Journalist Fellowship Paper

Pulling back the curtain: How live journalism is re-engaging news audiences

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Introduction: Inside the Black Box

It was a Thursday evening on 4 February 2016 and the atmosphere backstage at Finnish National Theatre was tense. Journalists – not actors – milled around nervously backstage. The first Black Box (*Musta laatikko*) performance in history was about to begin.

Muted sounds filtered in from the sold-out auditorium, as the audience found its seats. Some 300 people had bought a ticket to hear newspaper reporters tell a series of true-to-life stories. I was one of the producers and the opening night host. When the clock struck 7, I was pushed onstage.

"Welcome to the Black Box," I said to the gathered faces. In my hands was a carrot-coloured metal object known as a 'black box' – a flight recorder from a DC-9 that preserves technical data several times per second. If an aeroplane falls from the sky, the black box can help investigators decipher exactly what happened. The name is in fact a misnomer, as the sensitive measuring device is in truth encased in a bright-orange metal shell.

Our team from Finland's leading daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* had christened the live journalism concept "Black Box" in homage to both the theatre space we were using and journalism's basic mission: to decipher exactly what happened.

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Black Box got its start in the autumn of 2015. I was sitting at my workstation tapping out a story one day, when a colleague named Riikka Haikarainen stopped by for a chat. She had recently returned to the *Helsingin Sanomat* newsroom from California, where she had been studying for a year on a stipend. During her stay, she had travelled to Los Angeles to attend a Pop-Up Magazine event. This was a live show where reporters, photographers and documentary filmmakers took to the stage to tell previously unpublished true stories. They called their performance "live journalism".

“What if we tried the same thing?” Riikka suggested. We sat down with video producer Kimmo Norokorpi to contemplate the idea: what would our newspaper’s live performance be like? What would it contain? Where would it take place? How would we make it happen? Would Finnish residents be willing to pay money to watch a bunch of journalists from its most widely distributed daily tell stories on a stage?

Report author Jaakko Lyytinen (right) and “Musta laatikko” co-founder Riikka Haikarainen, who is holding a flight recorder from a DC-9, backstage at the first Black Box performance. (Photograph: Supplied)

We decided to give it a try, but not reveal our plans to the newspaper’s management. The media crisis had only barely begun to loosen its grip, and the bar for embarking on new projects was still high. We wanted to move quickly and lightly, in the spirit of experimentation, imagining ourselves a feisty internal start-up within a big company. We didn’t want to spend time fine-tuning something that might be brushed aside as an unrealistic pipedream. Our work became that of an undercover strike force: stealthily meeting to refine the concept, assemble a working group and brainstorm topics.

The underlying notion of the Black Box was to bring our newspaper to the theatre stage. In other words, the performance should resemble our publication, with sections devoted to domestic and international news, politics, the economy, culture, sports, lifestyle and science – just as it was laid out in the daily print paper or our website.

Once our concept was decided, we set out to find a venue. The director of the venerated Finnish National Theatre, Mika Myllyaho, was immediately enthused: "Great idea, let's do it!" he said. We booked the theatre's small stage for three evenings in the spring of 2016. The time had come to pitch our idea to the newspaper's management. Fortunately, editor-in-chief Päivi Anttikoski's eyes lit up as we explained our idea, and she told us to "Go for it!"

We had no instructions or manual to follow, so our journey was one of trial and error – sometimes even proceeding on blind faith. One month before our first performance, we put the tickets up for sale. We wrote a low-profile story for the paper and website with the headline "Helsingin Sanomat brings its journalism and reporters to the stage – series of live performances to begin in February". Ticket sales began at 9 am. The 300 tickets available were sold out in less than an hour.

Helsingin Sanomat's Black Box was so successful it had to move to the main hall of the Finnish National Theatre in Helsinki. (Photograph: Erik Rehnstrand)

That spring we produced three different shows on the small stage of the Finnish National Theatre. In the autumn of 2016, we added additional shows, but the public was thirsty for more, as each of the performances sold out instantly. By the spring of 2017, we had to transfer to the theatre's 700-seat main stage. Then our team hit the road, bringing Black Box to the Finnish cities of Turku and Tampere. In an effort to meet customer demand, we added even more performances. In the spring of 2018, our team was awarded a prize for Journalistic Invention of the Year – the most prestigious recognition in Finland.

We have staged 15 performances with different content over the span of the past four years, playing to more than 30,000 audience members. Close to 100 reporters and photographers from *Helsingin Sanomat* have participated in the presentations. Tens of thousands of subscribers to the paper watched livestreams of the events on the paper's website.

Our covert experiment has since become an important part of the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper. Black Box has created a new kind of community around the esteemed publication. Audience feedback indicates that even the most hard-to-reach group of 15 year olds was in thrall to this revolutionary new form of news presentation. What we were witnessing was the phenomenal power of live journalism.

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So what exactly is behind the appeal of live journalism? What kind of connection does it forge between journalists and the different audiences? How does one go about putting on such a show? This report seeks to answer these questions.

I received a grant from the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation to spend the academic year of 2019–2020 at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford. I wanted to use this opportunity to take a deep dive into live journalism, which was clearly a rising global trend.

My report is not an academic study. I am not a researcher; I am a journalist. I have relied on the traditional journalistic methods of observation and interview in compiling this account. I attempt to explain the appeal of live journalism through my own experience as a producer and viewer. I do not pretend to be an objective observer. I am instead a journalist that has made it my job to thoroughly examine this new form of journalism. I am eager to share my findings and what I've learned with anyone who is interested. I hope my report will serve as a travel guide or manual for journalists who wish to try this new and intriguing format.

Before we can continue, I need to clarify the terminology. Because live journalism is a new phenomenon, its meaning is not yet established. Some media companies have taken to calling events they host, in which journalists talk about their work and interview guests in front of an audience, live journalism. It has become a profitable business for some media houses, who charge corporate clients expensive admission to seminars and conferences and attract wealthy sponsors and partners.

I will not be examining this kind of live journalism in my report, but will instead focus on productions that feature reporters, photographers and documentary filmmakers telling true stories to a live audience in a theatre or club. In this light, the live journalism that I am concerned with could just as well be called "news on stage" or "stage journalism".

The initiator of this new wave of live journalism is considered to be US-based Pop-Up Magazine, the same group that served as the inspiration for Black Box. In Europe, live journalism is also being produced by *Live Magazine* in France and Belgium, *DOR Live* in Romania, *Zetland* in Denmark, and a group known as Diario Vivo in Madrid. In Germany, journalists compete to be the audience favourite in Reporter Slam clubs, and in Norway, live journalism performances commenced in late 2019. In London, multi-hour events known as Sunday Papers Live, which even incorporate the traditional British pastimes of a Sunday roast and a post-meal stroll, have also hit the scene.

It was my intention to visit as many of these live journalism performances as possible for my research. However, the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 cut these plans short.

This report will therefore concentrate on a Pop-Up Magazine performance in New York, a Diario Vivo show in Madrid, and the Report Slam finals in Berlin. In addition to this analysis, I also interviewed participants from many other live journalism projects.

To supplement my fieldwork, I performed several hands-on experiments in live journalism during my year at the Reuters Institute. The institute's fellowship director Meera Selva asked me shortly after my arrival if I could produce a live journalism show featuring journalist fellows for our final symposium in London. My excellent Reuters Institute colleagues agreed to assist me in this endeavour. Together, we co-produced a show titled "Rethinking Journalism" that was staged in London in December 2019. I will also discuss the learnings and lessons gleaned from this project in my report.

As a relatively recent phenomenon, live journalism has not yet been examined at length. This situation will soon be remedied, however, as a two-year multidisciplinary research project was launched in the spring of 2019 in Finland to investigate the appeal of live journalism from many different perspectives. "The Power of Live Journalism – From Insights to Applications" project is being funded by the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation that also sponsored my academic year in Oxford. In addition to extensive audience research, the project also examines how live journalism affects the work of journalists. Research results will be published in the spring of 2021. I am involved in this project as a member of the Black Box production team.

“The key ingredient is surprise”: the rise of Pop-Up Magazine as live journalism beacon

The towering letters “Hello NY” greet the audience at the BAM Howard Gilman Opera House. It is Wednesday evening on 29 May 2019 in the New York City borough of Brooklyn and a performance from Pop-Up Magazine’s spring tour is about to begin. Ticket holders search for their seats as soul music plays softly.

The 2,000-plus-seat auditorium starts to fill up. The audience seems to consist primarily of stylish New Yorkers between the ages of 25 and 50. Waiting on every seat is a handbill and a chocolate biscuit with the message “Don’t eat me yet” on the wrapper. The handbill promises “a night filled with wild rides, whoppers, pompoms, rom-coms, elephants, cookies, skyscrapers, and more!”

