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# THE POWER OF LIVE JOURNALISM: A HANDBOOK



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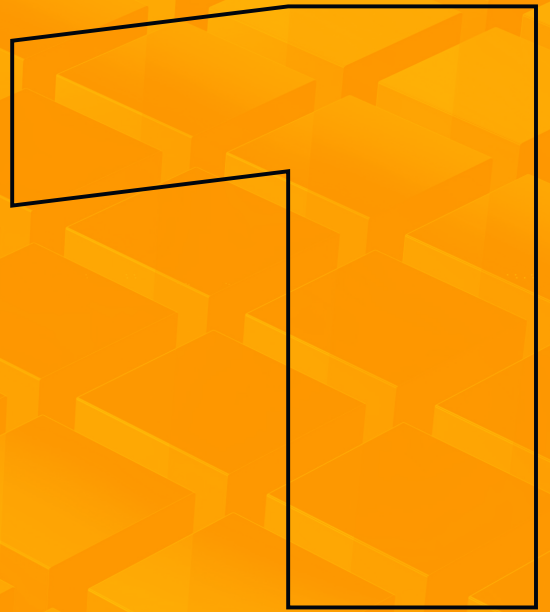
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**WHAT LIVE  
JOURNALISM IS,  
AND WHY WE  
SHOULD DO IT**

# INTRODUCTION

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Riikka Haikarainen

“I am sitting in the middle of 1,600 spectators in a dark cinema. The screen shines white, nothing there. On the stage, a middle-aged man stands behind the microphone. He is Sam Green, a documentary filmmaker. He has come to tell the story of Louis Armstrong, the legendary jazz musician.

‘Louis had a hobby, or rather, an obsession,’ Green begins.

The hoarse-voiced singer and trumpeter recorded most of his everyday life on reel-to-reel tapes. There are thousands of hours of tapes. Armstrong recorded not only his own playing, but also breakfast conversations, his own monologues, dinners with friends, and arguments with his wife.

‘This is my favorite tape. It was recorded during the late hours of a house party, when the guests had left, his wife had just gone to bed and Louis poured himself the last glass. Listen to his breathing. Just close your eyes,’ Green says.

I close my eyes, like my 1,599 fellow listeners (I imagine). The tape quietly hisses. Then I hear how the ice cubes clink in the drinking glass, the arm-chair creaks and Louis Armstrong sighs quietly.”

I wrote the above blog post on May 2015, after watching a show called Pop-Up Magazine in Los Angeles, USA. The show introduced me to the phenomenon of live journalism, a new narrative form of journalism in which journalists, often in a theater or a club, present carefully prepared and edited stories to a live audience.

The show convinced me of the charm of live journalism—how a storyteller speaking alone on stage could capture the attention of over a thousand listeners. The content, I had also noticed, drew in a crowd of people aged between 20 and 40 who enthusiastically responded to it.

Inspired, I wanted to see how Finnish journalism could be transformed into a similar stage performance. In the fall of 2015, I suggested to a few colleagues in the newsroom of Helsingin Sanomat (HS), where I was working as a journalist at the time, that we craft a show in the same vein as Pop-Up Magazine. This first working group included Kimmo Norokorpi, Jaakko Lyytinen, and Tuomas Kaseva, as well as Kaisa Osola as our freelancer speech coach. A little later, staff writers Esa Lilja and Heidi Väärämäki as well as visual designer Olli Nurminen joined the team. Petri Tarkiainen from the Finnish National Theatre has worked as our producer from the beginning on. We called our series of shows ‘Musta Laatikko’—Black Box—which premiered on February 2016.

Fast forward to the late autumn of 2022, 18 Black Box productions have been performed so far with different contents, all of them attracting a total of nearly 50,000 viewers in Helsinki and four other cities in Finland. Pop-Up Magazine’s example has also been followed in Europe by many other media or freelancer groups: Live Magazine in France & Belgium, Diario Vivo in Spain, and Zetland in Denmark have been producing live journalism for years.

You are reading—to our best knowledge—the world’s first handbook of live journalism. It documents the experiences and insights of the Black Box working group over a period of six years, as well as the final results of our academic research project. The Helsingin Sanomat Foundation financed our



research project, The Power of Live Journalism, which began in 2019 and explored the strengths and application possibilities of live journalism.

In addition to the Black Box working group, PhD researcher Anna Eveliina Hänninen from the University of Tampere, PhD researcher Juho Ruotsalainen from the Finland Futures Research Center of the University of Turku, and Professor Mikko Villi from the University of Jyväskylä have also participated in the project. During this three-year project, we greatly enjoyed the dialogue between practical journalistic work and academic research.

The project aimed to not only conduct groundbreaking basic research on a new journalistic phenomenon but also create an international network for those interested in live journalism. In May 2022, we organized the first-ever live journalism conference in Helsinki, bringing together about 50 journalists, researchers, and media professionals from all over Europe, US, and Canada. Insights were shared by the producers of all major live journalism productions, such as Pop-Up Magazine, Live Magazine, Diario Vivo, and DoR Live from Romania. More information on the network is available at [livejournalism.fi](https://livejournalism.fi).

Through this handbook, we hope to shine a light both on the practical production process of a live journalism show and on the academic research perspectives involved in this new phenomenon. We hope to offer the necessary tools and background information for anyone wanting to experiment with live journalism or to further investigate the phenomenon.

For the inspiring interactions, for the curiosity offered toward each other's work, and for the invaluable contributions to the handbook, I warmly thank the members of our research group.

I also extend my thanks to the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation, which financed our project, and to the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper, which offered us the opportunity to look into the Black Box as a case study.

Long live live journalism!

▼ Black Box 17 was performed at the Finnish National Theater in April 2022. Five of the authors of this handbook are in the picture: In the back row Kaisa Osola (first from left) and Riikka Haikarainen (second from left) and in the front row Esa Lilja (first from left), Tuomas Kaseva (second from left), and Jaakko Lyytinen (third from right). Photograph: Rio Gandara / HS



## 1.1

# THE POWER OF LIVE JOURNALISM FROM THE AUDIENCE'S POINT OF VIEW

An extensive survey we conducted on the audience of the Black Box show revealed that live performances conducted in shared spaces create a unique experience impossible to replicate by watching screens. For most of the audience, watching a journalist narrate their story increases its credibility, and they regard it central to the concept of the Black Box that the journalist has a personal connection to their story.

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Anna Eveliina Hänninen

Helsingin Sanomat's Black Box show is like a newspaper turned into a live performance. During a show, eight journalists walk into the stage before a live audience, proceeding to narrate a previously unpublished journalistic true story.

Like in a magazine, the topics covered are diverse—from foreign news and politics to culture and lifestyle. The narration is complemented by still images, videos, and animations—projected onto a screen behind the speaker—and, sometimes, even music. One production is performed, approximately, 10 times, both on the big stage of the Finnish National Theater, Helsinki, and on tour in four other Finnish cities (as of 2022). Currently, the Black Box show offers new content twice a year: in autumn and spring.

In fall 2019, we wanted to document and study the experiences of the Black Box audience on live journalism, so we requested them to fill in a questionnaire either during the show's intermission or afterwards (n=510). With viewers who had attended either one or more shows, we conducted semi-structured interviews (n=17).

The data revealed to us what the audience values in live journalism, what they pay attention to, and what impairs their experience.

Among the respondents, women formed the majority (73%); the average age was almost 50 years, with the youngest being 13 and the oldest 85, and 60% of them were new to the show.

### During the show, you give your full attention to journalism

For the audience, the essential aspect of the Black Box show was the opportunity for them to experience the show with the performers in the same physical space. Sharing a common space awakened a sense of togetherness in the audience: they found joy in the fact that they were also among others who wanted to experience high quality journalism. While some interviewees could com-





pletely mentally exclude their fellow viewers during the performance, some of them purposefully observed, for example, the reactions of older viewers.

*I experienced a strong empowering, even thrilling feeling that there are still people who believe in the right things, for example facts, journalism, and the search for truth. It's a powerful experience also in the sense that I feel like I am among my own people.*

**[Female, 47 years]**

Where the show was held, a theater space, was considered apt, as the audience found it conducive to fully concentrate on the show; the show was perceived to be an all-encompassing experience, one offering a special opportunity to consume journalism without distractions—a much-needed experience for the respondents who otherwise consumed journalism in short bursts and saddled with distractions.

For many respondents, there was a feeling of intimacy and being present in the live performance, one that cannot be experienced through screens. Such an atmosphere was important in forming a connection between the audience and the performers<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, compared to a broadcast viewed on a screen, watching journalists narrate their stories in a theater space made for a more powerful and personal experience.

*The show happens in front of you, it's not a recording, and it can't be re-experienced. There's sense of festivity that comes from the theater environment and the audience.*

**[Female, 26 years old]**

▲ In November 2021, Annikka Mutanen spoke about why Finnish sports coaching follows a model that does not bring any success.  
Photograph: Jukka Grondahl / HS

<sup>1</sup> Hänninen, A. E. (unpublished). The Rise of the Talking Journalist - Human Voice, Engagement and Trust in the Live Journalism Performance.


The impact of the show's structure on the viewing experience was also highlighted, with the respondents praising the production for effectively invoking emotions and handling their intensity through the order of the speeches (for instance, the evening climaxed on a note of optimism with an upbeat, feel-good speech).

### A connection is formed when a person talks to another person

The audience paid a lot of attention to the performers' emotional state and liveliness. A performer's speech and performance should feel authentic. If their way of speaking felt too generic, as if they were reading from notes, it killed authenticity. Despite the audience knowing that the show was scripted, that the performers were all well-rehearsed, the respondents revealed that they wanted the show to kindle and maintain the illusion of a camp-fire-like moment, one where a speaker spontaneously narrates a story. Evidently, a contradiction seeps into the audience's expectations: they simultaneously desire speeches that are smooth and articulate but also that are not too rehearsed<sup>2</sup>.

The audience's perception of a speech's authenticity was linked to a performer's perceived reliability. Watching and hearing a journalist speak furthered the credibility of their material. However, for some respondents, the journalists' live presence did not influence reliability; rather, it brought more interest, humanity, and emotion to the presentation.


- 2 Hänninen, A. E. (unpublished). The Rise of the Talking Journalist - Human Voice, Engagement and Trust in the Live Journalism Performance.



*Many performers put their souls into the speeches: you can sense the person, hear the tone of voice and see from the face when [the speaker] feels something. That is something that matters. You cannot experience that when reading a print or online article.*

**[Female, 31 years]**

Watching and hearing a journalist also brought them closer to the audience. While speaking, the journalists were perceived as being true to their own personalities, as ordinary people who were not hiding behind their professional role. Moreover, they were perceived as equals and not so much as stars, although some respondents did mention being fans of a particular journalist. To immerse yourself in a story, the respondents considered it vital that the journalist does not speak down to them but relates to them as an equal.



