their European colleagues, American politicians could not hide from the public in their own sociopolitical community with sympathetic journalists as their shield bearers. At that time, in

<sup>27</sup> Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.

<sup>28</sup> Aerts and Te Velde, *De stijl van de burger*; Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, pp. 28–29.

<sup>29</sup> Silvester, *The Penguin Book of Interviews*, p. vii.

<sup>30</sup> Mott, *American Journalism*, pp. 386, 444; Dickens-Garcia, *Journalism Standards in Nineteenth-Century America*, p. 201.

<sup>31</sup> Hudson, *Journalism in the United States*, p. 564.

<sup>32</sup> Ritchie, *Press Gallery*, p. 82.



France for example (and the same goes for the Netherlands), politicians preferred to publish articles of their own in the papers, or insisted on verbatim reporting of their speeches.<sup>33</sup>

Another explanation for American journalists and public figures being quick to embrace interviewing can be found in the country's sociocultural conditions. The United States, as opposed to the countries of Europe, was not a strictly class-based society. The restrictive bourgeois conventions which prevented rapid, unimpeded social mobility were exchanged for the opportunities of the American Dream. As a result, the exposure of individual qualities was stressed far more than in Europe. Regardless of their social background, each citizen could and should be motivated to exploit their good qualities.<sup>34</sup> Americans who wanted to climb the social ladder had an interest in gaining publicity. Self-creation was effective and success could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In the end, as Daniel Boorstin puts it: 'The celebrity is a person who is known for his well-knownness'.<sup>35</sup>

The interview more or less presupposed self-exposure. The genre existed merely by the grace of detailed personal information. 'Please impress on the men who write our interviews with prominent men the importance of giving a striking, vivid pen sketch of the subject', the famous American publisher Joseph Pulitzer wrote to his editor-in-chief, continuing: 'Also a vivid picture of the domestic environment, his wife, his children, his animal pets, etc. Those are the things that will bring him more clearly home to the average reader than would his most imposing thoughts, purposes or statements.'<sup>36</sup> An American guidebook for reporters described the practice in 1927 quite adequately as 'the art of extracting personal statements for publication'.<sup>37</sup>

In Europe it was almost completely unacceptable for a respectable member of bourgeois society to seek publicity. In a class-based society a person's social capital was related to the group to which he or she belonged. They were not supposed to show off their personal qualities and ambitions, and according to the bourgeois cultural norms these were to be used for the common good rather than to further one's own interests. The interview violated these conventions, and it was considered that giving an interview was only acceptable when speaking as a representative of a collective body, rather than for oneself. That is why, for example, the Dutch writer and psychiatrist Frederik van Eeden asked his interviewer to clarify in the text that

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<sup>33</sup> Chalaby, 'Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention', p. 312.

<sup>34</sup> Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>35</sup> Daniel Boorstin, *The Image. A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Silvester, *The Penguin Book of Interviews*, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

the subjects he spoke about were chosen by the journalist and not by himself. Suffragette Wilhelmina Drücker was also extremely rigid in her demands. To avoid the impression that she was seeking publicity she insisted that she would only cooperate if the interview was published after her death. The self-exposure presupposed by an interview was considered indecent by Europeans, the general public as well as journalists.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, there was a 'disparity in status' between a journalist and a politician or any other authority, which made questioning unacceptable for a long time. Only when a public figure needed publicity for political reasons would an interview be granted. An American reporter who visited Europe in 1909 to interview heads of state described his mission as 'ridiculous and impossible'. However, two decades later an interview was no longer a 'shocking innovation to the rulers of Europe'.<sup>39</sup> The First World War had made British and French politicians more familiar with the genre. They submitted to the requests of American reporters in order to gain the military support of the United States. However, in the 1930s a British guidebook still complained that American politicians and celebrities were 'more willing to the interviewer than those over here, who generally are reserved and not very partial to publicity'.<sup>40</sup> Obviously there was a difference between being directly quoted in an overseas newspaper rather than in one at home, as the famous writer Arthur Conan Doyle expressed – in an interview, of course.

'What has the public got to do with an author's personality', he asked. 'I vowed more than two years ago that I should never see an interviewer again.'

'But you are going to America –'

'Ah, in America it is a different thing. One should adapt one's self to the ways of a country.'<sup>41</sup>

American reporters did not take no for an answer. They were constantly trying to interview famous people who did not want to talk to them. On some occasions they even hid in the cleaning trolleys of hotels to achieve their goal. European journalists considered this far too aggressive.