I am on a mission to find out the secret of live journalism’s appeal. It is only fitting that I begin my investigation with a performance from Pop-Up Magazine, the prime example of the format that many others have since emulated.

At 7:35 pm, the Magik*Magik Orchestra takes the stage. Tonight the band has four musicians: a guitarist, violinist, percussionist and pianist. As the show starts, an animated introduction video appears on the screen and the band plays the theme music. The hosts Anita Badejo and Aaron Edwards warm up the crowd. “How many of you are watching our show for the first time?” they ask. About two-thirds of the onlookers raise their hands. The masters of ceremony emphasise the once-in-a-lifetime nature of the evening. The performance isn't being recorded for public distribution. Everything happens in the here and now. “After tonight, the show will disappear. We won't put anything online. We made it just for you.”

Comedian, actress and podcast celebrity Michelle Buteau kicks off the show, describing her love life in merciless detail. She berates the audience from time to time, as if we were

in a stand-up club. A low-key animation plays behind her. The first few minutes are, in sum, a hilarious and professionally executed cannon shot.

Next to take the stage is the journalist Chris Colin, who tells the story of a destitute man who was locked in a Burger King loo. The poor fellow is forced to wait for the locksmith for an hour, during which time an employee of the fast food establishment promises him that he will be able to eat for free at the restaurant when he is released. After the restaurant owner reneges on this promise, the man sues. Colin transports the audience to the filthy loo in question, which he visited in his investigation of the incident. At its core, his tale tells the story of an unconventional solicitor who takes up cases others would see as too small, while also shedding light on the reality of America's poor.

The Birth of Pop-Up Magazine

Pop-Up Magazine got its start in the middle of major US media sector upheaval. One bit of bad news followed the other in 2009, as a string of bankruptcies, layoffs and severe cost-cutting hit the US media scene. The financial crisis pummeled the newspaper industry at the same time that rapid digitalisation disrupted the market. Subscribers and advertisers transferred their patronage online in droves. Print publications and TV stations were in trouble.

But sometimes the best ideas swim against the tide.

In the spring of 2009, San Francisco-based journalist Douglas McGray decided to hook up with some friends to try something new. He had made a name for himself writing long-form feature stories, and had also tested his narrative wings as a contributor to This American Life. McGray wondered why storytellers didn't collaborate more across mediums. Many documentary filmmakers, journalists, illustrators, radio producers and podcast professionals did not even know each other, despite working on similar topics and telling the same kinds of stories.

Pop-Up Magazine was born to bridge this gap by bringing a whole range of storytellers to the same stage. The founders selected a "live magazine" format, which would contain

different themes and sections, just like in a magazine. And yet Pop-Up would be something else entirely from online news stories and algorithm-driven content. Performances would be one-night-only. They would not be recorded or livestreamed. To top it off, the audience would not be informed of the evening's content before the show.

Pop-Up Magazine premiered to 300 people in the Mission District of San Francisco, at the Brava Theatre. What was meant to be a single show soon multiplied, as the public screamed for more. The Pop-Up team had to book a bigger venue. Pop-Up became a part of the public speaking renaissance in 2000s America, among prominent peers like TED talks, The Moth storytelling clubs, and smash hit podcasts like This American Life and Radiolab.

View of the stage before the start of a Pop-Up Magazine show in New York (Photograph: Jaakko Lyytinen)

The hobby-inspired passion project soon turned into a real job, as an entire media organisation grew up around the Pop-Up Magazine concept. In the autumn of 2014, Pop-Up began to produce The California Sunday Magazine, which was published in print six times a year until this June, when it shifted its focus online. At the same time, the

presentations expanded out from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and soon to other cities as well. The Pop-Up tour currently extends to more than a dozen North American locations. In addition to ticket sales, the company has also been earning revenue from the work of its Brand Studio, which produces innovative advertisements shown during the live performances, custom live events, events consulting, and short branded film series and branded photo essays. For example, Google has both sponsored and advertised in Pop-Up shows.

In 2018 an organization named Emerson Collective acquired Pop-Up Magazine Productions. Emerson's founder is the widow of Apple billionaire Steve Jobs, Laurene Powell Jobs, who has provided significant funding to several media ventures in recent years. The transaction price has not been made public. Emerson had previously made a $10 million investment in Pop-Up in 2016.

To what can Pop-Up attribute its success? My Finnish colleagues and I met with Anita Badego in a Brooklyn café in the morning before their performance. She works as Pop-Up Magazine's Executive Editor and, as such, leads the editorial team and is responsible for three annual production tours. She joined Pop-Up in 2016.

Badejo says the most important Pop-Up principles are still in place. The content of each performance is still not disclosed before the opening night, and as a rule, the night features stories that have not been previously published. Performances are not recorded for public distribution or livestreamed; the evening is a one-time-only experience. "We want to create magic moments", Badejo says. Ideally, a live performance is an immersive and multisensory experience in which the viewer becomes a part of the narrative.

In addition to an Editor-in-Chief and Executive Editor, the Pop-Up team includes producers, art and photo directors, music directors, tech professionals, and an events team. The company also has a sales team and Brand Studio, who work with sponsors on branded content and events. Some of the Pop-Up team members work on The California Sunday Magazine as well. Employees of the theatre and concert venues also assist with the performances.

Pop-Up has expanded its reach over the last few years with different kinds of creative collaboration. The company has arranged performances in cooperation with other organisations and media companies.

Performers at the events can either be freelancers or full-time employees of big media houses. “We have good relationships with other media companies. *Pop-Up* is unique, and given that it's unrecorded and contributors retain the rights to the work, being a part of the show is often seen as an opportunity to promote a story or give it more reach, rather than competitive,” Badejo says.

She says the performers and their producers primarily work together to fine-tune and edit the content. Rehearsals also begin at this one-on-one level. Full dress rehearsals don’t begin until shortly before the performance. If necessary, performers can receive professional coaching on public speaking. “It helps them to feel comfortable and takes off some of the pressure,” Badejo explains.

Badejo says the *Pop-Up* performances strive to convey a “truly spoken and conversational” feel. Some presenters – podcast and radio professionals in particular – find it easier to project the desired tone. Yet *Pop-Up* seeks out storytellers, and not professional speakers, first and foremost.

The most important ingredient is the speaker’s conviction, or passion. It has to come through when they are speaking. “Why are you the person to tell this story?” Badejo asks them to consider. She says this passion must be made clear relatively early on in each presentation: why am I going to tell you this particular story right now?

But what does Badejo believe is the most important element of live journalism? “I would say the key ingredient to live journalism is the element of surprise. People want to be told stories that are surprising; that they haven’t heard before. Stories that make them think about the world and people and places in new ways.”

That evening, in the Pop-Up Magazine performance, Badejo's words become reality. One of the highlights of the show is a presentation from the musician and podcaster Hrishikesh Hirway. It grows into a multimedia sensory extravaganza with a surprise twist – like all of the best stories. Hirway hosts a podcast in which he examines the anatomy of music, but in his Pop-Up presentation, he examines the creation of a chocolate biscuit using this same technique. How does a top chef go about preparing the perfect chocolate cookie? The surprise twist in his performance is a personal one: an on-stage Skype call to his father, a food scientist who has made a career examining the many tastes found in the culinary world. His son does the same in the field of music. The presentation takes a deeper, touching turn. Hirway's relationship with his father is reflected in their exchange: What does his father expect of him? Has his son lived up to these expectations?

Eventually, the purpose of the mysterious chocolate biscuit left on our seats is solved: Hirway urges us to close our eyes and take a bite. During his talk, he has primed our taste buds for the experience by discussing the composition of a perfect chocolate biscuit: a touch of salt, a full-bodied cocoa taste. It is a sublime sensory moment.

Libyan-born comedian Mohanad Elshieky continues the show by describing some awkward small talk he once shared with an Uber driver. Suddenly the setting changes, and Elshieky, who arrived in the US as an asylum seeker, transports us to the Libyan city of Benghazi. He tells how an armed hijacker commandeered his car one night as he drove through the city. A captivating noir-style animation on the screen behind him accompanies his harrowing account. His presentation is powerful and sharp throughout, with a bit of detached irony thrown in to keep his audience engaged. We are, by turns, amused and mortified by Libya's collapse into chaos, Benghazi by night, and the strange encounter between the two men.

Even the advertisements have been adapted to the live format. Google has come up with an ad showing an elderly Swedish man with a memory disorder bicycling on a stationary exercise bike through familiar neighbourhoods of his youth with the help of Google Street View and giant curved displays.