*The most rewarding thing is that an ordinary person is talking to an ordinary person. It's nice to see reporters who normally are sort of distant stars. When reading the newspaper, you wonder what kind of person he or she is. Here you can see that they are just ordinary folks. I think that's good.*

**[Male, 64 years]**

### The journalists' passion is transmitted to the audience

For the audience, it is key that the journalist has some kind of personal connection to their material. As revealed by the respondents, they wanted the journalists to speak with enthusiasm, passion, and motivation, and such passion could be evident in the performers' voice and gestures<sup>3</sup>. A skilled and enthusiastic speaker can make an interesting presentation out of a dull topic. In contrast, if the performer did not seem interested, it was difficult for the audience to muster the motivation to listen. Moreover, a journalist who

- 3 Hänninen, A. E. (unpublished). The Rise of the Talking Journalist - Human Voice, Engagement and Trust in the Live Journalism Performance.



spoke live brought the audience closer not only to themselves but also to the topic. However, it was highlighted that performance anxiety might falsely create an impression that a performer is inauthentic or unmotivated.

When it came to a journalist sharing the details of their life in a speech, the respondents were divided in their opinions. In general, that the journalist had a personal connection with their material was considered a factor that spiked audience interest—according to some, it also increased the credibility of the material. A journalist sharing details of their private life was considered brave and their presentation impressive. However, some of the respondents felt uncomfortable, almost as if they were eavesdroppers, when a journalist discussed extremely personal things.

Moreover, the respondents considered it essential that the journalists have accumulated significant knowledge about the topic of their speech through their work. Only then could they be considered experts on their topics.

The behind-the-scenes information provided by the journalists was very much liked. The audience was interested in knowing about the ideation of the story, the interviews that did not end up in the paper, and the stages the journalist went through during data collection. Offering such transparency to the editorial process was felt to increase credibility and bring journalists closer to the audience. Moreover, the respondents felt that a show like Black Box offers journalists more freedom to express their opinions and share background information than a newspaper story.

▼ Katarina Baer, who appeared in the spring of the 2016 Black Box show, discussed her grandmother's Nazi past in her speech.  
Photograph: Sami Kero / HS







## Quality journalism at the center of the experience

The audience appreciated the carefully planned execution of the show, including the visuals and the guest performers. At the same time, it was emphasized that the key element of the Black Box is high quality journalistic content. The respondents appreciated the fact that the Black Box audience was the first to experience something exclusive, such as seeing an animation created just for the show.

The audience did not want to know the topics and performers in advance. For many of them, the element of surprise was rewarding: the show gave them the opportunity to get excited about topics they had not considered interesting at all beforehand. Some of them even refused the hand-out program before the show, so as not to spoil their surprise and to prevent their own possible prejudices from immersing themselves in the show.

*There is no room for doing anything else here. While watching the TV news, you can look at your phone, [but] this forces you, like in the movies, to sit and be present in what is happening. It's awesome that it forces you to listen to a topic you're not interested in.*

**[Male, 29 years old]**

The audience appreciated the background information about familiar news events but also fresh information about topics that were new to them. Some of them highlighted that they were usually 'prisoners of their own preferences' when consuming journalism. Several respondents liked the fact that live journalism forces them to listen to speeches about topics for-


▲ During the pandemic, the use of face masks in theaters became more common.

Photograph: Rio Gandara / HS



eign to them, topics they would not otherwise read. One person specifically came to the show to learn about things that did not interest him, and thanks to the show, he could better participate in the discussions about these topics.

Because the topics of the show are not revealed beforehand, the audience purchases tickets for the show without knowing any of its content. According to the respondents, this seemed to work because having the HS newspaper as the producer offered them confidence about the quality of the show, the credibility of its speakers, and the relevance of its content.



*There's an opportunity to be exposed to a wide range of themes, even on topics that you would otherwise ignore and which, surprisingly, are perhaps the most interesting things of the evening.*

**[Female, 32 years old]**

## 1.2

# WHY DO JOURNALISTS GET EXCITED ABOUT THE NEW PHENOMENON?


For journalists, live shows offer evidence that the public has not abandoned journalism, that their work still matters. According to the journalists interviewed for the study, direct contact with the public can increase the transparency of journalism. It also helps journalists develop visually ambitious feature stories where they can mix ambitious reporting and subjective observations.

Esa Lilja

During the last six years, HS journalists have embraced live journalism and developed their own live storytelling style. Of the approximately three hundred journalists in the newsroom, as of 2022, about one hundred of them have already performed in the Black Box shows. The participants have come from all editorial departments and age groups (from young newcomers to the most senior staff), and have included staff writers, photographers, data journalists, a journalist-proofreader, editors, and even the senior editor-in-chief. The production process of the show also involves many graphic designers, photo editors, and videographers. The shows, it is fair to say, run on the joint effort of the entire newsroom.

The Black Box enjoys a good reputation among the HS staff and attracts plenty of eager participants. As revealed by the staff surveys, the Black Box is considered a bold new experiment, a welcome change in the routine of everyday editorial work, one that allows solitary writers to become part of a dedicated and enthusiastic ensemble. The high level of ambition involved in making the show—for instance, the numerous rounds of editing and rehearsals—is also perceived as ensuring journalistic accuracy and high quality to the stories.

However, when the journalists of the 130-year-old newspaper company first heard about live journalism—the idea that they would appear on the Finnish National Theater stage and present their story—some of them were extremely critical of it:



*First of all, I thought that I don't do this Black Box thing, that I don't need it.*

*When I first heard about this project, I was really skeptical. I thought that it was another trick to try to save this industry, which was on the brink of destruction, and I didn't believe in it at all.*



*When I went to see it for the first time, I was surprised that it actually works. Because I was doubtful; it sounded like a bad idea.*

These are excerpts from the interviews conducted for a Master's thesis<sup>4</sup> that studied the HS staff writers' experiences with live journalism. The interviews were conducted between March and April 2020 with eight journalists who had been performing in the Black Box shows, all of them staff writers with extensive experience. The average age of the interviewees was 51 years, and the four men and four women represented different editorial units of HS and various ways of journalistic thinking and writing; their beats extended from domestic and foreign news to culture, lifestyle, and feature writing. At the time of the interview, everyone's experience of Black Box was relatively recent.

Eight semi-structured thematic interviews were studied using a thematic analysis, aiming to analyze the live journalists' relationship to the audience. The study then looked into how the journalists achieved a balance between subjective interpretations, the use of emotions, and journalism's more traditional task of conveying information while emphasizing objectivity.

Another Master's thesis<sup>5</sup> was also published based on the same interview data, analyzing the ways in which live journalists seek to increase audience engagement and how these methods could be used more widely in journalism. In the research interviews, the performers talked almost exclusively about the positive aspects of live journalism—the new genre gave faith and new ideas to their everyday work, opened the door to a completely new kind of relationship with the audience, and seemed to increase the trust between journalists and the public.

In this chapter, the perceived positive gains of live journalism to the HS newsroom are summarized in the form of four main findings.


4 Lilja, E. (2020). [Toimittajat parrasvalaissa – Helsingin Sanomien Mustalaatikko -esiintyjien kokemuksia livejournalismista](#). Jyväskylän yliopisto.

5 Vilén, T. (2020). [Livejournalistit lavalla: journalismin uudet keinot yleisön sitouttamiseen](#). Helsingin yliopisto.

▼ In the fall of 2021, Anni Pasanen spoke about the world's most popular intoxicant, caffeine, which she also brought to the stage as a powder in a bag.  
Photograph: Kalle Koponen / HS



## 1. "Restoration of faith in journalism"




*For me, at least, there was a restoration of faith in this job. My faith in this field is tested from time to time. — I've often wondered if anyone reads my stuff. .like hello, is there anybody out there? — So, suddenly, the crowd is going crazy about my topic, which I thought no one was interested in.*

Several respondents reflected on restoring faith in journalism but everybody in slightly different words. The experience of performing live journalism made many seasoned journalists realize concretely that, after many difficult years in the media industry, their work remained in strong demand and was valued. This encouraging experience of live journalism left a lasting memory.

The public, which was thought to have abandoned journalism at some point, was still willing to listen and learn. Furthermore, no magic tricks were needed to attract the audience—an interesting subject and smooth storytelling were enough to keep them interested. The live audience seemed to be active and societally aware and did not shy away from difficult or even “boring” topics.

The enthusiastic reception of live journalism made the performing journalists think about the importance of everyday journalistic work in a new way. In live journalism, the size of the audience is relatively small: a journalist can reach some hundreds of listeners at a time, and perhaps a few thousand people over the course of the production. A standard online or print story of HS, on the other hand, might have hundreds of thousands of readers. Moreover, the feedback from the live audience made the journalists think concretely about the scale of the audience they could still reach, and it highlighted the importance of an institution like HS in Finnish society.

## 2. The antidote to social media content



*Through social media or because of certain loud voices, there's been this perception that we're hated, that we're scumbags... in a way it [Black Box] brought about a positive understanding that, hey, those people really want to listen to this stuff and they don't think we're complete idiots. They gave us a chance. — That's how it changed my perception that I now think that there actually are many people who have a positive and receptive attitude toward us and that their first reaction toward journalists can be a positive one.*

The negative pressure regarding journalistic work emerging from social media and the avalanche of critical comments are unfortunately familiar to journalists all over the world. According to some studies, journalists are, due to fear of criticism, tired of writing about topics that can cause a stir, indicating that they may already be too risk-averse in their work<sup>6</sup>.

In this context, live journalism can offer an alternative: a good-natured public forum where journalists and the audience can face each other and exchange opinions. The interviewees felt that through live journalism they could handle even difficult topics in such a way that the audience treated them with curiosity and without getting offended or starting a dispute. If they received criticism, it was appropriate, and it meant that the audience was seeking a dialogue with them. Moreover, the interviewees felt that such direct encounters between the public and journalists can increase the transparency of journalism, reduce the amount of angry feedback, increase under-

6 Pöyhntäri, R., Haara, P., & Raittila, P. (2013). *Vihapuhe sananvapautta kaventamassa*. Tampere: Tampere University Press.



standing and trust between the public and journalists, and humanize the distant newspaper, the “HS institution.”

HS's live journalists also considered that discussing the journalistic process is an underused resource in journalism. Catherine Adams<sup>7</sup>, who investigated the importance of transparency in international live journalism productions, made a similar observation. According to Adams, many members of the audience considered it important that live journalism allowed them to look into the process of journalism and what happened behind the scenes. When journalists discussed their working methods and journalistic thinking, it made it easier for the public to better understand how journalism worked, which was perceived to increase the transparency of editorial work.

In live journalism, a journalist can take their audience behind the scenes in many different ways: they can open up about the process of their work or talk about the difficulties they encountered during reporting, the choices they made along the way, the possible shortcomings of the final story, or perhaps the ethical questions related to the story.