In Europe this 'distinctively American invention' went through a process of acclimatization. At first newspapers copied interviews from foreign

<sup>38</sup> D'Oliviera Jr., *De mannen van '80 aan het woord*, p. 69; *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 16.12.1925.

<sup>39</sup> Schudson, 'The objectivity norm', p. 157.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, pp. 161–162; Schudson, 'Question Authority', p. 82.

<sup>41</sup> Silvester, *The Penguin Book of Interviews*, p. 16.

papers to accustom readers to this new practice without taking full responsibility themselves. Between 1866 and 1890, the Austrian papers the *Morgen-Post* and the *Neues Wiener Zeitung*, for example, took two-thirds of their interviews from foreign sources. The *National-Zeitung* in Berlin was even more reluctant: ninety-three percent of the interviews between 1860 and 1890 were first published in other newspapers.<sup>42</sup> When journalists themselves started to interview people, certain ‘odd limitations’ arose, as noted by the famous British journalist W.T. Stead (who popularized the genre in the 1880s): ‘*The Times*, for instance, will never publish an interview with any person if it takes place on British soil.’<sup>43</sup> Other papers restricted interviews to those with foreign celebrities – which was less provocative than bothering fellow citizens – and to public figures who sought publicity.<sup>44</sup> After some years, the journalists also started to ask for interviews, but in general they did not use the same persistent ‘stalking’ techniques as their American colleagues.

*The discursive strategy of a journalistic form*

In the 1880s the first interviews appeared in Dutch newspapers, mostly taken from foreign newspapers, as a safe way of accustoming readers to the genre. However, Dutch journalists also reluctantly started to publish interviews themselves and the first is to be found in a popular paper, the *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, from 1881. It is not a personality interview though, but rather a coverage of a train accident which quotes the crashed train’s fireman. After this initial ‘interview’ it took twelve years before the paper published another. In the meantime it followed the Dutch habit of paraphrasing anonymous respondents. The first interview in the leading daily, the *Algemeen Handelsblad*, in 1885 has more of the characteristics of an interview. It contains questions and answers and some human interest elements. The representative of the Boer republic was questioned about the war with Great Britain. In the final sentences he was asked about his twelve-year-old son, who had accompanied General Smit to the Transvaal. However, this is also primarily a news interview which makes a standard reporting technique – questioning eyewitnesses – explicit.<sup>45</sup>

The introduction of the interview by Dutch journalists was a delicate and therefore slow process. Newspapers which blurred the boundaries of the

<sup>42</sup> Grzella and Pflingsten, *Genese einer journalistischen Darstellungsform*, pp. 40, 42.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Høyer, ‘Old and New Journalism in the London Press’, p. 68.

<sup>44</sup> *The Penguin Book of Interviews*, p. 6; Schudson, ‘Question Authority’, p. 79.

<sup>45</sup> Scheffer, *In vorm gegoten*, p. 199; *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 16.03.1885; Wijffjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, p. 61.

public sphere were easily accused of being 'sensationalist', which was the most horrifying offence for a Dutch paper. Especially the *Telegraaf*, which in many respects introduced Anglo-American journalism into the Netherlands, came under fire from opinion leaders and other newspapers. This paper was considered offensive and irresponsible because it appealed to the emotions of the masses. The First World War, however, was the breaking point and a cataclysm in the transformation of Dutch journalism. The war stimulated the public's desire to read news facts instead of opinions and also encouraged the desire for readable stories. The use of quotes in reports and the interview answered these desires and such pieces became a selling point for newspapers.<sup>46</sup>

The personality interview was introduced in the 1900s and became more common after 1918, but it was still unusual, however, in the 1920s. *Het Vaderland* for example, in 1928, published interviews which the prominent journalist Doe Hans had conducted with leading politicians, featuring them in the most important section – the front page.<sup>47</sup> Interviewers developed a special position in news organizations, and it is remarkable that so many well-known interviewers were female when so few women worked in the newsrooms of the 1920s and 1930s. The common opinion was that journalism was no occupation for women because of the demanding nature of the profession. An interview could be scheduled, however, and moreover, the genre appealed to supposedly female characteristics. Women were considered more sensitive and less intimidating than male interviewers, making interviewees feel at ease and less reluctant to share private details with them and the public. W. van Itallie-van Embden, Amy Groskamp-Ten Have and Annelèn wrote widely read pieces which were also published in books.