To finish off the night, essayist and reporter Mallika Rao takes us to an Indian wedding. Her vantage point is also highly personal: her Indian community in Dallas, Texas, where the pressure to throw a flashy traditional wedding has been blown completely out of proportion. Her presentation is entertaining and astute, but above all, it is a multimedia fireworks display of Bollywood movie clips. Its score is composed by a sitar player, who performs as part of the band, and it culminates in a live dance performance from a dance troupe. This is what live journalism can be at its most spectacular: a new form of media in which storytelling meets the performing arts, live music and stunning visualisation.

Make it personal

After the show, my Finnish colleagues and I discuss our experience. At its peak moments, the night has broken down barriers and became a truly immersive experience in terms of its originality, multimedia effects and interdisciplinary and at times truly immersive approach. There were several "magic moments": the abrupt change of setting in Libya, the bite into the chocolate cookie, the exuberant Bollywood dancing.

Many things about the night have blown me away. The performances were honed to perfection and the balanced structure of the texts revealed a painstaking editing process. Live music composed by Minna Choi and performed by the talented band strengthened this authenticity, as the musicians moved effortlessly from suspenseful crime film crescendos to laid-back Brazilian bossa nova. Many of the evening's animations were startlingly beautiful works of art. A person would be hard-pressed to find this combination of emotionally moving real stories mixed with top-notch live music and striking visualisation anywhere else. Pop-Up's considerable experience and resources were apparent.

And yet part of me is taken aback: primarily by my preconceived notions. I am a journalist that engages in live journalism alongside my work writing for a major print newspaper. I'd travelled to New York in order to see a performance from a group that is considered a pioneer of live journalism, and yet the question at the top of mind was: If this is 'live journalism', then where is 'journalism'?

The spring 2019 edition of Pop-Up Magazine had clearly pushed what we know as journalism to the back burner, a move that I could only surmise was intentional. Individuality and personal experience were the core of many of the presentations. The narrators opened up not only about their experiences and observations, but also about their family and friendships, even their love lives and parental relationships. The speakers created an intimate atmosphere, unafraid to show their vulnerability and insecurity. The Pop-Up performances provided intelligent entertainment that moved skillfully in the same terrain of essays, columns and podcasts. It gave the impression that Pop-Up Magazine is not overly concerned with sharing important journalism with the public, or seeking answers to burning societal questions. The goal seemed more about providing experiences in the midst of a world of cold, hard facts. Make it personal, entertaining, smart and tell a story.

Pop-Up is like a narrative-oriented lifestyle magazine, where intricately woven personal essays and stories offer glimpses into people's private worlds. Perhaps the genre also speaks to differences in journalistic cultures. The US has a deeper tradition of storytelling than in Europe, apparent in the thriving offshoots of narrative journalism and the booming podcast culture. A journalism-heavy, furrowed-brow European take on the concept would likely receive a frigid response in the Big Apple.

“The last oasis of undivided attention”: Madrid’s Diario Vivo turns to theatre

“Stop!” yells the man in black jeans and a black T-shirt, as he paces the theatre’s central gangway. He issues a few quick instructions to the accordionist and performer standing on the stage. The accordionist resumes playing and the person on stage begins to leap in place as if he were in slow motion. His arms and legs make long, fluid movements, while he fixes his gaze hypnotically on the back wall of the auditorium. “Good!” comes the review from their director on the gangway.

The man in black is François Musseau, the *redacator jefe* or Editor-in-Chief of Diario Vivo. The mime José Piris is the entertainer on the stage, and the accordion player is Sara Martinez Caballo. It is Tuesday evening on 12 November 2019 at the Teatro Cofidis Alcázar in central Madrid. In just a few hours, Diario Vivo’s performance will begin. The producers have granted me and my two Finnish colleagues permission to watch the final run-through. Musseau hands us a stack of papers. The Diario Vivo team has translated the evening’s performance from Spanish into English for their Finnish guests.

From left: François Musseau, Vanessa Rousselot and Marta Núñez Gallego with performers from Diario Vivo in Madrid. (Photograph: Jaakko Lyytinen)

Two hours later, the 700-seat theatre is full of fashionable Spaniards. The average age appears to be near 40. After Caballo plays an introductory tune, the first speaker takes the stage. She is Karina Sainz Borgo, a Venezuelan reporter and writer who has lived in Spain for 13 years. Her debut novel *La hija de la española* is an international hit, and has been translated into more than 20 languages. She discusses the relationship between literary fiction and journalism. Upon the publication of her successful novel, interviewers began to drill down on the journalist to ask if her book was actually factual and personal. "A novel does not provide answers, but hopefully it poses questions," Sainz Borgo explained.

Environmental reporter Clemente Álvarez and Sara Acosta next tell the story of the Elwha River restoration project in the northwest corner of the US, where environmental activists and local indigenous tribes successfully campaigned to remove two dams. The presentation also unpacks some of the stages and components of the journalistic process, along with its associated challenges.

The audience is enthralled by the Diario Vivo performances. The atmosphere is reminiscent of an intimate theatre performance, not a stand-up club.

The most poignant moment of the evening comes with Alfonso Pardo's presentation. Pardo is a doctor of geology who writes both fiction and scientific articles. His performance focuses on the last days of his father's life. In May 2014, Pardo's father suffered a stroke and was hospitalised in a Zaragoza intensive care unit. The family patriarch had been a physician and had once worked in that same unit. When Pardo arrived at hospital, his father's doctor asked if the patient's organs could be donated to needy recipients if his condition became hopeless.

Pardo donned a protective suit, shoe covers and a surgical mask and entered the ICU. His father had told him that the seasoned team of medical professionals working there had referred to the room as "Cape Canaveral". Naming the emergency facility after the Florida launch site was their idea of black humour: here, among the monitors, computer screens and tubes, patients blasted off to the heavens.

For the next few days, Pardo sat beside his father's bed. Doctors regularly examined the senior Pardo for neurological function. If they unanimously determined his father was braindead, they would turn off his life support and retrieve his organs. Eventually, the team of physicians reached a consensus: it was time to let go. Pardo supported their decision.

"I am a geologist, although my father would have liked me to be a doctor like him. I am familiar with the close relationship between death and life, due to my work examining the great epochs of our Earth's history," Pardo says.

It is time to say farewell. Pardo describes the moment from the stage: "I hold his hand. It feels warm." He grows silent. He says nothing for a long time. He has brought us with him to the ICU. We sit beside his father for the last time. You could hear a pin drop. He continues by saying that months later, he returned to the ICU to hear that the organs donated by his father saved the lives of two people.

Lightness and humour balance out the profound and touching elements of the night. Bruno Galindo, a journalist specialising in travel reports, describes a recent trip he made to the city of Pisa, Italy. His journey has just one purpose: to avoid seeing the big draw in the city, the Leaning Tower of Pisa. His presentation is a gentle satire of the one-dimensional nature of tourism. "It seems as if big cities are being reduced to only their most famous places and nothing else," he says.

Several pieces of performance art are also included in the programme. José Piris, the springing man on stage from rehearsal, explains how as a young man, he set out for Paris to learn the art of miming from the French master, Marcel Marceau. Piris spices up his talk with a demonstration of how one can mimic the movement of jumping while in reality staying in place.

Following this, Portuguese-born vocalist Laureana Geraldes tells the story of how she became a fado singer. When she was eight years old, she saw the legendary fado artist

Amália Rodrigues on the cover of a magazine. She explains how she would listen to the songs of longing with her mother as a child while they cleaned. During one particular song, Rodrigues' *Foi Deus*, they would always stop what they were doing to listen. Geraldes relates how the song became her secret garden, an escape during life's distressing moments. She describes how she would furtively listen to it and hum along, feeling a lump in her throat and a tightness in her chest.

"Today I am a fado singer," she says. "And tonight I would like to remember that solitary little girl who used to go to chapel, watch the sunset, and listen to her secret song in her room. I am now 33 years old, and I have sung this song many times, on several stages, but never *a cappella*. Tonight I will sing it without accompaniment for the first time." Geraldes sings the Portuguese ballad of *Foi Deus* and the heart-wrenching sounds of fado fill every corner of the theatre.

The most unique performance of the evening is presented by a man who goes by the pseudonym Anónimo Garcia. He is a member of an activist group known as Homo Velamine that engages in culture jamming, a disruptive form of performance art, much like that of the world-famous Yes Men. One year, his group replaced a department store Santa Claus with Karl Marx, who asked queuing children if they have participated in enough class struggle over the past year. Garcia's speciality is media hoaxes, and tonight he tells us about one that span out of control.

It began when the activist group set up a website that pretended to market a tour that retraced the steps of a real-life gang rape. When news outlets pick up on the story, the group found itself having to do a lot of explaining. Fact mixed with fiction in media reporting of the stunt, and the Home Velamine members soon found themselves in court. "In the end, if I learned anything, it is that fiction is more credible than reality. What is presented as reality is not always real. I wanted to fight the media, but the media is winning," he said. "I wanted to beat the absurd, but the absurd won." His presentation is witty, complex and self-reproaching.