### 3. Humility in front of the public and in today's media landscape



*You have to make yourself useful to that audience.*

*We have to win over those people and their interest.*

Doing live journalism, the interviews revealed, can help journalists understand how important it is for journalism to reach its audience and really capture their attention. As journalism faces an increasingly brutal competition with all forms of on-demand entertainment for the public's time, it is the relevance, topicality, and comprehensibility of journalism that grow to be even more important. This made some interviewees feel humble.

Behind the humility was the fear that, without hard work, the audience might be lost forever. Regardless of the quality of the content, the public may not find their way to journalism or consider journalism irrelevant. In this struggle, a new form of journalism like live journalism can play a significant role: it allows for experimentation and can act as a laboratory from which new narrative ideas can perhaps be transferred to other formats and channels, like immersive digital stories, videos, podcasts, or social media posts.

Some interviewees felt that, at its best, the whole of the live journalistic presentation—text, speech, visuals, music, and the direct contact with the audience—helped them reach the core of the topic and present it really well, a feeling considered rare in a journalist's work. One interviewee even compared the work process of live journalism to writing a book. Through live journalism, he felt that he was able to thoroughly and efficiently report on a huge and “shapeless” topic.

Some of the interviewees were left to wonder how they could fully utilize the same potential of storytelling in their everyday work as well. Live journalism made them think, for example, about utilizing all the possibilities of online reporting. The differences between online publishing and live journalism presented in the theater may seem big at first, but there are actually similarities. In the same way as the theater stage, a web article offers the possibility of the full use of sound, image, and video—in other words, for highly immersive storytelling.

Some of the interviewees felt that they had also learned valuable lessons that they could apply in their everyday work. According to one interviewee, after his live journalism experience, he saw writing in a slightly new light,

7 Adams, C. (2020). [Putting news on stage: Bringing journalism back to the theater as a public space](#). NiemanLab. (Haettu 15.1.2020)



having learned new storytelling skills, and realized that he needed to use those skills in his everyday work as well. For instance, he attempted the Black Box practice method of speaking his writing out loud, even when writing his everyday stories.

Following the production process of the Black Box, all the speeches were carefully thought-out, written, and edited many times. According to Van Krieken<sup>8</sup>, whether the distribution channel is a newspaper, a mobile phone screen, or a theater stage, journalism strives for more and more compelling and immersive storytelling.

#### 4. Thorough editing combines subjectivity and objectivity

*We have always known how to dig out facts and probably still do. But how to form a story, based on those facts, that can be presented in such a way that the public is interested and wants to hear it, that's a kind of learning process brought about by the changing media landscape. And for that the Black Box offers a concrete lesson.*

While producing live journalism, the journalists felt that they were constantly balancing emotionality, storytelling, subjectivity, and objectivity. The interviewees who performed definitely felt that live journalism must be as fact-based as all other journalism is. At the same time, however, they realized that narrative storytelling and the use of emotions made journalism relatable, especially in a live setting. The stage show was perceived as pretty merciless for the performer: from the very first sentence, the speech had to be engaging, immersive, and meaningful. One could easily gauge the audience's interest—or the lack of it!—on the stage.

▲ The performers of Black Box 17 waiting for their turn to perform on the back stage of the Finnish National Theater in the spring of 2022.  
Photograph: Rio Gandara / HS

8 Van Krieken, K. (2018). [Multimedia Storytelling in Journalism: Exploring Narrative Techniques in Snow Fall](#). Information, 9(5).



The interviewees considered the overuse of emotions in journalism to be a generally negative phenomenon: according to them, “subjectivity porn” was practiced too much in journalism, and it was seen as annoying. Still, emotions were considered to play an important role in live journalism. The theater as a physical space made the audience expect emotions and experiences. However, emotions such as laughter or affection were used with consideration in the speeches.

The interviewees also felt that a certain kind of subjectivity was functional and necessary in live journalism. The performer should discuss their findings with enthusiasm and sincerity, but also in such a way that they had a personal attachment to the story—a combination that resulted in powerful storytelling.

Writing a journalistic true story that appeals to emotions, is based on truth, and includes the personality of the writer is not easy. The spoken script must be simpler than a story text for reading, but still, live journalism must fulfill the same requirements for being truthful as traditional journalism. However, the facts themselves are not enough. They must be made interesting with personality, narrative storytelling, and the appropriate use of emotions.

When faced with such pressures, the ambitious production process of the Black Box proved to be helpful. According to many of the journalists, the presented speeches were more polished and thought-through than almost any journalistic story they had produced during their career. The quality stemmed from the entire production process of the Black Box: from topic selection, text editing, and rehearsing based on the feedback given by colleagues. The difference of such stories compared to fast-paced, daily news reporting was considered significant. Before publication, an “ordinary” story passes through perhaps only one round of quick editing. In contrast, the production of a live journalism story takes several weeks, with the story being edited several times, its angle and reporting choices carefully examined, and even its small details, such as diction, critically dissected.

▼ Jussi Lehmusvesi's speech in the spring of 2022 dealt with Finnish provincial songs and what today's song of Helsinki would be like. Photograph: Rio Gandara / HS



## 1.3

# LIVE JOURNALISM AND THE "AUDIENCE TURN"—WHY DO WE NEED LIVE JOURNALISM RIGHT NOW?

From the perspective of media research, live journalism is an example of journalism's "audience turn." Live journalism is an example of audience-oriented journalism that is not based on data collected about the audience but rather on a direct connection between the members of audience and the journalist. The Black Box show can be seen as a pioneer in two genres that are interesting for the future of journalism: it represents both reciprocal and "eudaimonic" journalism that tries to create experiences of meaningfulness through journalism.

Juho Ruotsalainen & Mikko Villi

In a live journalism show, journalists, driven by their personal interest, tell the audience news stories as themselves. Their physical presence, voice, and the affective, even intimate, interaction between them and their audience create an immersive experience that is difficult to replicate in text-based journalism<sup>9</sup>.

The journalists' informal, conversational, and subjective ways of speaking on stage support the in-depth reflection and meaningfulness of news content<sup>10</sup>. In accordance with the ideals of journalism, the subjectivity of live journalism is not so much about presenting one's own opinions as helping individuals understand the world beyond their individual, even private realities<sup>11</sup>. In live journalism, the audience experiences news topics through the journalist's mediating subjectivity<sup>12</sup>.

With the direct interaction between the reporter and the audience, live journalism positions itself as part of the so-called audience turn of journalism<sup>13</sup>. If, in the past, journalists kept a distance from their audiences in the name of journalistic autonomy, now many journalists, on the contrary, consider journalism first and foremost a service to their audience and their information needs<sup>14</sup>.

The audience turn means a move toward small audiences, as journalism is increasingly produced for paying subscribers and consumer groups formed with the help of data analytics<sup>15</sup>. Journalism is also pushed to con-

- 9 Lilja, E. (2020). [Toimittajat parrasvaloisissa – Helsingin Sanomien Musta laatikko -esiintyjien kokemuksia livejournalismista](#). Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.
- 10 Vodanovic, L. (2022). [Aesthetic Experience, News Content, and Critique in Live Journalism Events](#). *Journalism Practice*, 16(1), 161–177.
- 11 Steensen, S. (2017). Subjectivity as a Journalistic Ideal. In Fonn, B.K., Hornmoen, H., and Hyde-Clarke, N. (eds.), *Putting a Face on It: Individual Expose and Subjectivity in Journalism* (pp. 25–47). Oslo: Cappelen Damm Academic Press.
- 12 Chalaby, J.K. (1996). [Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention](#). *European Journal of Communication*, 11(3), 303–326.
- 13 Costera Meijer, I. (2020). [Understanding the Audience Turn in Journalism: From Quality Discourse to Innovation Discourse as Anchoring Practices 1995–2020](#). *Journalism Studies*, 21(16), 2326–2342.
- 14 Costera Meijer, I. (2020). [Understanding the Audience Turn in Journalism: From Quality Discourse to Innovation Discourse as Anchoring Practices 1995–2020](#). *Journalism Studies*, 21(16), 2326–2342.
- 15 Nelson, J. L. (2021). [The next media regime: The pursuit of 'audience engagement' in journalism](#). *Journalism*, 22(9), 2350–2367.



centrate on the public by the culture of online communications, which favors mutual interaction between journalists and the public instead of faceless and hierarchical information transmission. In such a culture, it is thought that the trust in journalism expressed by audiences ultimately guarantees the relevance of journalism<sup>16</sup>.

The competition for the audience's attention in the digital content stream directs the news media to engage with their audiences<sup>17</sup>. Audience engagement is often understood as a quantitative and measurable phenomenon, such as the number of times a story is opened or clicked on. Engagement, however, at its core, is a qualitative phenomenon that refers to the affective and cognitive experiences evoked by news content and the actions that may follow from these experiences<sup>18</sup>.

As a non-digital narrative form based on physical encounters, live journalism is an interesting phenomenon in the audience turn. Live journalism can highlight opportunities related to audiences that digital platforms cannot offer. For example, according to the journalists interviewed by Belair-Gagnon et al.<sup>19</sup>, engaging audiences in an online environment often aims to increase profits or other instrumental benefits. In contrast, face-to-face engagement in a live situation helps build long-lasting and reciprocal relationships between journalists and their audience<sup>20</sup>. Live journalism thus facilitates the creation of audience-oriented journalism, which is at least not directly based on audience analytics and the operating mechanisms of digital platforms.

The audience turn in journalism therefore also means a stronger and more widely accepted position of emotions than before<sup>21</sup>. As a genre that emphasizes the experience of audiences (and journalists)<sup>22</sup>, live journalism

- 16 Ferrucci, P. (2017). [Exploring Public Service Journalism: Digitally Native News Nonprofits and Engagement](#). *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 94(1), 355–370.
- 17 Steensen, S., Ferrer-Conill, R. & Peters, C. (2020). [\[Against a\] Theory of Audience Engagement with News](#). *Journalism Studies*, 21(12), 1662–1680.
- 18 Broersma, M. (2019). [Audience Engagement](#). *The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*, 1–6.  
  
Steensen, S., Ferrer-Conill, R. & Peters, C. (2020). [\[Against a\] Theory of Audience Engagement with News](#). *Journalism Studies*, 21(12), 1662–1680.
- 19 Belair-Gagnon, V., Nelson, J.L., & Lewis, S.C. (2019). [Audience Engagement, Reciprocity, and the Pursuit of Community Connectedness in Public Media Journalism](#). *Journalism Practice*, 13(5), 558–575.
- 20 Ferrucci, P., Nelson, J.L., & Davis, M.P. (2020). [From "Public Journalism" to "Engaged Journalism": Imagined Audiences and Denigrating Discourse](#). *International Journal of Communication*, 14, 1586–1604.
- 21 Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2020). [An Emotional Turn in Journalism Studies?](#) *Digital Journalism*, 8(2), 175–194.
- 22 Vodanovic, L. (2022). [Aesthetic Experience, News Content, and Critique in Live Journalism Events](#). *Journalism Practice*, 16(1), 161–177.