In the early years of the interview, the interviewees were (as in Germany and Austria) either politicians, artists or scientists.<sup>48</sup> The first group had an interest in voicing their views in public, and especially after the introduction of universal suffrage and proportional representation in 1917–1919 it became of more interest to reach the masses through the media. Furthermore, as representatives of the Fourth Estate, journalists felt they were entitled to question politicians. Artists were a rather eccentric avant-garde in bourgeois society. They were considered to be outsiders who did not have to respect the conventions and values of bourgeois society in full. It seemed justifiable to interview this strange species, and thrilling as well. To avoid fierce criticism the first interviewees were mainly foreign

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<sup>46</sup> Broersma, 'Botsende stijlen'.

<sup>47</sup> *Het Vaderland*, 12.10.1928; id., 05.09.1930.

<sup>48</sup> Grzella and Pflingsten, *Genese einer journalistischen Darstellungsform*, pp. 48–54.

artists, such as the actress Sarah Bernhard and the writers Emile Zola and Jules Verne. They were interviewed so often by foreign colleagues that Dutch reporters felt they could not let them 'leave the country without asking for an interview'.<sup>49</sup> When public figures and the readers became used to the genre, journalists also began to interview Dutch celebrities.

Interviews in Dutch newspapers did not just present the results of a conversation, they also offered a narrative about the interview itself. They had more or less the same narrative structure until the 1940s. Firstly the journalist would describe the attempts made to obtain an appointment. All the difficulties, including the protests of the interviewee, were mentioned. By doing so the exclusivity of the story was stressed while emphasizing the status of the persistent journalist. The considerations behind questioning this particular public figure were also explained. The journalist usually implicitly presupposed the approval of the public but could also state or ask a rhetorical question, such as: 'I did not want to exclude him from my national gallery of our great men. He is one of them, isn't he?'<sup>50</sup> Finally the interviewer would reach the interviewee's house. After describing being welcomed at the door, a description of the interior followed. The actual interview was then transcribed, sometimes as a straight quote, but in most cases in a question and answer format. Some spaces for evaluation were usually included in the text, where the journalist, with or without the interviewee, would reflect on the interview thus far. At the end of the story there was usually a farewell on the doorstep. The interview was then evaluated for the last time – again either by both parties or the journalist alone. In many cases, at this point the importance of the interviewee (and implicitly the interview) was stressed once again.

The evaluation points in the text usually had an apologetic character towards the journalist and the interviewee alike. Journalists often felt obliged to defend themselves for intruding on the privacy of the interviewee. In the narrative they apologized to them, as well as the readers, who might be annoyed at this violation of bourgeois conventions.<sup>51</sup> They also tried to show they were decent journalists: 'One shall understand that he [the interviewer] talked to strangers and could not inquire after their most intimate thoughts and emotions directly. And one should know he was not always free to ask what came into his head.'<sup>52</sup> The interviewee apologized to the readers for his self-exposure – vanity was considered highly morally improper. Some kind of game was being played. At first the interviewee

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<sup>49</sup> Abeling, *Interviews uit Nederland*, p. 20.

<sup>50</sup> *Het Vaderland*, 05.02.1929. Interview with the politician W.H. Nolens.

<sup>51</sup> Broersma, *Beschaafde vooruitgang*, p. 278.

<sup>52</sup> D'Oliviera Jr., *De mannen van '80*, p. 6.

was reluctant: 'I just hate to talk about myself', Aletta sighed. 'The words stick in my throat.' However, in the end, of course, he or she cooperates.

Illustrative for these discursive patterns is the interview W. van Itallie-van Emden conducted with and wrote about the politician A.F. de Savornin Lohman.<sup>53</sup> To arouse expectations, she started with a quotation from a letter he wrote to her in response to her request for an interview. 'You should not expect this conversation to end in a portrait: the old De Savornin Lohman will not open up to you; he will keep his distance.' She then describes the modest house Lohman lives in and how his maid welcomes her with the news that her employer has been ill for a while – another challenge for the interviewer. After this, Lohman asks her why she wanted to interview him. With rhetorical modesty he claims to have never met any celebrities and that his life is of no interest to anyone. However, Van Itallie persists and asks him about his youth growing up in an orthodox Protestant family. After a few pages she celebrates her success: 'How sketched this aristocrat by birth and reasoning his character in every modest word and in the casualness of his view of life!' The interview moves on to Lohman's political life. He then speaks up: 'I don't have much more of interest to tell you. If this visit disappointed you ... I did warn you.' The interviewer now shows her capability by citing some intimate passages in which Lohman talks about his religious life. On the final page he shows her to the door. She thanks him 'very, very much' for his trust in her, thereby stressing once again the revealing character of the interview.