After the show, the performers gather around the theatre bar. The atmosphere is informal and lively. I speak with many of the evening's presenters. Alfonso Pardo commends the exacting work of the Diario Vivo producers. He compares the level of editing to that of a publishing house churning out highly polished texts.

Create a new media

The next day we meet with the Diario Vivo producers in a coffee shop in Madrid. Joining us at the table are *redactor jefe* François Musseau, his number two Vanessa Rousselot and a show producer Marta Núñez Gallego. Sofia Gomes da Costa, who is responsible for the group's business side, joins us over her lunch break. This core group has an ideally variegated background for live journalism: Musseau has worked for two decades as a reporter, acting as a foreign correspondent for the newspaper *Libération* in India. Rousselot is a documentary filmmaker who speaks Arabic and has made films for the European cultural channel ARTE, while Núñez Gallego has worked as a reporter for the television news and Gomes da Costa has previously raised funds for museums and other enterprises.

Diario Vivo got its start in 2017. Founding members Musseau and Rousselot are originally from France, and after seeing a *Live Magazine* production in their home country, they began planning similar productions in Spain. "The performance deeply affected me," Rousselot said. She compared live journalism to a documentary film, a labour of love that could take several years to complete. Yet, heard from the stage, the stories can have a strong influence that lingers.

"You remember them for many years. I love it when people tell the stories from their own point of view. They don't pretend to be objective. As part of the audience, you gain an understanding through the various clues as to who is talking, from where and why. I miss that a lot of the time in traditional news. It is a very special way to cultivate a better understanding of the world," she said.

Once they realised they had both seized on the same idea, Musseau and Rousselot joined forces. In December 2017, they arranged the first Diario Vivo production in Madrid. The

cast of performers included big-name reporters from the *El Pais* daily. The premiere attracted an audience of 250 spectators. They couldn't secure an appropriate theatre space, so a nightclub served as their first venue. "We carried in the chairs one by one and halfway through the performance Vanessa had to climb up on a stool to fix the lights," Musseau recalls.

The producers of Diario Vivo emphasize the importance of careful editing. The team's journalist background and editorial proficiency is revealed in the final product's skilfully honed structure and spotlights on intriguing detail.

Marta Núñez Gallego tells us of her personal method. She begins by arranging for a two-hour meeting at the home of the performer she is coaching. She interviews the scheduled speaker and asks questions to steer the conversation towards the crux of the story. Directly after the meeting, she goes home and writes her own version of the presentation, based on the discussion. She does not show her version of the text to the presenter, however. Once the speaker has completed his or her first version of the text, the editing process begins. Núñez Gallego sends her comments to the author daily as a video message. Texts are refined and reworked, as they are exchanged back and forth via documents in the cloud. Towards the end of this evolution, she sometimes returns to the version she wrote after the initial meeting. The final product is often similar to her first take on the story.

The Diario Vivo producers seek out performers from all walks of life for their show. Speakers can be anything from teachers to geologists – just as long as they've got a good story to tell. The production performers meet each other for the first time at a dinner at Musseau's home. Run-throughs with the entire cast present are held one week before the performance. Public speaking coaches are available to presenters that might be struggling with stage fright.

How about the outfit's finances? For the time being, Diario Vivo remains the production team's side venture, an ambitious passion project that has not yet reached the point that would allow the team to quit their day jobs. Performers are paid €100 for their efforts. In

addition to ticket sales, there are a handful of sponsors. The team has also embarked on a few spin-off ventures, such as performances designed in collaboration with different companies and a toolkit for schools and local organisations to help them create similar live performances.

Before we finish, I ask the people behind Diario Vivo to tell what they feel is most important in live journalism. Musseau outlines three principles: “The most important thing is to create a new media. Another way of approaching people. Live means that the performance is direct; it has no borders. Use body language. Tell the story without intermediation,” he says.

His second point is associated with the significance of the environment. “We are not theatre people, and yet we are drawn to the theatre. Why? Because the theatre is maybe the last place left where people really listen. They pay attention. It is a place where people willingly agree to disconnect from their phone.” Our Black Box production team recognises this same quality. We refer to it as “theatre’s magic dust”. As Musseau correctly describes, theatre is the last oasis of undivided attention – a shared place and time for experiencing something corporeal with words, pictures, sound, and something more.

“The third principle to remember is that we are sharing human experiences”, Musseau says. He brings up Alfonso Pardo’s performance from the night before, in which he shares his experience of losing his father. Pardo made the abstract concept of death feel real for everyone in the audience, he says, as if a mirror were held up in front of them. The private expanded to become the universal. “It’s all about stories. We as human beings understand things in the deepest way through a story.”

“Live journalism can restore journalists’ passion”: the Reporter Slam model

It’s Saturday night on 11 January 2020 in Berlin’s trendy Neukölln district. As the clock ticks towards 7 pm, students in their twenties and creative professionals and hipsters in their thirties and forties start to fill up Karl-Marx-Straße’s Heimathafen event venue. This crowd is not coming to see a stand-up show or a new indie band. Tonight, it is journalists who will take the stage.

The audience stands in small groups with a bottle of beer or a glass of wine in hand, others sit on the floor. I conduct a round of interviews to find out why they’ve ventured out on a Saturday night in January to see a live performance by reporters.

Jochen Markett (far left) with performers from the Reporter Slam on stage in Berlin at Neukölln’s Heimathafen. (Photograph: Jaakko Lyytinen)

Media worker Anca stands near the bar with her friends. “Reporter Slam is a great way to see how reporters work. In the era of fake news, transparency is important,” she says.

Three of the evening’s performers wait by the bar for the show to start. Marvin Xin Ku is a student of journalism, Cornelius Pollmer works as a reporter for the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, and Bastian Berbner is a journalist for the German weekly *Die Zeit*. In 2019, Xin Ku, Pollmer and Berbner participated in regional Reporter Slams and won. Now they’ve come to Berlin to compete with four other journalists for the “German Championship”.

Reporter Slam is a playful competition somewhat like a poetry slam. Reporters have 10 minutes to deliver a story, after which a winner is chosen. In Reporter Slams, the winner is determined by a direct popular vote of sorts – decibel measurement of audience applause – whereas in poetry slams, a jury selected from the audience usually makes the decision.

One of the central questions of my report revolves around the added value live journalism creates: what does live journalism on stage provide to viewers and performing journalists that is not reached by other journalistic formats?

Cornelius Pollmer has given thought to this issue. He says *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reader feedback has made it clear that the public does not really know or understand how journalists do their work. “We think the public knows how journalism is made, but this is not the case. We need to get better at explaining what we’re actually doing,” he says. “People are really interested in how we do our work and what is behind the story. The stories we tell on stage reduce the distance between journalists and the audience because they too get to see, hear and feel the stories.”
Pollmer says he is very excited about this new way of presenting the results of his journalistic work to the public. “It’s a lot more fun to stand on stage and tell stories directly to the audience than to sit alone typing behind an office desk,” he says.

"Journalists are people, not stars"

As the show begins, a tall man in jeans and a green Reporter Slam T-shirt walks onto the stage. It is the slam's producer Jochen Markett. "There are 500 of you here today," he says, to enthusiastic audience applause. He introduces the evening's schedule and competitors, as well as the previous year's competition winner, Christian Helms. Markett next invites Bommi and Brummi to the stage. Bommi (Johannes Schneider) plays the ukulele and sings, while Brummi (Simon Wörpel) plays the double bass. The duo are journalists by profession, and play a couple of entertaining songs.

Music critic Juliane Streich is the first to take the stage. She talks about some of the comic slip-ups she has made in her career, such as the time she didn't finish her review of a gig because she got stuck in a bar. Her performance is backed up by whimsical GIFs on the screen behind her.

Marvin Xin Ku's performance gets more laughs than Streich's confessions. He tells of his adventures as a fake Chinese persona he portrayed during Berlin Fashion Week. To create "Chinese social media influencer Shi Shang", he first created fake profiles on the Chinese Weibo and WeChat services. Xin Ku shows pictures of himself as Shi Shang posing at a VIP event, and talks about his alter ego getting a mention in a gossip column. He speaks casually, without notes. The presentation is entertaining, and reveals the ridiculousness of star cults created by social media. "Towards the end, I was afraid I wouldn't be able to shake the role," Xin Ku says.

Next, Daniel Sprenger of the satirical weekly television program *Extra3* talks about the work of an investigative journalist and shows humorous video clips of situations in which interviewees accidentally reveal something about themselves. *Der Tagesspiegel* journalist Julius Betschka is the last performer before the break. Having previously worked as a tabloid reporter, he talks about the City of Berlin's bloated bureaucracy by examining an illustrative case.