◀ In autumn 2019, Suvi Ahola spoke about how esoteric features have been implemented and applied in the Finnish art scene.  
Photograph: Aku Isotalo / HS

provokes questions about the experiential relevance of journalism that have arisen especially with the audience turn<sup>23</sup>.

## The Black Box show as a pioneer of reciprocal and eudaimonic journalism

As the relationship between journalists and their audience grows closer than before, the ritualistic dimensions of journalism grow in relevance. This term refers to the notion that the task of journalism is not only to convey information but to build shared meanings and construct a shared social reality<sup>24</sup>. From a ritualistic point of view, live journalism represents two developments and possible futures of journalism: reciprocal journalism<sup>25</sup> and eudaimonic journalism<sup>26</sup>.

In reciprocal journalism, the relationship between journalists and their audience is based on mutual interests and the mutual exchange of “gifts”<sup>27</sup>. Journalists can obtain, for example, useful information and insights from their audience, such as perspectives or story tips on topics important to the communities the audience belongs to. The members of the public, on the other hand, get to participate in the journalistic process and in the community formed through the interaction of the journalists and audience<sup>28</sup>.

In live journalism, the immediate “gift” the journalists receive from the audience is their affective, often enthusiastic reception and the resulting professional and personal experience of success<sup>29</sup>. The journalists, interviewed by Esa Lilja<sup>30</sup>, who appeared in the Black Box show, describe the relationship with the theater audience as “exceptionally intense”—it cannot be compared to other forms of journalism (see subsection 1.2 for more details). A journalist interviewed by Lilja<sup>31</sup> described the relationship with the live audience as “the sharing of the same feeling [which is] a really great experience.” Live journalism is thus an experiential and affective form not only for the audience but also for the journalists themselves<sup>32</sup>.

So, what is the gift the audience receives, besides the performance itself? According to Anita Badejo, the producer of the Pop-Up Magazine show in the US, the most important element of live journalism is surprise—the shows must offer the audience something new, something that makes them think about the world and people in new ways<sup>33</sup>.

In our research project, The Power of Live Journalism, we analyzed the scripts of the 2019 spring and autumn Black Box speeches (N = 16) to study the actual content—“the gift”—of the performances. Qualitatively analyzing the manuscripts, we tried to understand how the journalistic texts of the Black Box convey their meaning. In the first stage of the analysis, the content of the manuscripts was divided into thematic categories, such as “time,” “nature,” or “creative individual.” In the second phase of the analysis, the categories that emerged from the data were placed in the typology of meaningful media experiences presented in a previous study<sup>34</sup>.

Based on the script analysis, the features typical of meaningful media experiences were found to be also present in the stories of the Black Box. These stories make the viewer ponder big questions: What does the future of the Finnish forest industry look like? How can you live a meaningful old age without your own children? What values and practices is the Finnish sports coaching based on?

It is difficult to define the emotional register of the stories in one word: it ranges from joy to sadness and from high to low. Live journalism can therefore involve the viewer with new and unknown topics and related complex emotions. The journalists who appeared in the Black Box show describe a wide and versatile range of emotions that the stories arouse in the audience,

- 23 Beckett, C. & Deuze, M. (2016). [On the Role of Emotion in the Future of Journalism](#). *Social Media + Society*, July–September 2016, 1–6.
- Steensen, S., Ferrer-Conill, R. & Peters, C. (2020). [\[Against a\] Theory of Audience Engagement with News](#). *Journalism Studies*, 21(12), 1662–1680.
- 24 Carey, J. W. (ed.) (1989). *Communication as Culture. Essays on Media and Society*. New York: Routledge.
- 25 Lewis, S. C., Holton, A.E. and Coddington, M. (2014). [Reciprocal Journalism: A Concept of Mutual Exchange Between Journalists and Audiences](#). *Journalism Practice*, 8(2), 229–241.
- 26 Ruotsalainen, J. & Villi, M. (2021). [‘A shared reality between a journalist and the audience’: How live journalism reimagines news stories](#). *Media and Communication*, 9(2), 167–177.
- 27 Lewis, S. C., Holton, A.E. and Coddington, M. (2014). [Reciprocal Journalism: A Concept of Mutual Exchange Between Journalists and Audiences](#). *Journalism Practice*, 8(2), 229–241.
- 28 Kligler-Vilenchik, N., & Tenenboim, O. (2020). [Sustained journalist-audience reciprocity in a meso news-space: The case of a journalistic WhatsApp group](#). *New Media & Society*, 22(2), 264–282.
- Malmelin, N., & Villi, M. (2016). [Audience Community as a Strategic Resource in Media Work](#). *Journalism*
- 29 Lilja, E. (2020). [Toimittajat parrasvaloissa – Helsingin Sanomien Musta laatikko -esiintyjien kokemuksia livejournalismista](#). University of Jyväskylä.
- 30 Lilja, E. (2020). [Toimittajat parrasvaloissa – Helsingin Sanomien Musta laatikko -esiintyjien kokemuksia livejournalismista](#). University of Jyväskylä, 38.
- 31 Lilja, E. (2020). [Toimittajat parrasvaloissa – Helsingin Sanomien Musta laatikko -esiintyjien kokemuksia livejournalismista](#). University of Jyväskylä, 38.
- 32 Lindén, C.-G., Lehtisaari, K., Grönlund, M., & Villi, M. (2021). [Journalistic Passion as Commodity: A Managerial Perspective](#). *Journalism Studies*, 22(12), 1701–1719.
- 33 Lyytinen, J. (2020). [Pulling back the curtain: How live journalism is re-engaging news audiences](#) (Journalist Fellowship Paper). Oxford: Reuters Institute.
- 34 Oliver, M. B., Raney, A. A., Slater, M. D., Appel, M., Hartmann, T., Bartsch, A., . . . Das, E. (2018). [Self-transcendent media experiences: Taking meaningful media to a higher level](#). *Journal of Communication*, 68(2), 380–389.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). [Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being](#). *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.





▼ Suvi Vihavainen performed in the Black Box in the spring of 2020, when the pandemic closed the theaters after just one performance. Photograph: Jukka Gröndahl / HS

such as laughter, movement, astonishment, confusion, and enthusiasm<sup>35</sup>. The expression of feelings is restrained and kept together by the journalist's often laconic delivery and dry humor.

Fundamentally, however, the gift of live journalism to the public can be defined as a change of thinking: an increased understanding of oneself, the world, "this era," and the relationship between them. The viewer breaks away from their familiar world of experience, crosses their limits, and becomes a part of the journalistic story<sup>36</sup>. According to Pop-Up Magazine's Anita Badejo, the members of the audience should leave the performance slightly different than who they were before it. The experience of change is not private—it is created together with other viewers and journalists.

Research on podcasts has also found that building shared meaning is a key motivation for listening to podcasts<sup>37</sup>. Although a podcast is not based on a shared physical presence in the same space, it is a form of journalism that, like live journalism, is based on sound and a sense of closeness and therefore closely compares to live journalism.

In recent research, meaningful, reflective, and affectively complex media experiences, like the one described above, have been analyzed as eudaimonic experiences<sup>38</sup>. The journalism of the Black Box show can also be called eudaimonic<sup>39</sup>. Eudaimonia refers to an emotional state that arises from the reflection of values, shared meanings, meaning in life, and "being human." For example, the pleasure gained from watching drama movies is eudaimonic, while the pleasure produced by entertainment can be considered hedonistic—in other words, immediate.

Journalism often deals with difficult, complex issues that go beyond the individual perspective. That is why the eudaimonic emotional register can

35 Lilja, E. (2020). [Toimittajat parrasvaloissa – Helsingin Sanomien Musta laatikko -esiintyjien kokemuksia livejournalismista](#). University of Jyväskylä, 38.

36 Barker, M. (2003). [Crash, theatre audiences, and the idea of 'liveness'](#). *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 23(1), 21–39.

Lyytinen, J. (2020). [Pulling back the curtain: How live journalism is re-engaging news audiences](#) (Journalist Fellowship Paper). Oxford: Reuters Institute.

Tenenboim, O., & Stroud, N.J. (2020). [Enacted Journalism Takes the Stage: How Audiences Respond to Reporting-Based Theater](#). *Journalism Studies*, 21(6), 713–730.

37 Chan-Olmsted, S., & Wang, R. (2020). [Understanding podcast users: Consumption motives and behaviors](#). *New Media & Society*.

38 Oliver, M. B., Raney, A. A., Slater, M. D., Appel, M., Hartmann, T., Bartsch, A., . . . Das, E. (2018). [Self-transcendent media experiences: Taking meaningful media to a higher level](#). *Journal of Communication*, 68(2), 380–389.

39 Ruotsalainen, J. & Villi, M. (2021). ['A shared reality between a journalist and the audience': How live journalism reimagines news stories](#). *Media and Communication*, 9(2), 167–177.

offer journalists a new way to bring emotions and human depth to stories. For example, Pjesivac et al.<sup>40</sup> found that, in 360° war news video stories shot from all four directions, the feeling of presence can arouse eudaimonic feelings in the viewers. The viewer's world of experience expands beyond their usual circle of life, and the interactivity enabled by a 360° video brings the tragedy of war extremely close. Together, these features can help viewers reflect on their own life and its relationship with the outside world<sup>41</sup>.

The speech scripts of the Black Box repeatedly use the elements of the eudaimonic experience described above: relationships with other people, a complex and often contradictory spectrum of emotions, “transcendence” that places the individual as part of something greater, and a sense of self-determination, independence, and ability<sup>42</sup>. In addition to topics and perspectives, eudaimonia is conveyed in the style of Black Box scripts and performances. The stories show the journalist's own enthusiasm and expertise about the topic, which also makes the topic feel more relevant.

Self-transcendent media experiences are the basis of eudaimonic media<sup>43</sup>. Conducting a script analysis of the spring and fall 2019 productions of Black Box revealed that the Black Box stories evoke transcendence in viewers in four ways<sup>44</sup>:

- 1) speeches place news events as part of extended time—i.e., the continuum of history, present, and future,
- 2) the speeches describe nature and people's relationship with nature; nature is shown in the stories as an awe-inspiring force greater than man,
- 3) the speeches reflect on life and death; they deal with the beauty of life as much as its limitations,
- 4) speeches emphasize the value of democracy and political participation; public life appears to be a secular way to overcome the limitations of private life.

Eudaimonic, meaningful experiences are internal experiences and, therefore, in addition to transcendence, they have been approached from the perspective of basic psychological needs and individual self-determination<sup>45</sup>. From the eudaimonic point of view, meaningfulness is both internal and external: on the one hand, it arises from the individual's way of realizing their own potential and, on the other, from the understanding that the individual and the surrounding world are interconnected<sup>46</sup>.