The interview offered journalists a tool to gain professional status. In the standard news items or reports they were 'invisible'. Articles were unsigned and the form of these genres presupposed the hiding of the process of news gathering and selection. The interviewer, on the other hand, was a 'visible' actor, by having his or her name mentioned at least sometimes, and by always being present in the text. This gave the interviewer the opportunity to show his or her merits with intelligent questions and witty remarks, or to demonstrate persistence in encouraging someone to talk, as well as conveying a critical sense. The interview was a means for self-representation. In some cases the interviewer seized the opportunity even quite explicitly. For example, at the end of his interview with the Minister of Defence, Doe Hans, in the usual on-the-doorstep passage, writes that the doorkeeper praised one of his earlier articles, and adds that: 'This moment did my heart a lot of good'.<sup>54</sup>

The interview encouraged journalists' self-confidence and autonomy, allowing the journalist to take control in two ways. During the interview he

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<sup>53</sup> Van Itallie-van Emden, *Sprekende portretten*, pp. 1–12.

<sup>54</sup> *Het Vaderland*, 05.09.1930.

or she determined which subjects were discussed by asking the questions, and afterwards could he or she select the statements to be cited in the story. The interviewer had the power to represent the interviewee, and both parties concerned knew this throughout their conversation. This contrasted sharply with prior genres which aimed to record speech verbatim. Critics accused interviewers of making news instead of gathering it. Quotations could be 'real' indeed, that is, the interviewer could elicit striking remarks from the interviewee. However, should these indiscretions be published? This was regarded as 'dishonourable journalism',<sup>55</sup> with resistance to the interview as a genre being related to a resistance to the changing power relations between journalism and the elites. This line of criticism slowly disappeared, though, with interviewing becoming a useful practice for an emerging profession which aspired to an autonomous position in society.

*A subversive strategy*

The discursive strategy of the interview as a journalistic form aimed to blur the boundaries between the public and the private spheres. The 'new' journalist was an active reporter who tried to obtain confidential information and wanted to reveal the 'real self' of public men. In the public sphere people used to wear 'masks' – acting according to the social and cultural conventions of bourgeois society. To really see through a person and understand their deepest thoughts, ambitions and objectives, one had to get to know them privately. Therefore, investigative reporters could not restrict themselves to recording what happened in the public sphere. There was a need to intrude into the subject's private life. W. van Itallie-van Embden, for example, stated that she was determined to reveal the character of her interviewees, because that was what determined the manner of their public actions.<sup>56</sup>

Although politicians and celebrities still distrusted interviews as 'subject to editing, misunderstanding, or distortion', they increasingly agreed to talk to journalists in private.<sup>57</sup> Public figures realized that it was of growing importance to be visible in the public sphere. Some cooperation with the press was necessary. In mass society and mass democracy, a friendly relationship with the newspapers could be beneficial. The Dutch prime minister Hendrik Colijn, for example, understood that as the leader of a minority party he had to organize support in the neutral and liberal press. He supplied

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<sup>55</sup> *De Journalist*, August 1912, p. 67.

<sup>56</sup> Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure*, pp. 29–30; Matthijsen, *De gemaskerde eeuw*; Van Itallie-van Embden, *Sprekende portretten*, p. iii.

<sup>57</sup> Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, p. 166.

journalists with information and was willing to answer questions on political events and his private life as well.<sup>58</sup> It was increasingly important to be known to the public. However, to receive the attention of the press one had to blur the boundaries of the private sphere.

Newspapers eagerly cooperated. Publishers and editors understood that the interview was a journalistic form which was attractive to the masses. It also offered the opportunity to become less dependent on politics. As a result of this interaction between the discursive strategies of the new journalism and the inevitability of public figures having to be visible in modern mass society, the public sphere enlarged. Eventually this was a serious threat to the ideological framework of bourgeois society. The identification of the individual with the sociopolitical community underlay power relations in class society. While this principle became problematical, if not untenable, it was much harder to discipline the masses. By stressing the significance of personal qualities, the interview made individuality instead of social background the foundation of social position. The increasing public demand for self-exposure, as expressed in the journalistic form of the interview, not only threatened the cultural foundations of bourgeois society but also undermined class-based society itself.

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<sup>58</sup> Langeveld, 'De verzuiling doorbroken', pp. 37–49.