During the interval, I continue my vox pop interviews with the audience. A ticket holder named Herman tells me this is his third time attending the Reporter Slam. He says he

finds live journalism appealing because it is immediate and authentic. “Here, journalists are people, not stars. They talk about the boring aspects of their work as well, but at the same time, they are funny,” he says.

Katrin tells me she enjoys it when reporters talk about what goes on behind the scenes in their work. To her, humour is also an essential ingredient. “There’s not so much high-quality comedy available in Germany,” she says. She feels it is important to address serious issues from this perspective from time to time, as real-life stories often contain absurd elements. From Katrin’s perspective, Reporter Slam performances resemble satirical US television programmes like *The Daily Show*, hosted by comedian Trevor Noah, that take a tongue-in-cheek look at contemporary news stories. It is an enjoyable combination of the serious and funny, with both weighty and light-hearted content. Audience member Victor says he enjoys live journalism’s intimacy: “It feels like a friend is telling you a funny story and you want to laugh along.”

The second half of the night begins with Bommi and Brummi performing a song about a recent tweet from FDP party chair Christian Lindner. After this, three more performances take to the stage. Freelance journalist Ninja Priesterjahn’s performance describes her work reporting on football. She shows a picture of the deserted parking lot at the Berlin football club Hertha BSC training centre. “My job was to stand in that parking lot and wait for someone to come and comment on something,” she says. The audience laughs at the stark absence of glamour.

She tells the story of Herman, a 100-year-old supporter of the club, who built Hertha’s home arena, Berlin’s Olympic Stadium, in the 1930s. Priesterjahn’s tale has many layers, as she touches on fan culture, the special nature of sports journalism, historic events, and Herman’s life story. Priesterjahn speaks without notes and interacts easily with her audience. “When did Hertha win the German championship for the first time?” she asks. 1930. “What about the second time?” 1931. How about the third? “Well, that hasn't come yet,” she says. The audience laughs heartily at the miserable record of the Berlin football club, which has tried the patience of even the most loyal Hertha fans.

Next up is *Süddeutsche Zeitung* journalist Cornelius Pollmer and his story of a train trip he once took across Europe with a bunch of partying students. The fast-paced and funny performance inspires a lot of laughter, and Pollmer clearly enjoys performing, walking the stage like a stand-up comedian, sometimes with a beer bottle in his hand. He has notes propped up on a music stand, but for most of his presentation, he doesn't consult them.

Die Zeit journalist Bastian Berbner closes out the evening by speaking on the topic of polarisation. He tells the story of Sven and Thomas, two men who travel together to Africa. Sven is a neo-Nazi, while Thomas is a former anarchist and currently a hard-line leftist. Berbner interviewed the men for his podcast and plays excerpts from their interviews as part of his presentation. The audience listens attentively. He recounts in detail the odd couple's journey south, during which time Thomas became seriously ill. The recording shares Thomas' account of how Sven took care of him. Exceptional circumstances caused the extremists to come together and form a human connection.

After the last performance, Reporter Slam's producer gathers all the speakers on stage. The audience casts their votes by cheering and clapping for each of them. Markett announces the winner based on the decibel meter results. It is Ninja Priesterjahn, who receives an impressive trophy. The show is over, but many spectators stick around for one more drink. David, who works as a journalist, is full of praise for the show. "I liked it very much. It was all killers, no fillers. Reporter Slam is a great way to celebrate journalism."

The birth of Reporter Slam

The next day, I met with Reporter Slam's founder and chief producer Jochen Markett at a café near the Berlin-Charlottenburg station. The 40-year-old journalist and media educator had promised to tell me everything I need to know.

The story of Reporter Slam began in 2016. Markett was getting tired of his job as a media trainer and wanted to try something new. He decided to co-found a blog called *Realsatire* with photographer Andi Weiland. "We wanted to tell funny stories, primarily from Germany. Crazy, everyday stories about ridiculous bureaucracy or other silly true-to-life things that had happened to people. The idea was to do our own research and stories, but

we quickly realised that we didn't have enough resources," he said. Instead of original reporting, the duo started collecting links on their blog to funny content published in other media. Then a new idea began to evolve in Markett's mind: "Could these funny stories be brought to the stage?"

The first Reporter Slam Club was held in Berlin in November 2016 to a sold-out audience of 170 people. Christoph Herms, responsible for the visual production, event recordings, and strategic partnerships, signed on as a third founding member. Interestingly, the idea came from the world of science, as Markett had attended Researcher Slam events where scientists presented their work in an amusing manner. Markett wondered why reporters didn't do the same. 'If a chemist or a physicist can do it, then why not a journalist? Journalists should be the best storytellers,' he thought. At this point, none of the founders had heard of live journalism or productions like Pop-Up Magazine in the US.

Reporter Slam soon expanded from Berlin to other German cities, and Markett and his partners had soon staged seven different performances in five cities. By January 2020, a total of 28 Reporter Slams had been held in eight cities across Germany. As a rule, Reporter Slam's performers are journalists who talk about their work. Markett explains that "most of the stories have been published before, but the reporters retell the story with a humorous perspective." The majority of performers are younger journalists. According to Markett, speaker ages typically range from 20 to 35. The company sources performers in three ways: combing networks, taking applications, and flagging appropriate stories. More potential speakers are showing interest now that the reputation of the slams has risen.

Reporter Slam performances are not rehearsed ahead of time. Even Markett hears them for the first time when they are being performed. "I talk to the performers about their topics in advance on the phone, and I send them links to recordings of successful performances, but that's it: no workshops, no coaching for public speaking."

The performers themselves are also responsible for the visualisations that accompany their show. Sometimes the image quality can be poor and files can be in different formats,

causing problems. But this laidback atmosphere also has its own charm. One of the most experienced speakers in the Berlin final told Markett that they should hold on to the concept's "pub-like roughness". "He said he loves the amateurishness of the show," Markett said. Of course Markett would like to make the show more professional, but he is wary and says he wonders: 'How much time do we have for training? How professional do we want to be? Will we lose our entertaining roughness and charm if we were to make improvements?'

Markett says he believes in the power of storytelling. "We want to show how good journalists can be when it comes to telling stories about truth and reality. The stories can be funny, but they don't have to be," he said. He says that while performers can make use of narrative means to tell their stories, everything must be absolutely true – in that it is based on verified information and original reporting. "I hope there aren't any Relotius[1] among us, as we can't verify the performance facts," Markett says.

Besides storytelling, Reporter Slam relies on the power of humour. Markett himself has dabbled in stand-up comedy. "I want to make people laugh. I didn't succeed as a stand-up comedian, but Reporter Slam is another way to do it. That's one of our strengths. People want to laugh, especially in such crazy times," says Markett.

He has also noticed another important effect of live journalism. "I think people remember the stories they've heard live on stage better. They identify more strongly with live stories than reading a text. It sticks in their mind better. I've noticed it myself. I've heard several hundred stories in Reporter Slams by now, and I remember all of them. I see images related to the story in my head," Markett says. This, in his view, is one of the hallmarks of an effective story told on stage. The images displayed on the stage reinforce the message and leave a strong impression on the audience.

Reporter Slam is not yet profitable. Most of the journalists who have performed to date have done so for free, in the spirit of trying something new. Markett continues to earn his

[1] Claas Relotius is an award-winning journalist who was caught making up stories for the German magazine *Der Spiegel* in 2018.

living as a media trainer. “Reporter Slam is still a hobby. Virtually all our ticket revenue is used to cover things like travel expenses.” Tickets for Reporter Slam performances normally cost only €10, with half of the proceeds going to the venue. If a crowd of 500 spectators attends, there may be a bit of revenue left over. This year, performers who made it to the Berlin finals received a prize of €150. Markett has set himself two financial goals: “I want to be able to make a living from this, and I want to be able to pay our performers a performance fee.”

In May 2019, he started a new company called Slampions with the two other founders of Reporter Slam, Andi Weiland and Christoph Herms. Slampions bills itself as an event organizer and media production company. This new company was scheduled to produce 10 Reporter Slams in 2020, in collaboration with various foundation and media company partners – before the Coronavirus outbreak put everything on hold. In the summer of 2020, the team adapted to the new situation by hosting their first digital slam.

We finish our conversation by talking about the effects of live journalism on the performers. Audiences are clearly excited about the new concept, as auditoriums fill up from Spain to Finland and from Romania to France and the phenomenon spreads. But this new way of presenting journalism has also had a surprisingly strong impact on the journalists involved. Markett says many reporters are becoming increasingly frustrated as financial difficulties make some media outlets feel more like rewriting production lines.

“They can’t even get out of the office once in a while to do reporting. The journalism work they are doing no longer resembles the reasons they first chose the occupation,” Markett says. Many journalists have found much-needed variation in their careers in the original reporting they are doing for Reporter Slam, which often entails going out to meet with people and writing a longer feature story.