According to self-determination theory, there are three basic psychological needs and sources of internal motivation: autonomy, the feeling of independent decisions; ability, the feeling of one's own ability; and community, relationships with other people<sup>47</sup>. The descriptions of autonomous and capable individuals are also repeated in the Black Box manuscripts<sup>48</sup>. The stories present individuals with a well-developed self-understanding who reflect on their lives and the society around them, make independent decisions, and are capable in their own professional fields and hobbies. Similarly, the stories contain plenty of descriptions of warm and communal social relationships. Black Box editors create a communal feeling by repeatedly referring to themselves and the audience with the pronoun “we” or “us.” This is how they make themselves and the audience part of a shared community.

According to the self-determination theory, basic psychological needs can be satisfied by observing the self-determined features in other people and in media representations<sup>49</sup>. It can be thus assumed that the appeal of the Black Box is partly based on the descriptions of “self-determined” people (includ-

- 40 Pjesivac, I., Ahn, S. J., Briscoe, A., & Kim, S. (2020). 360° journalism and information seeking: The role of enjoyment and spatial presence. Paper presented at the 70th International Communication Association Annual Conference.
- 41 Pjesivac, I., Ahn, S. J., Briscoe, A., & Kim, S. (2020). 360° journalism and information seeking: The role of enjoyment and spatial presence. Paper presented at the 70th International Communication Association Annual Conference.
- 42 Ruotsalainen, J. & Villi, M. (2021). [‘A shared reality between a journalist and the audience’: How live journalism reimagines news stories](#). Media and Communication, 9(2), 167–177.
- 43 Oliver, M. B., Raney, A. A., Slater, M. D., Appel, M., Hartmann, T., Bartsch, A., . . . Das, E. (2018). [Self-transcendent media experiences: Taking meaningful media to a higher level](#). Journal of Communication, 68(2), 380–389.
- 44 Ruotsalainen, J. & Villi, M. (2021). [‘A shared reality between a journalist and the audience’: How live journalism reimagines news stories](#). Media and Communication, 9(2), 167–177.
- 45 Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). [Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being](#). American Psychologist, 55(1), 68–78.
- 46 Oliver, M. B., Raney, A. A., Slater, M. D., Appel, M., Hartmann, T., Bartsch, A., . . . Das, E. (2018). [Self-transcendent media experiences: Taking meaningful media to a higher level](#). Journal of Communication, 68(2), 380–389.
- 47 Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). [Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being](#). American Psychologist, 55(1), 68–78.
- 48 Ruotsalainen, J. & Villi, M. (2021). [‘A shared reality between a journalist and the audience’: How live journalism reimagines news stories](#). Media and Communication, 9(2), 167–177.
- 49 Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). [Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being](#). American Psychologist, 55(1), 68–78.



ing the journalists who appear on stage), the psychological satisfaction this produces, and the resulting eudaimonic emotional state.

Eudaimonic journalism can be considered a form of “reciprocity journalism” as well as a form of engagement. Eudaimonia is based on shared meanings, but it is also an individual, affective experience, which is a prerequisite for commitment. Eudaimonia can be understood as a way of engaging audiences, where engagement is created with stories that contain complex and conflicting emotions and reflect on the “big questions” of the present day. The stories invite audiences to reflect on their own relationships to these big questions.

In this way, eudaimonia offers an alternative to simplistic stories that appeal to basic emotions, such as joy, sadness, and anger, and that spread effectively on digital platforms<sup>50</sup>. Indeed, Steensen et al.<sup>51</sup> have considered the key dimension of audience engagement to be the journalists’ ability to connect the members of the audience to something bigger than themselves—to connect their private lives to the public and shared world of news.

50 Oliver, M. B., Raney, A. A., Slater, M. D., Appel, M., Hartmann, T., Bartsch, A., . . . Das, E. (2018). [Self-transcendent media experiences: Taking meaningful media to a higher level](#). *Journal of Communication*, 68(2), 380–389.

Pelzer, E., & Raemy, P. (2020). [What shapes the cultivation effects from infotaining content? Toward a theoretical foundation for journalism studies](#). *Journalism*.

51 Steensen, S., Ferrer-Conill, R. & Peters, C. (2020). [Against a Theory of Audience Engagement with News](#). *Journalism Studies*, 21(12), 1662–1680.

2

**HOW TO CREATE  
A HIGH-QUALITY  
LIVE JOURNALISM  
PRODUCTION?**



## 2.1

# THREE PHASES: IDEATION, SCRIPT WRITING, AND REHEARSING A SINGLE SPEECH

A speech for a live journalism show is created as a group effort where each journalist-performer develops the idea and stage adaptation of their presentation together with their producer-editor and, finally, with the entire working group. From the beginning, the production process utilizes the narrative methods of feature journalism and public speaking. In the end, a high-quality speech comes alive only by speaking—that is, by practicing! On the stage, the speaker's genuine desire to share their unique content with the audience is conveyed.

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Jaakko Lyytinen & Kaisa Osola

When we put together the first-ever Black Box shows in the spring of 2016, we did not have a handbook. We stumbled in the dark using a trial-and-error method. From the beginning, we collected feedback from both performers and viewers. Over the years, our method has been refined, and today it can be broken down into six phases: ideating the topic, reporting, script writing, editing, practicing, and performing.

Our initial goal was to find the tools and methods that would help us create a new kind of journalism—journalism that works as a spoken performance on a theater stage. Many of the methods that ended up in our toolkit are related to the fundamentals of public speaking: making the issue and topic meaningful, building the presentation with the listener in mind, limiting the amount of content, and offering clarity, illustrations, and transparency.

### Refine the topic into an idea that forms the premise of the speech

In the Black Box show, each performer works with their own producer who supports them throughout the process and also works as the text editor.

The collaboration between the performer and the producer starts with a discussion aimed to clarify the chosen topic into an idea. This is because the topic is actually just a starting point that does not necessarily reveal the direction of the journey yet. Once there's a more refined idea, it already contains “a preliminary map”—the perspective and implementation of the idea. If the topic is not thoroughly processed into an idea, this is usually reflected negatively in the final presentation.

When a journalist narrates a true story on stage, the audience looks at it differently than when they are reading a newspaper text. In live journalism, the speaker's authenticity and credibility are built in relation to the idea of the speech. Therefore, the idea of the speech should be personal. This does not necessarily mean speaking about one's own life but rather that the speaker has some kind of a relationship with their theme. One can refine this relationship with the help of a few questions: Why does this idea appeal to me as a speaker? Why do I want to talk about this particular topic? What is my expertise in the subject based on?

The second requirement for a live speech is linked to the relevance of the topic. The idea of the speech should be exclusive: It must give the listener new information about the world in a way that sticks in their minds more effectively than a written text or a TV news story. Exclusivity builds on unique content and skillful storytelling. But it also means that, in addition to personal observations and insights, the speech must have a universal and deeper level: What does this speech say about the world?

In the spring of 2019, Pekka Mykkänen, HS foreign correspondent, was coming to the Black Box to talk about the EU and Brexit, Britain's exit from the EU. Mykkänen had just returned to Helsinki after working as an EU correspondent in Brussels. We started the process with Mykkänen by considering how the subject should be tackled. In the end, the idea for the EU speech grew out of personal frustration. As a correspondent, Mykkänen had noticed that news about the EU attracted not much interest from the HS readers, at least based on news site analytics. It upset Mykkänen who called himself a passionate "EU geek."

Once the topic is refined into an idea, it must be crystallized into one main sentence that summarizes the core of the entire presentation. In the world of theater and films, we talk about the premise. In drama, the premise creates conflict or tension that keeps the story moving. The premise of Pekka Mykkänen's EU speech ended up being this: What will happen if the EU interests nobody? This main sentence offered the tension driving the speech that Mykkänen delivered with both humorous and tragic case examples. The goal of the speech was ambitious: it had to make viewers care about the EU.

### **Reporting and gathering material: Don't forget to collect souvenirs**

Once the topic is refined into an idea, the journalist's daily work begins: reporting, interviewing, searching for sources, and reading material. In live journalism, however, traditional reporting is insufficient. In addition to gathering just the facts of the speech, other levels are also needed.

The speaker has to think about the live situation. How do I convey or reveal the idea to my viewers in the most captivating way? How can I take the viewer to the actual location of the reporting? Can I tell the content more effectively using pictures, videos, graphics, or music?

Based on the feedback from the Black Box audience, viewers are not only fascinated by the topic but also by how journalists and photographers work. What happens behind the scenes of journalistic work? That is why we ask the performers of the Black Box to document their own work process in addition to their actual reporting job.

In live journalism, the aim is not to transform the journalist into a pompous expert lecturing on stage—instead, the aim is to show how journalism and journalists function. Journalists know that reporting stories usually involves surprising twists, misinterpretations, and incorrect assump-



tuimmaksi EU-direktiiviksi kutsuttu tupakkatuotedirektiivi pantii  
isti komission, parlamentin ja jäsenmaiden kolmiodraamassa lains  
ojaa. Esimerkiksi mentoli makuna kielletään siirtymäajan jälkeen v



tions. Revealing your own mistakes and shortcomings in a presentation is allowed, even desirable.

Kimmo Norokorpi, one of the founders of the Black Box, always asked the performers to collect “souvenirs”—objects, pictures, archive clips, recorded phone calls—any illustrative details of the work process. By doing so, we try to make the viewers capable of following the reporters as they dig for information and develop insights from them. In the show, the journalist can present evidence like a criminal investigator in the courtroom.

When Esa Lilja, an HS staff reporter, spoke about the new inventions of the Finnish forest industry in the Black Box, he brought a bucket of pulp with him on stage. After the performance, the audience could meet Lilja with the bucket in the lobby and finger the white wonder substance, which, today, is used as raw material for textiles, among other things.

In his EU speech, Pekka Mykkänen talked about his own frustration through a practical example. During his time as a correspondent for HS, Mykkänen had made an extensive news analysis of how the tobacco directive, claimed to be the most lobbied EU directive in history, had come about. When the long and arduous story process was finished and the analysis was published on the HS's web site HS.fi, Mykkänen waited for readers' reactions. The analytics of the site were merciless: the EU story did not attract readers even though the headline was changed many times and, in the end, even the abbreviation “EU”, rejected by readers, was removed from it.

▲ In his spring 2019 presentation, Pekka Mykkänen spoke about the EU and what will happen if no one is interested in it anymore.  
Photograph: Valtteri Heinonen / HS

## Write the script for the stage

Most journalists are used to writing news stories with a clear structure. The most important thing will be told first. The classic formula of a news text resembles a pyramid standing on its tip. What? Where? When? Why? How?—the facts are told with a neutral tone of voice. The journalist does not express their own opinions.

When people buy a ticket to a live performance, they want something more. They want to hear stories; they want to experience something deeper. That is why live journalism often uses the tools of longform and feature journalism, which are also tools for skillful public speaking: storytelling, narrative structures, intimacy, dialogue, everyday details, showing one's own observations, subjectivity, feelings, and experiences.