“If media houses wake up to the fact that live journalism has the potential to restore journalists’ passion for their work, it could have a big impact. They might start to realise they need to give journalists more time to write decent stories,” he says.

Jochen Markett remembers how a young reporter came to chat with him after the very first Reporter Slam in November 2016. The journalist praised the show and talked about his own work: publishing news stories from newswire services at a desk all day. “He said he was completely fed up with his work, but he had to come to thank me because the performance had reminded him what journalism could be.”

The Black Box formula: the core elements of good live journalism production

Let us examine in more detail what goes into creating live journalism in practice. What stories work on stage? How does spoken language differ from the written word? What can live journalism learn from Aristotle's ancient treatise on rhetoric? And how do people not accustomed to performing in public shake their jitters?

As I have already mentioned, I have been a part of the production team responsible for *Helsingin Sanomat*'s Black Box performances since 2015. Through a process of trial and error, our style of live journalism has developed over the past five years. The methods I describe here are based on my own experiences as a producer and performer of live journalism. I believe the formula for a successful presentation can be broken into these key parts. In short, it consists of detailed pre-planning, intense coaching, rigorous editing and heaps of practice.

1. Refine the idea and find the angle

Each Black Box presenter is assigned a personal producer to act as a conversational partner and text editor. The collaborative work begins with the careful evolution from a topic to an idea.

When reporters or photographers first suggest their presentations to us, they usually have an intriguing topic in mind. But before any actual reporting can begin, considerable time must be devoted to turning their topic into an idea. A topic is like having an outline; the idea will contain the seeds of the story's angle and execution.

So what does a good idea for a live journalism presentation look like? The first requirement is that the speaker be connected to their subject. The idea should be something sparked by their own personal interests or experiences. The authenticity and credibility of the presenter is ultimately found in this relationship with the topic in question.

In Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric, he refers to the concept of '*ethos*': the character or emotions of a speaker that persuade an audience. A personal touch doesn't mean it is necessary to reveal intimate details of the speaker's private life. It simply means that the speaker has a vested interest in the topic. This interest can be clarified with the following questions: Why is this idea special to me? Why do I want to tell you this? And what is my gift to the audience?

Another requirement in the process of honing an initial idea is identifying its significance. It must be an idea that will provide the audience with a new insight into the world in a way that a written text or television news broadcast cannot. It means the presentation should contain a universal truth, above and beyond personal observations and realisations. What will my talk reveal about the world?

Semantics researcher S. I. Hayakawa used a ladder as a metaphor for the varying levels of abstraction. The highest rungs, he said, represented universal themes of life and love, death and happiness, good and evil, and so on. But as one moves down the ladder, the themes grow more concrete and the level of abstraction decreases. Storytelling, at its finest, should operate on the lowest rungs of the ladder: relating stories about universal themes with concrete, low-abstraction details that are coloured by real-life events and individuals.

In preparing our end-of-year live journalism show for the Reuters Institute, I worked with Nigerian finance reporter Adesola Akindele-Afolabi , foreign correspondent for Japanese public broadcaster NHK Kohei Tsuji and Brazilian *Piauí* magazine staff writer Consuelo Dieguez. Our first meeting sought to sharpen their presentation topics into feasible ideas. I asked a series of questions to steer the trio towards a clearer vision of their presentations' unique perspectives and boundaries. What concrete examples could you share that would illustrate your point and leave an indelible impression on your audience?

Adesola wanted to speak about the purpose of financial journalism. Her job was to supply the prosperous Nigerian elite with the latest news on the economy, yet at the same time, abject poverty was ballooning in her home country. She wanted to address this disconnect: how to share information on important market developments with the people that needed it most. It was an important topic, but also challenging. What concrete examples could she draw on? Could Adesola find someone from Nigeria through whom she could communicate the need for and useful applications of such data?

Nigerian finance reporter Adesola Akindele-Afolabi (left) consults with report author Jaakko Lyytinen. (Photograph: Supplied)

Kohei had been working as a foreign correspondent in the Middle East. He was frustrated with what he felt was a one-dimensional news reporting protocol that didn't reach out to broader audiences. The potential was there to tell some amazing stories, he reasoned, but the stories his Japanese viewers were watching were far from inspiring. He wanted to devise a way to incorporate storytelling into straight-up news reporting style.

Consuelo had written several extensive profiles of world leaders and politicians, including pieces on Bolivia's president Evo Morales, and a controversial politician from her home country who would go on to become Brazil's present, Jair Bolsonaro. Consuelo hoped to speak at the symposium about finding the human voice in such profiles. I felt the subject was interesting, but too broad. We agreed that she would instead open up her portrait of Bolsonaro, to examine what it suggested about societal changes in Brazil.

Once we had tightened up the ideas, I asked the three journalists to write a first sketch of their presentation text to present at our next meeting. I asked that the draft have a clear structure and highlight the central themes.

2 Report for the stage

Once a topic has been distilled into a workable idea, the collection of material can begin. This is what reporters do best: gathering information, conducting interviews, tracking down sources, and extensive reading. These same requirements apply to live journalism. Original reporting, data mining, personal observations, and authentic first-hand testimonials are essential; they are the foundations of trustworthy and inspiring journalism.

Aristotle refers to this component of rhetoric as '*logos*': the rationale and logic that acts as the basis of argumentation.

But live journalism requires moving beyond traditional data collection and reporting. In this medium, there are additional questions to consider: How can I present this story on the stage? How can I transport my audience to the scene? Can I relate something with images or graphics?

Feedback from our Black Box performances indicates that the audience is not only interested in the content of the story, but also the actual work of how the story was found. What happens behind the scenes when these journalists and photographers work? Take the audience along on your beat, show them how information is uncovered.

Founding Black Box member Kimmo Norokorpi was responsible for designing the visual look of the productions. He has a background in television news, and is constantly encouraging presenters to "think visually". I asked Norokorpi and the third member of our original Black Box planning team, Riikka Haikarainen, to lead a workshop for the Reuters Institute fellows in November 2019.

"Pay very close attention to the process of gathering documentation for your story, " Norokorpi told my peers. "Collect souvenirs. They are gifts for your audience. If you do a piece on elephants, don't just take photos and aerial footage of the herd. Take audio recordings of them mating, save some dandruff from their hair, bring back samples of elephant fodder [and dung]! Slip a spent casing from a poacher's rifle in your pocket. The things you find will change the story."

"Souvenirs" can be real objects, not just photos, archived material and sounds. As part of his Black Box presentation on innovation in Finland's forestry industry, my colleague Esa Lilja took a bucket of cellulose pulp out onto the stage with him. After his talk, the audience could touch the white substance he had just described as now being used as a raw material in clothing. In live journalism, reporters become like barristers presenting evidence in a courtroom: don't forget to show your exhibits.

3. Write for the stage

Journalists are, for the most part, accustomed to writing news stories that follow a clear formula. Who, what, why, where and how comes first, then the details follow. It's like an inverted pyramid. The facts are communicated neutrally: the reporter must remain objective, and their own opinions should not interfere in the account.

If people want to hear the news, they turn on their television or radio, or open up their internet browser. But when people buy a theatre ticket, they want more: they want to have experiences. Spoken word is a very different animal to written text.

Live journalism oftentimes resembles a feature profile, with elements of storytelling, narrative arcs, individuality, personal observation, and open subjectivity. These pieces tell human stories on a micro level and reveal personal experiences.

In his contribution to the book *Telling True Stories* (2007), US editor and writing instructor Jack Hart refers to this style as "dramatic narrative". Hart says even seasoned reporters cannot necessarily distinguish between the two, as the lion's share of journalists have been indoctrinated into using what he calls the "summary narrative".

According to Hart, true storytelling requires mastery of dramatic narrative. "Summary Narrative emphasises the abstract while Dramatic Narrative emphasises concrete detail. Summary Narrative collapses time while Dramatic Narrative lets readers experience action as if it were happening in real time," he says.

The late great Finnish journalist Ilkka Malmberg wrote about this same dichotomy in his 1998 collection of essays entitled *Journalismia! Journalismia?* (Journalism! Journalism?) There are stories that emphasise facts and hard news, and there are those that focus on emotions, experiences and interpretation. In scientific language, the divide is between positivism vs. hermeneutics. These days, newspapers are bursting with feature articles that emphasise feelings and experiences, or reportage that stresses "observation, description, emotions and interpretation, along with an ability to recognise symbolism and use one's imagination".

On stage, the task of facilitating emotions and interpreting the symbolism is amplified even more than in stories written for print. In fact, it becomes the prerequisite of a successful performance.

This, Aristotle refers to as *pathos*: the emotional connection between the speaker and the listener. It alludes to both the ability of speakers to tap into their own feelings and influence the emotions of the listener. Emotional response has a much deeper effect on the audience than even the best argued *logos*.

Journalism on the stage differs from feature writing in one other significant way. In a feature, the writer can switch back and forth between different storytelling styles, for example, employing flashbacks or switching narrative voices. In a spoken performance, the structure must be simpler – right down to sentence structure.

Public speaking coach Kaisa Osola has given the Black Box team lessons on this. "A spoken performance needs a clear structure," she writes in our performer handbook. "The speaker cannot abandon the person who is listening. The audience must comprehend at all times where the presentation is going and how what currently is being said fits into the whole. Otherwise, you stand the risk of misdirecting or losing their attention."

Live presentations do not have the supporting elements of written text like subheaders and typographical highlighting. There are no supplementary info boxes or bullet-pointed lists. Kaisa Osola advises: "In public speaking, paragraph breaks and subheaders have to be done orally. For example, when you move into a new time frame as part of a chronology, you have to say so". She reminds performers that people's working memory is quite short: a few dozen seconds at best.

The aim of live journalism is not to make journalists seem like the dispensers of great wisdom or expertise, but to shine a light on the real work of journalism and news writers.

All journalists know that reporting work can take surprising twists and inevitably carries the risk of misinterpretation and erroneous assumptions. The journey to the destination is often full of roadblocks, and sometimes we can lose our way. In live journalism, it is permissible – and even desirable – to show one's ignorance and mistakes. It's a matter of authenticity.

Journalism presented on stage accentuates the humanity and vulnerability of the people behind it. Perhaps counterintuitively, this only serves to strengthen the level of trust between the journalist and the viewer.

4. Edit it down to the essence

As a producer of live journalism, I strive to be a proactive editor, assisting the presenter to make edits through all stages of the creative process. I ask scheduled speakers to sketch out the presentation before they begin gathering data and composing their story. I also ask for regular updates while the material is collected. Did you get the information you needed in that interview? Do we perhaps need more sources? Has anything unexpected been unearthed in your search that we could use to build the narrative? I want to get inside the topic, down to the last detail and source, so I can make targeted requests later in the editing process, if necessary.

The real editing begins when the first version of the presentation text is complete. Although I am familiar with the text already, I try to read it as if I were someone who knows nothing about the topic at hand. Is the structure appealing? Does it best serve the story? Does the presentation grab its audience and not let go?

It is not until my second reading of the text that I start to make marks, suggesting changes to the structure and individual sentences. If there is too much text, I try to work out what bits can be dropped. A finished edit is often covered in suggested changes in CAPS and edits in double parenthesis.

Most live journalism performances last only 10 minutes. This is a good length: long enough to dive deep into a subject and touch people's emotions, but short enough to maintain momentum. This translates to roughly 900 words, or two single-spaced sheets of paper. In this span of time, a performer is expected to tell a complete story. This necessitates strict boundaries.

5. Practice, practice, practice

Journalism may inform us about the world, but it also has the potential to entertain. As Finnish dramatist Outi Nyytäjä says: "Information is the best form of entertainment." Aristotle said the fourth element of a brilliant presentation was *kairos*, the ability of a speaker to take complete control of their audience.

It is beneficial to start practicing the presentation in good time before the full-cast rehearsals, even if the final version is not locked down yet. Black Box performers start their first rehearsals one-on-one with their producers after the first few rounds of editing.

As a producer, I try to do the same thing I did on my first reading of the text: to hear the performance as if I were a first-time audience member. Do I understand the content? Does it keep up its momentum? After these sessions, edits are again made based on the spoken performance, breaking up sentences and clarifying the construction.

Rehearsals start to intensify once the text has been finalised. Speakers can practice on their own, but the earlier the presenter can start speaking in front of others, the better. Public speaking coach Kaisa Osola tells the Black Box presenters: “Runners practice by running, trumpet players practice by playing. Public speakers practice by speaking. Speaking the presentation aloud is important because that is how it begins to come into its own as clear and precise spoken language. It becomes familiar; it feels comfortable in your mouth. When the final product is spoken, the process leading up to it must also be spoken.”

The Black Box production process normally includes four full-cast dress rehearsals. The first of these takes place about two weeks before the scheduled performance. At this stage, many of the individual presentations are still unfinished: texts are still being edited and pared down, images are being collected and the last interviews might still be taking place.

Everyone is on tenterhooks. For many of the speakers, this is the first time they have given their presentation to anyone besides their producer. Speaking in front of their production peers may be more nerve-wracking then speaking in front of the live audience at the Finnish National Theatre.

Yet these run-throughs are extremely important, as the individual presentations begin to come together to create a whole. The performers start to unite as a team; what were soloists now form a band. The rehearsal performances offer opportunities to offer detailed feedback, and the pieces begin to fall into place.

The second all-cast rehearsal happens about a week before lift-off. At this stage, the texts are almost good to go, and most of the visualisation is up and running. The performers have been practicing, and they are starting to get the feel of the story they plan to tell. By this stage, the producers have decided on the presentation order, based on our understanding of the nature of the production entirety. Which stories work in succession, and which don't? What presentation would kick the night off right and which would make a handsome finale?

The third dress rehearsal for the entire company is held on the actual stage, usually on the day before the performance. Now everything should be working without a hitch: technical equipment, texts – the whole shebang. This rehearsal is stressful for the speakers, as they must stand alone on a massive stage and play to rows of empty seats. After this performance, the performers are given one last round of feedback that takes little details, such as stresses on individual words, ideal eye lines, and tips for relieving tension, into account.

A final dress rehearsal is scheduled for the day of the performance, where the entire show is performed without a break. This last run-through double-checks that all of the technology is functioning properly and shores up the presenters' confidence. Coach Kaisa Osola plays a key role in these last rehearsals, whipping the presentations into shape and doing her best to relieve the speaker of stage fright with personal feedback and last minute tips.

6. Showtime

The actual performance can feel as intense as a final in a sporting contest. This is where all that preparation comes into play.

The Black Box performances generally start at 7 pm. The team meets at the theatre at noon, and the final dress rehearsal takes place at 2 pm. After this, the performers have their hair and makeup done, and begin preparing for the evening's event. The producers are like coaching staff, looking after the energy level and wellbeing of their star players.

Backstage we keep Coca-Cola, peanuts and bananas on offer to keep the speakers' energy level high. Kaisa Osola does exercises with the team, because a warm body can better manage the adrenaline spikes associated with pre-presentation butterflies. She shores up the presenters' courage: "Even if your heart is beating 200 times a minute, no one will be able to see it," she says.

We review the final instructions: Remember to smile and calmly make eye contact with the entire crowd before you say your first word. Light up the stage with your eyes.
T-minus 10 minutes, and the team gathers in a huddle in the back room with our hands on each other's shoulders. We communicate a message of support: "Go out there and give it your all. All of your passion, all of your energy." We finish by clasping hands and yelling "Black Box".

In December 2019, my peers from Reuters Institute Journalism Fellowship followed this formula. After we warmed up, we gathered backstage at the Royal Society's Hall and made our huddle. Our collective nervous energy erupted as a magical series of performances. The final product was a 90-minute live journalism production of which we could be terrifically proud.

The show weaved from a finance reporter's role in preventing poverty in Nigeria, to storytelling in news writing, the astonishing rise of President Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, dissident persecution in Russia, identity politics among disgruntled elderly males, the importance of listening to the public in a post-Brexit Britain, as well as the unusual success story of a Hong Kong tabloid and the maltreatment and imprisonment of a Ukrainian journalist.

Two reporters – Tejas Harad from India and Philipp Wilhelmer from Austria – related the wildly different trajectories they took to establish their careers as journalists. The first studied night and day to rise up out of his social class and leave his poor country village, while the other ended up in the field through a series of chance coincidences – all he really wanted to do was skateboard.

My first-rate peers shared their successes and failures, laid bare the day-to-day life of journalism, and told important stories. At the heart of it all were ideas about journalism that had emerged during our months spent in close teamwork.

The 100 or so media influencers who gathered to see the presentations had been expecting a traditional seminar or panel discussion. Instead, they sat flabbergasted, listening earnestly to 10 true stories that they will not soon forget.

The 2019/2020 cohort of Journalist Fellows from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism presenting their Live Journalism review in London in December 2019. (Photograph: Supplied)

Thrill and transparency equals trust

I believe live journalism has an important role to play in restoring journalism's relationship with its audience. Done correctly, I think it may be the way our bond with our audience is saved. There are three compelling reasons for this.

The thrill of live engagement

Today's news media must compete for people's time and money against streaming services, pay TV, social media, the gaming industry, and more. People can tuck into their smartphones for entertainment and helpful services anywhere, at any time of the day or night.