However, in one sense, on-stage journalism is fundamentally different from a feature text. Whereas versatile narrative tools—such as flashbacks or perspective shift by changing the narrator of the story—can be used in a feature text, the structure of a speech must be much simpler. The listener must be “held by hand”—throughout the speech, they must be able to understand where the story is going and how the current passage is related to the premise of the speech. Otherwise, they will be distracted and lost.

Pekka Mykkänen used humor in his EU presentation, a demanding and even risky method. When successful, however, humor creates a strong emotional bond in many directions: between the audience and the subject, between the audience and the speaker, and among the members of the audience. Mykkänen made his audience laugh by presenting old EU stories from the British press: Over the years, newspapers have, for example, claimed that the EU requires citizens to use one-size condoms and forces cows to use diapers. From such comical examples, Mykkänen cut directly to the serious consequences of such stories in the British newspapers: Several years of disinformation had contributed to the fact that the British eventually voted for leaving the EU in a referendum.

## The editor helps to select and limit the story

In the Black Box, as already mentioned, the producer dedicated to each speaker also acts as a text editor. Editing starts even before the first sentence is written. Already before the actual data collection and writing, the producer asks the journalist to make a draft outline of their script. During the reporting phase, the performers are asked to keep the producers informed: Did the journalist gather all the necessary information from the interviewees? Have they come across any surprises or twists that could be used to build the narrative?

Once the first version of the speech script is ready, the actual editing begins. When reading the script for the first time, even though they know the topic, the producer tries to approach it like a reader who is unfamiliar with the topic. Is the structure optimal and engaging for this topic? Is the story immersive?

With broad topics, such as Pekka Mykkänen's Brexit speech, the challenge arises from making choices and leaving out material. To make the story memorable for the audience, you must simultaneously dive to a sufficiently detailed level but also stick within the time limit. You have to carefully choose the people, scenes, and examples that can communicate your story most effectively.

Producers offer suggestions for editing both the structure and the individual sentences of the speech. They also ask the performers to already



read the draft script aloud at this stage; the producers themselves also do it to help prepare a script that is meant to be spoken and not read. If there is too much text, the editors try to figure out the parts that could be deleted.

The speeches of the Black Box are usually around 12 to 15 minutes long. This means, approximately, 8000 to 9000 characters as a text, which is long enough for depth and dynamism in a speech but short enough to maintain tension.

## **Practice, practice, practice**

When the script is ready, the active rehearsal phase begins. Running is practiced by running, drumming by playing drums, and speech by speaking. By speaking out loud, we try to create a presentation that is told and not read, even if the performers on stage hold notes with the entire speech verbatim.

The practice phase for the Black Box, which lasts for two to three weeks, includes two joint speech practices and two joint rehearsals in full presentation mode. At the theater, speeches are practiced with props, such as lighting and projected images, videos, animations, and other physical objects. However, most of the training takes place off-hours and independently. The speakers practice at home, while walking their dog, or while meeting their friends at a bar. They practice before their friends, producers, and family members; they sometimes also record themselves with their cell phones and listen to it.

Exercising has four main goals. In the beginning, it is all about the words: we try to translate all clumsy or awkward expressions into colloquial language. The producers ask the performers: Would you really say that? If not, how would you say it? At the same time, the final script is prepared.

The second goal of exercising is to refine nonverbal communication. When rehearsing the presentation before other people, one notices, for example, that the listener needs pauses around important points. In addition, a performer's confidence can be gradually built if they are able to get excited and look at their everyday (off-stage) audience in the eyes, which means that they can also do it to their (on-stage) audience during their performance.

Third, through exercising, the performer grows more fluent with the speech, allowing them to become more present in the actual live setting.

Fourth, through practicing, the performer grows more familiar with the physical performance space, its props, lighting, and so on.

Practicing also includes the ability to give and receive feedback. It is the producers' responsibility to ask: Did we say clearly enough what is good and why and what should you still be working on, how, and why? It is the performer's responsibility to answer honestly and tell what support they still need.

## **While performing, trust that hard work pays off**

When the premiere approaches, we return to the beginning. The performers are told during the first meeting that while performing, a person does not magically transform into somebody else or start acting. The most important element of the speech is the unique content and the speaker's desire to share it with their audience. In addition, unlike in everyday speaking, a slightly more active take on speaking is needed in front of a live audience, so that the speech contains enough dynamism and offers listeners enough

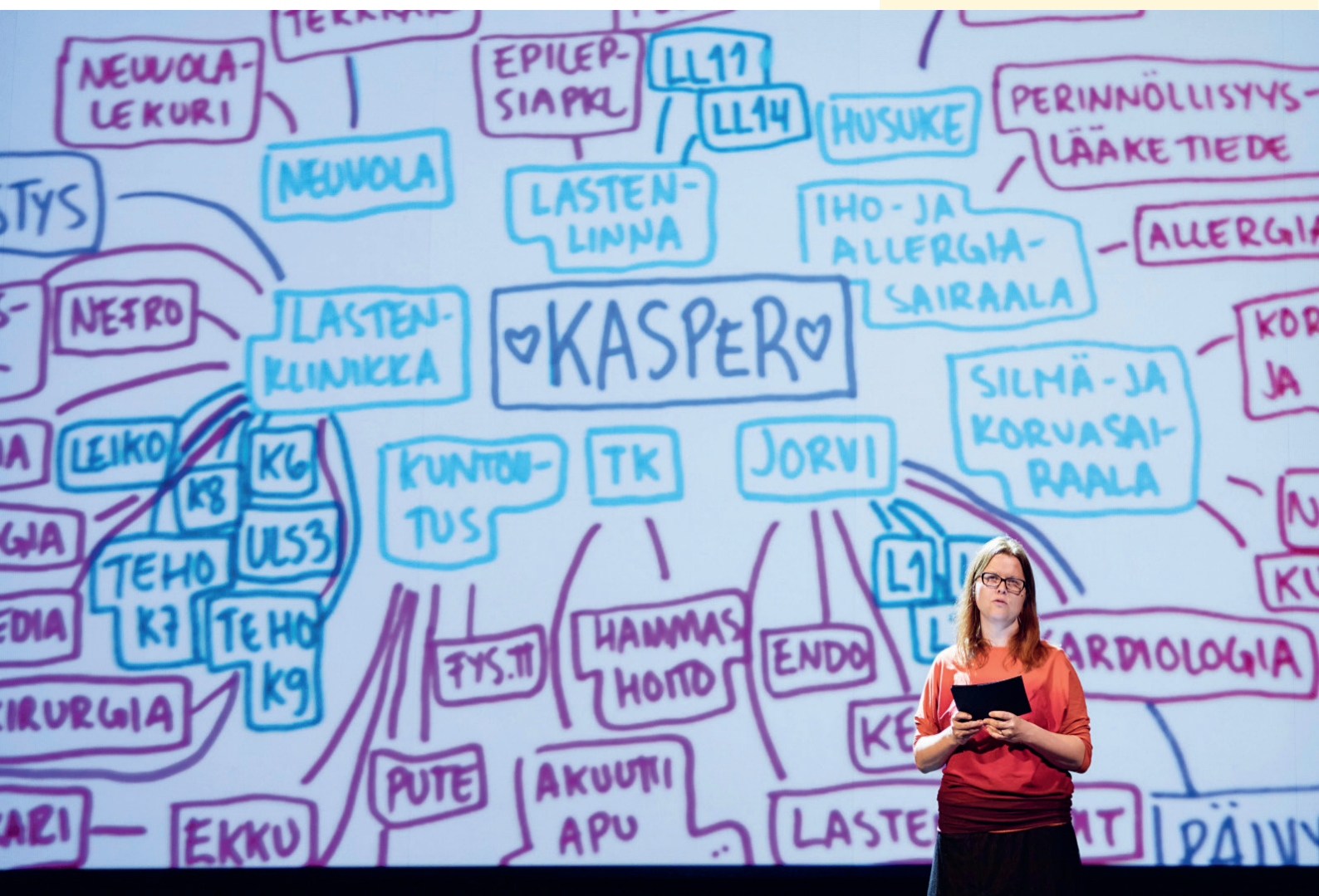
time to clearly understand the topic. When the performer does all this by themselves and trust that their listeners are interested, their speech becomes credible and interesting.

However, the performance situation is extremely exciting, and that is how it should be. During the Black Box speech training, we carefully discuss what causes performance anxiety and what can be done about it. Anxiety is a state of alertness, not a synonym for failure. The state of alertness rises in a situation where you want to succeed and where you are placed in the spotlight of attention. A certain level of alertness is needed to effectively communicate the matter to almost a thousand listeners at best. Many professional performers experience performance anxiety throughout their careers.

On performance days, the speakers come to the theater a couple of hours before the show. The speeches are delivered once or twice. In joint warm-ups led by a speech coach, the level of alertness is either leveled or raised as needed. In addition, we warm up the voice, breathe, and prepare for the fact that the performance will be unique: It is the first and last for this particular audience.

When the lights go out, it is time to trust that all the hard work will pay off. One is allowed to be anxious, even freeze, or mess up. Perfection is neither interesting nor relatable, humanity is. Also, the note cards in the performers' hands will be of much help. Before they climb up to the stage, we say this to the performers: "Stop wondering if you are interesting. Be interested. Be interested in your topic. Be interested in your listeners. It is about them. It is about giving it your all. Go Big, Your Way!"

▼ Maija Aalto's presentation in the autumn of 2017 dealt with the problems of the Finnish healthcare system. She showed a drawing that a mother of a chronically ill boy had drawn about her child's multiple care facilities. Photograph: Outi Pyhäranta / HS



## 2.2

# **PLANNING AN ALL-NIGHT PERFORMANCE: DRAMATIZATION, VISUALITY, ILLUSTRATIONS**

The dramaturgy of a live journalism show requires a variety of topics, narrative methods, and visuality. The emotional state of the audience is strongly influenced by the order of the speeches, which is often decided after the first speech rehearsal. The producers are responsible for creating variety and surprises for the stage production.

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Tuomas Kaseva & Jaakko Lyytinen

Since the beginning, the foundational idea of the Black Box has been to create a “newspaper on a theater stage.” Like a newspaper, the show covers a wide range of topics: domestic and local news, politics, economy, foreign news, culture, science, lifestyle topics, and sports. Variety is created in many other ways as well: The show needs both serious and humorous performers as well as speakers representing different ages and genders. A dynamic show might also feature a joint speech by several journalists or one presentation that takes the form of, for example, an interview.

The performers are selected from different editorial units of the HS newsroom, which has almost three hundred staff reporters. The ensemble always includes both news reporters and journalists who write longer feature stories as well as at least one photographer or another visual journalist. Since participating in the production of the Black Box demands a great deal of work time, the workload simply has to be shared between different editorial units. It is also a question of fairness: As a production of the entire newsroom, any eager HS journalist can appear at the Black Box.