This is why we must learn to better justify our utility and purpose, and journalists must move their focus beyond content to consider the medium by which their stories are communicated.

Important journalism can be captivating and entertaining. And by entertaining, I don't mean superficial or light-weight. Even the most hefty and serious topics can be covered in an intriguing and engaging manner. There is a saying: "Learning without studying is the highest form of entertainment".

As sold-out live journalism productions around the world can attest, the public is eager to hear what reporters, photographers and documentary filmmakers have to say. How can we create those kinds of "magic moments" described by Pop-Up Magazine's Anita Badejo?

Several live journalism groups have followed in the footsteps of the US-based Pop-Up Magazine in not disclosing the content of their performances ahead of time. It's the "anti-algorithm ethic": a refusal to spoon out like-minded stories on similar themes to match customer preference and interests based on the analytics gathered from our data trail.

Live journalism's edge is its ability to surprise, delight and expose audience members to new topics. It is a celebration of the serendipitous: the viewer might make unexpected discoveries that ignite a deeper interest.

A comprehensive audience survey was conducted in association with the Black Box performances in the autumn of 2019, and while the results have not yet been published I was given access to the preliminary findings. An overwhelming 96.7% of the >500 survey respondents agreed that keeping the topics of the live journalism performances as a surprise was essential.

The magic of the medium

That thrill of surprise is extended by the medium itself. In the words of Diario Vivo's chief editor François Musseau: "The most important thing is to create a new media. Another way of approaching people." And theatres present the ideal soil in which to plant new seeds of information sharing – this last oasis of undivided attention, where no additional screens are allowed in to distract you from the moment.

Finnish theatre director and author Saara Turunen once described the theatre to Finnish weekly *Suomen Kuvalehti* saying, "I think the charm lies in the idea of sharing the same space and time, and physicality." Live journalism allows for a singular moment where our usually-scattered readers are sharing the same time and space.

And for once, they can process the journalist's contribution via non-verbal signals including body language, gestures, intonations, and eye contact. This close communion fosters a deeper connection between the journalists and their audience than is possible in other forms of shared journalistic content.

More than 84% of Black Box survey respondents somewhat or fully agreed with the statement "The performance made me feel connected to the performing journalists". And it inspired the following open-ended responses:

- "Black Box created a more intimate and deeper connection to news and the people behind it."

- “The stage and theatre setting added a high degree of intensity to the presentation, I was able to perfectly focus on following the performances.”

More than four out of five – or 87.4% – of the Black Box audience survey respondents agreed somewhat or entirely with the statement “The performance provoked stronger emotions in me than journalism in general”.

Another open-ended response came from an audience member who said the narrator’s voice, face and feelings – apparent from their movement and intonation on stage – created a personal connection that doesn’t transpire when one reads a news story.

The same respondent said the act of “performance journalism” in a theatre created the impression the journalist was speaking “directly to me”. The production’s fact-based trustworthy presentations were also credited with giving the audience “substantial pleasure” in the era of fake news.

And to the question of how we reach those elusive younger audiences: why put on ourBlack Box productions for free to young people between the ages of 15 and 18. It begins to form those relationships, improves their media literacy, and makes reliable journalism available to them in a way they will find compelling. Survey results confirm that teenagers prefer this journalistic format over many other traditional formats.

Transparency

Around the world, we know that public confidence in the media has eroded. The Reuters Institute’s Digital News Report 2020 confirms as much. Even in Finland, once a top-ranking country for media trust, our numbers of media trust are falling.

Earlier this year in Berlin, in a conversation with Reporter Slam presenter and *Süddeutsche Zeitungin* reporter Cornelius Pollmer, he said, “We think the public knows how journalism is made, but this is not the case. We need to get better at explaining what we’re actually doing.”

Journalists have never made a concerted effort to tell their audiences how the news is made: from which raw material, according to what kind of recipe. We don't explain things like data verification or double-sourcing. We don't take time to assure our audience that, despite its hectic pace, good journalism is still the most reliable and credible way to understand what is happening in the world and how it is going to effect you.

At the main launch event for Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2020, Edelman's moderator Ed Williams asked how to maintain the spike in interest in comprehensive news articles triggered by the Covid-19 crisis. Deborah Turness, president of NBC News International, answered: "Transparency, pulling back the curtain, and sharing journalism is the way forward."

She mentioned NBC's News Verification Unit as an example of sharing and showing this craft. "We have to find ways to embed and integrate those levels of transparency, depth, forensics and authentic storytelling in all our journalism, to connect with our audience. Because this is what they demand in return for their trust," she explained.

Jay Mitchinson, editor of The Yorkshire Post stressed the same point in the panel: "Being more transparent about how we do things will certainly convince more people to trust and invest in us."

In live journalism, opening up our journalistic practices to scrutiny by the audience is a natural and inevitable part of the process. Sharing this "making of" dimension increases transparency and respect for journalistic work. This is crucial in a time in which people's esteem for reporters is declining and cynical views of our industry abound.

In the soon-to-be-published Black Box audience survey, 85.2% agreed completely or somewhat with the statement "Live journalism stories feel more authentic than in other journalistic formats".
One respondent explained the difference: "[Black Box] makes journalism feel alive and real. The performance provides a genuine point of contact to current topics and the diverse array of human experiences in the world."

Conclusion: Challenges and opportunities

In this report, I have examined the phenomenon of live journalism inside and out. My hope is that by painting a picture of live journalism performances in Helsinki, New York, Madrid, Berlin and London, I have inspired you to try this format in your own community.

Live journalism is spreading across the world and new productions are springing up everywhere. But one recognisable factor is stalling the momentum: the large number of people, and amount of time and know-how required to pull off a high-quality live performance is something that even the largest media conglomerates may not be able to cobble together.

At the moment, it is primarily smaller media companies and communities of freelancers that are behind live journalism productions. France's *Live Magazine* may be the sole exception among production companies, as it has hired a small full-time team for the express purpose of producing live journalism. In most other cases, reporters still assemble productions alongside their primary work responsibilities.

Many big media houses arrange events and conferences, but very few have been enterprising enough to try live journalism of the kind examined in this report. As far as I know, *Helsingin Sanomat*'s Black Box presentations are the only regular live journalism productions being arranged by a major media house.

An experiment at the *Boston Globe* was limited to one try, as was a similar effort by the *Financial Times*. The majority of major media entities currently prefer to invest the majority of their development resources in the digital realm.

In the spring of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted live journalism productions around the world. *Helsingin Sanomat*'s 15th Black Box production was shown just once at the Finnish National Theatre before the rest of the dates had to be cancelled.

Pop-Up Magazine has released one shorter presentation online since the outbreak, as has Reporter Slam. The Pop-Up performance was professional as ever, but it reinforced my perception that the greatest strength of live journalism is also its greatest challenge: live requires face-to-face, physical attendance; sharing the same space and time with other audience members. It is not impossible to share a fascinating tale via a computer or television screen, but we can't deny that some essential magic with your audience goes missing.

Scaling up live journalism productions presents a challenge for this same reason. Until now, each Black Box production was presented somewhere between 8 and 10 times, with two different productions arranged annually. Although every one of the shows was sold out, we found we couldn't increase the number further without jeopardising our day jobs.

By the same stroke, a move from the National Theatre to a bigger arena would likely come at a loss of intimacy.

So, why should media houses explore live journalism despite these real challenges? I do not know of any other existing format that more effectively builds appreciative communities and binds reporters and their audiences together.

Journalist and associate professor Jeff Jarvis has written extensively about the media's chances of survival in a platform economy where Google, Facebook and others rule over the dissemination of information.

In May this year, Jarvis tweeted that media business models should be founded on selling a particular skill. And what exactly is the skill set that journalism sells? His suggestion is as follows: "I say we should sell the skills of convening & serving communities, of listening, of enabling transparency, of improving the public conversation. We have to learn those skills before we can sell them."

He continued: "Facebook and Google are not killing news. News has been slowly killing itself by refusing to learn new skills to sell, new ways to bring value to the public we serve,

new ways to listen to the needs of that public, new ways to earn trust, new ways to compete, not complain."

In many ways, live journalism has the tools to renew the connection between journalism and its wavering audience. It reinforces trust, and transparently bolsters the argument for a strong tradition of journalism. It helps information to take a deeper hold. It influences lives.

I cannot claim to be an entirely independent expert on this format – I believe too passionately in its merits to give an entirely subjective outlook. For this reason, I give New York University professor of journalism Jay Rosen the last word.

"The reason I find live journalism significant is that I believe the entire relationship between journalists and the public has to be rebuilt from the ground up. (That is why I have also been researching membership models in news for three years.) In live events, journalists can explain to their strongest supporters what their journalism is all about. They can create so-called 'super fans' who can instruct and recruit others."