### **Eight speeches with varying visuals**

During the early years of the Black Box, the show consisted of 10 speeches per night. After seven productions, the number was first reduced to nine and then to eight. The main reason was to reduce the length of the show. The whole show, we realized, should not last for more than two-and-a-half hours (with a 30-minute intermission). Moreover, we learned that a speech lasting for 12 to 13 minutes is essentially more nuanced and multidimensional than a 10-minute presentation.

The evening’s dramatic arc is constructed by ensuring that there are different performers, different topics, and different angles to them. Also crucial is to create dynamism with the visuals of the speeches: There must be





speeches during which dozens of images, videos, or animations are projected on the screen behind the speaker. At the same time, there must be at least one show with sparse visuals.

If possible, the show should aim to produce ambitious visualizations. In his speech, Kalle Silfverberg, an HS city desk reporter, spoke about urban planning for Helsinki in the 1960s. The speech was supported by a 3D video animation made by the graphic artist Uolevi Holmberg, which showed the at-the-time planned multi-lane highway that was to be built through the city center.

Sometimes, the screen can be switched to something else. When staff writers Tuomas Kaseva, Elisa Rimaila, and Teija Sutinen spoke about their grandfathers' and great-grandfathers' participation in the Finnish Civil War in 1918, we tried to transform the lack of documentary images into a strength. Instead of a screen with changing imagery, a single large photo of the speaker's grandparent or great-grandparent was placed behind each presenter for the duration of the speech.

Therefore, the overall dramaturgy must be kept in mind during the entire planning and rehearsal process. However, according to our experience, the order of the speeches for one show cannot be decided very early. In the Black Box, the speech order is usually decided after the first rehearsal, a couple of weeks before the premiere. This way, the order of presentations can be tested in rehearsals before the premiere and, often, a small change is still made—for example, the order of two performers is switched. Above all, the order of the speeches aims to achieve a varied but smooth dramaturgy that takes into account the diverse emotions and topics of the speeches.

In principle, the order of the speeches can vary a lot, but we have found a few solutions to be particularly effective. It pays off to open the evening with a somewhat news-like performance, one that offers a lot of new facts and

▲ In the spring of 2022, Heli Saavalainen talked about his son who died from drug use.  
Photograph: Rio Gandara / HS



also defines the ground rule of the Black Box for the first-timers in the audience: that the show is about journalism on stage. The first speaker should also be a skillful performer with a topic that is well-known or widely appealing.

Particular attention should be given to the emotional speeches based on the journalist's personal experiences. In the first productions of the Black Box, we placed such speeches at the end of the first half-time before the intermission or at the end of the entire performance. However, this decision received a lot of negative feedback. No one wants to leave for the intermission or go home in a strong emotional stage with tears in their eyes.

The stronger the feeling a speech arouses, the more carefully you have to think about what comes after it. In the spring of 2022, Heli Saavalainen, an HS staff writer, talked about his son's death from drug use. Saavalainen's performance was the third of the show. As producers, we pondered for a long time on which speech to place after Saavalainen's emotionally-charged performance and as the last speech of the first half-time. In the end, we chose a speech by Sonia Zaki, a data journalist, which revealed the most talkative members of the Finnish Parliament of all time. Zaki's performance was lively as well as humorous, and our solution seemed to work. Zaki's speech served as a kind of emotional flushing: After Saavalainen's extremely moving performance, the audience was able to laugh before the intermission.

### **Producers are responsible for making the most out of the theater space**

In our experience, one of the biggest challenges of live journalism is that a show can easily become a collection of speeches where each performance can be interesting and of high quality, but when presented one after the oth-

▲ In the spring of 2018, photographer Rio Gandara presented the sports photos he took at the South Korean Olympics.  
Photograph: Markus Jokela / HS



er, the whole show starts to become boring. At some point in the evening, it is absolutely necessary to somehow break the stage setup.

During the speeches of HS cultural journalists, we have tried to bring visitors from different art fields to the stage as well. When Samuli Tiikkaja, a music reporter, spoke about the composer Einojuhani Rautavaara, the opera singer Essi Luttinen premiered Rautavaara's secret but newly found composition at the end of the speech. Another staff writer from the culture desk, Juuso Määttänen, discussed the development of Finnish rap music and wanted to introduce the audience to a group of popular female rappers. As part of the speech, one of the top names in the Finnish rap scene gave a performance.

We have also included art in other topics. At the end of science writer Niko Kettunen's speech, which was about gene technology and incredible human achievements in the field, Ilkka Kemppinen, an aerial acrobat, presented a five-minute acrobatic performance commenting on the topic without words. Photographer Kaisa Rautaheimo discussed her photo series in which she had documented Finnish people and animals with the prizes that they had won in sports or in some other hobbies, for example. During the last photos, a youth choir arrived on stage and performed Abba's song The Winner Takes It All.

You should always try to create variety and surprises for the show. Building dynamism requires conscious work, specifically from the producers, as the speakers often have their hands full with getting their scripts ready and bringing themselves on stage. That is why the producers are constantly thinking about, for example, whether some form of interactivity could be built into the show.

One of the most successful interactive moments was during the talk by Vesa Sirén, a music reporter and critic, who discussed the use of artificial

▼ Economic journalist Juha-Pekka Raeste's speech in the fall of 2021 highlighted how technology giants challenge the foundations of Western democracy.  
Photograph: Kalle Koponen / HS







intelligence in composing. At the beginning of Sirén's speech, a pianist and conductor, Tarmo Peltokoski, performed two piano pieces, one by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius and the other one composed by artificial intelligence that imitated the works of Sibelius. The "AI Sibelius" was created by a software programmed by an American composer David Cope, and the audience's task was to convey using a vote of hands which of the songs they liked more. On most nights, the majority of the audience voted for the "Sibelius" piece composed by artificial intelligence.

A lively interaction with the audience also took place during a speech by Heidi Väärämäki, who talked about her inability to sing. In the beginning, Väärämäki played two sounds to the audience, a test to check whether they themselves suffered from tone deafness. At the end, Väärämäki claimed that everyone should be able to use their voices exactly as they want. Then Väärämäki's singing teacher arrived on the stage and encouraged the audience to sing "Sata Salamaa," a Finnish pop song known as a popular karaoke piece. Before the premiere, the production team was nervous about whether the audience would join the karaoke, but the experience proved that the performers have the power to direct the audience. The speech was a success.

### The host creates the atmosphere of the show

One of the main features of the evening is the host. The Black Box has had a host-presenter from its very beginning, although not all live journalism shows have one. Based on our experience, although the host appears on stage for a limited time, they play an important role in ensuring the flow of the evening and in creating a feeling that the audience will be taken care of.

▲ In the fall of 2019, Juuso Määttä chronicled the evolution of the Finnish rap scene and presented the new top names who also appeared on stage at the end of the talk.  
Photograph: Aku Isotalo / HS

In the Black Box, the host always opens the evening with a short introduction, highlighting some of the topics that will be discussed. In our first productions, the host also explained what live journalism is all about. The host typically returns to the stage twice or three times during the evening. Sometime toward the end of the show, they tell, for example, when the tickets for the upcoming shows go on sale and remind the audience of the opportunity to meet the speakers at the lobby bar at the end of the evening.

The host is also a handy tool if you need a moment between two speeches. When the speech of Heli Saavalainen, who spoke about his son's death from drugs, ended, it seemed necessary to take a short breather before moving on to Sonia Zaki's talk about the most talkative MPs. The host briefly thanked Saavalainen, told that the intermission was approaching, and introduced the topic of Zaki's speech. The content of the host's words was perhaps not the most important—the primary purpose was to give people time to wipe off their tears.

▼ Culture journalist Vesa Sirén's speech in the spring of 2019 focused on music composed by artificial intelligence, and the pianist-conductor Tarmo Peltokoski played a few examples on stage.  
Photograph: Valtteri Heinonen / HS





## 2.3

# **ENABLERS OF LIVE JOURNALISM: LOCATION, MARKETING, AND AUDIENCE**

Theater as a space invites you to immerse yourself in the moment and the attention of the viewers is undivided. However, reaching a diverse audience requires some effort. In the marketing of live journalism, it is necessary to clarify what the genre is all about.

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Tuomas Kaseva

In principle, setting up a live journalism show does not require miracles. When there is a room that can be darkened with a little space reserved for the performer, and you can point a lamp at the speaker, you are basically set. Everything else is extra.

The Black Box show has been performed in more than 10 different locations. Our smallest venue was the small stage of a provincial theater capable of accommodating 232 members of the audience (and the sold-out performance had a wonderfully intimate atmosphere). We have also appeared in a concert hall where the performer's face could not be properly seen from the back row of the 1,800-seat auditorium (luckily, the auditorium was not sold out). In the spirit of experimentation, we have also presented two 13-minute talks on the stage of the Helsinki Book Fair. Despite being in the midst of the noisy book fair, and though no one could describe the event as intimate, the audience seemed to be, surprisingly, not only interested but also attentive.

### **The established audience base is a challenge of a theater space**

Based on our experiences, a theater space is the best location for a live journalism show. As institutions, theaters invite you to immerse yourself in storytelling—and that is what live journalism is all about. Theaters are also one of the few places where mobile phones still remain in pockets, and the audience's attention is relatively undivided.

Theaters usually also use light, sound, and other stage technology to the extent that all the basic tricks can be done smoothly. The staff producer of the Black Box's main performance venue, Finnish National Theater, follows the first speech rehearsals and acts as a contact person and operator of the on-stage technical solutions. However, most of the possibilities of theater technology are still left unexploited in the Black Box. While this is a necessity dictated by our limited rehearsal slots at the venue, it is also a conscious choice. The most important commodity of live journalism is a compelling true story, one that stands the risk of actually losing its credibility with, for example, a typical set design of a fictional drama.



However, sometimes the technical possibilities of the theater also inspire you to try something completely new in journalism. In the middle of a performance, there have been instances of a robot or a necessary musical instrument suddenly emerging on stage.

It is good to keep in mind that a theater is not the only possible performance location. Theaters have three aspects that can even be considered their weakness. First of all, the theater as a space has a surprising effect on the audience: It does attract a culture-hungry crowd, but for the same reason, it is not the best location if you want to reach, for example, a younger audience, an often difficult target group for journalism. To expand the audience base and overcome the language barrier of our Finnish show, we tried adding on-stage English subtitles to the spring of 2022 show, a decision that received positive feedback from the international viewers invited to see the show.

The second challenge of theater as a location is that they are often fully booked—at least the biggest provincial theaters. One Black Box show is usually performed 10 to 11 times in total in Helsinki and in other four Finnish cities: Turku, Tampere, Oulu, and Jyväskylä (as of 2022). Building a performance calendar is a tedious job, as theaters book their venues well in advance for their own rehearsals and performances.

Third, the theater is not a cheap performance space. Even operating the small stage of a provincial theater requires a dozen members of the theater staff, which increases rent and personnel costs.

### **Funding models: Public money and business collaboration in addition to ticket revenue**

The expenses for the Black Box production come from location rents, performers' and producers' salaries, travel costs, advertisements, photo purchases, licenses for using music, staff catering, ticket sales commissions, taxes, and much more.

To pay for the expenses, income is naturally needed, which, for the Black Box, is generated from only one source: ticket sales. The show is independently produced by the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper, a publicly listed media company. The production is not supported by any foundations or governmental subsidies, unlike, for example, the French Live Magazine.

Other funding models for live journalism have also been successfully developed around the world. Some live journalism organizations produce shows especially tailored to companies or cooperate with businesses in other ways. In some shows, there are commercial breaks between speeches.

Currently (as of 2022), a Black Box ticket costs 34 euros (students get a 10-euro discount). The price has been increased over the years, as the expenses have grown. The more versatile, visual, and ambitious the production becomes, the higher the costs rise. However, the production style chosen by the Black Box does not mean that it is the only way to go. Sometimes, we have thought that it would be refreshing to do a lighter and faster—and, consequently, a cheaper—show in a smaller and more intimate location. That kind of a show would probably work very well.

In any case, doing live journalism requires resources, at least staff and time. In the Black Box, the income covers the expenses, but at least at the moment (as of autumn 2022), we cannot talk about big business. On the other hand, producing Black Box also has other goals besides generating enough income to cover the expenses. Live journalism is not only brand work for HS but, above all, it hopefully builds the reputation of journalism at large, which, if successfully done, strengthens the public's trust in it. This

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◀ In her spring 2022 speech, Sonia Zaki discussed the most talkative Members of the Parliament in the Finnish history.  
Photograph: Rio Gandara / HS

kind of work may bear fruit only after many years, perhaps even decades, if live journalism succeeds in attracting young audiences to journalism either as consumers or media professionals.

### **The challenge of marketing is to tell what the show is all about**

For the public to discover the shows, marketing is needed. Since the Black Box has been produced for more than six years, it has a certain, established audience base that always buys tickets early for the next season. In total, almost 50,000 spectators have already seen the show (as of autumn 2022).

However, we also want to reach new audience segments. That is why we repeatedly tell through marketing what the Black Box and live journalism are all about. To a new viewer, the words “live journalism show” do not really mean anything. There are no known precedents and, on the other hand, comparing it to some other genres is difficult.

Not once nor 10 times have the producers of Black Box had the following conversation with potential viewers: So, is it a theater performance? Yes, in a way, but we do not have actors and all the things that were told are true. Is it some kind of a concert? Yes, kind of, because on stage the speeches follow each other like songs in a concert, but no one actually sings. In the case of the Black Box, we often use the analogy of a live newspaper that always surprises the reader with its stories and topics.

Especially in the early years of our production, marketing could have been made easier if we had announced the topics of the speeches in advance. However, even today, we do not publish the topics of the show in advance, although the speakers are allowed to post about their participation in the Black Box in their own social media channels. We aim to get a younger audience to become interested in live journalism, and to reach this audience, social media presence is necessary.

Black Box productions are regularly featured on the HS website, in social media channels, and in the print newspaper. In terms of marketing, one of the most effective channels has been to hear about it through the grapevine. The Black Box shows are apparently talked a lot about, for example, at workplaces, evidenced by the fact that there are many groups of colleagues and friends in the audience. There is also something quite beautiful about this: a live journalism show of the 2020s is bringing people together in the same way as fireside stories throughout history have done.



3

**APPLYING THE  
STRENGTHS OF LIVE  
JOURNALISM AND  
ITS FUTURE**

## 3.1

# **CASE "YEAR OF THE CORONA" PODCAST: JOURNALISTIC EXPERTISE AND SUBJECTIVITY COMBINED**

We wanted to experiment how the strengths of live journalism could be applied in the form of a narrative podcast. In an intimate, honest, and even humble tone, "The Year of Corona" podcast by Helsingin Sanomat aimed to tell its listeners how the pandemic was reported in an unprecedentedly difficult news situation. The podcast experiment can be said to have considerably increased the transparency of corona journalism.

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Heidi Väärämäki & Kaisa Osola

Based on the audience survey conducted as part of our research project, live journalism viewers especially appreciate the live journalist's personal relationship with their subject, the connection between the journalist and the audience, and background information about news events and the journalist's work (see chapter 1.1 for more details). Could these strengths of live journalism also be applied to other forms of journalism? This is what we wanted to try as part of our research project.

We developed a concept for a narrative podcast describing the background of news reporting by the HS newsroom. The ideation for the podcast started in the spring of 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic spread worldwide. The coronavirus crisis and the reporting of the first corona year was soon selected as the topic of the podcast. The staff writers and editors of Helsingin Sanomat, Finland's largest daily newspaper, had an exceptional perspective on how the pandemic affected different parts of society.

We saw an opportunity to tell listeners in a humane, honest, and humble way—without keeping silent about the journalists' mistakes—how journalistic work was conducted in an unprecedentedly difficult news situation where the need for information was enormous and people's lives were threatened. The podcast offered a natural opportunity to test the strengths of live journalism, such as opening up the relationship between the reporter and the subject, as well as offering background information about both the reporter's work and the news event.

## Producers interviewing the journalists

The podcast was produced by the four-person Black Box working group at HS (Tuomas Kaseva, Esa Lilja, Jaakko Lyytinen, and Heidi Väärämäki) accompanied by two freelancers: Kaisa Osola as the speech coach and Matias Harju as the sound designer.

Finnish journalistic podcasts are typically conversational. However, in this experiment, we wanted to test a narrative, scripted monologue format. The reason was that, based on the audience survey of the research project, the listeners considered one of the strengths of live journalism to be the genuine, direct bond between the speaker and the listener that the show creates even though the content is carefully scripted.

As the main character for each podcast episode, we selected an individual journalist who talked about doing corona journalism from the perspective of their own beat. The eight episodes progress chronologically, from the early stages of the pandemic in 2020 to the end of that year.

To document the experiences and thoughts of the involved journalists as freshly as possible, the executive producer of the podcast, Heidi Väärämäki, already interviewed a number of journalists involved in HS's corona coverage between April and May, 2020—a decision that turned out to be quite wise. Since these interviews were conducted while the first wave of the pandemic was still on, the journalists' observations, feelings, and even astonishment were captured without them getting affected by the information about the pandemic they later accumulated.

When, five months later, the actual podcast episodes were scripted, the interviewed journalists had already forgotten many of the interesting thoughts and details (their descriptions of different situations, milieus, and people) they had offered; fortunately, they were recorded in the interviews conducted during the previous spring. Thanks to these interviews, there was a feeling of intimate documentation of personal experiences, which is characteristic of narrative podcasts. Since the podcast audience's experience is based only on listening, the other senses must be created with words. The more precise the words, the more precise the experience.

The podcast episodes were scripted in the late autumn of 2020. The eight chronologically advancing episodes covered the following topics:

1. How coronavirus began to spread in East Asia (Katriina Pajari, HS correspondent in China, as the protagonist and narrator)
2. Pandemic arrives in Finland (Päivi Paulavaara, chief editor for the domestic news desk)
3. Finnish authorities' lack of preparation for the pandemic (Paavo Teittinen and Maria Manner, investigative journalists)
4. The shocking state of care homes after the corona hit (Katja Kuokkanen, metropolitan news reporter)
5. Sweden's atypical corona policy (Petja Pelli, HS correspondent in Sweden)
6. Pandemic's effects on the Finnish economy and the world economy (Tuomas Niskakangas, financial reporter)
7. How the corona decisions came about behind the scenes of politics (Marko Junkkari, political reporter)
8. When and how the pandemic ends (Annikka Mutanen, science journalist)

► Katriina Pajari



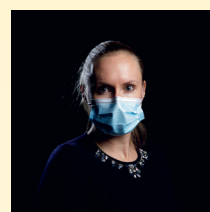
► Päivi Paulavaara



► Paavo Teittinen



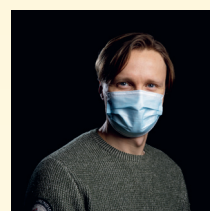
► Maria Manner



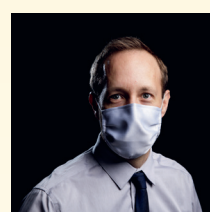
► Katja Kuokkanen



► Petja Pelli



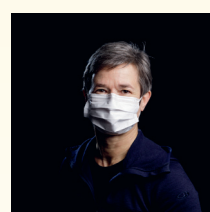
► Tuomas Niskakangas



► Marko Junkkari



► Annikka Mutanen



Photographs:  
Mika  
Ranta / HS



The scripts were written using a different method than what was used for the Black Box show: They were made mainly by the podcast producers instead of the journalists who narrated the episodes. The first versions of the scripts were based on the interviews conducted between April and May 2020 as well as on the second round of interviews that took place between September and October 2020.

The producer-driven scriptwriting was justified by the fact that, even though there were many different narrators, the podcast had to be made into a coherent and uniform series. In addition, by interviewing, it was possible to elicit the journalists' thoughts about the challenges of doing corona journalism as well as their feelings, frustrations, and successes—aspects that are not typically written into one's own stories. The producer-led model was also supported by the fact that the dramaturgy within each episode had to be built carefully and clearly so as to maintain the listeners' interest.

In the second stage of scriptwriting, the narrator-journalists edited the preliminary scripts to tailor them to their own language and ways of expression. The goal was to strengthen the journalists' ownership of their episode and to bring it closer to their natural way of speaking as much as possible. From the point of view of spoken language, the scripts were already in rather good shape, as they were based on spoken interviews and even contained direct quotes. In addition, the producers had read the scripts out loud while writing them.

The journalists' own voice was then strengthened, among other things, with the following instructions: Read the script aloud. Read it to other people. If some part feels strange or difficult to read out loud, edit it—only those sentences that are easy and natural to speak are the ones that are easy and natural to listen to. Finally, the narrator-journalists also fact-checked the scripts to ensure that they would not feel uncertain at any point when speaking.

This method of joint scriptwriting proved to be effective from the point of view of both the producers and the journalists: The project management was easier for the producers, and the project was not too time-consuming for the journalists. However, there were also disadvantages. Since the script was mainly from the producer's pen, the staff writers' commitment to the process was probably weaker compared to the Black Box show, where they create their own speeches from the very beginning.

## **Creating a sense of connection between the speaker and the audience**

We tried to bring the strengths of live journalism that emerged from the Black Box audience research to the podcast production in several different ways.

The most important way to build a connection between the speaking journalist and the listener is to direct the journalist's speech directly to the listener—and not to the interviewer in the studio. However, the listener was not directly addressed here, as is often done in the live performances of the Black Box; instead, the script was structured in monologue form, as a story delivered by one person to another.

The monologues were based on two ideas: How can you make stories as clear as possible? And how can you tell them to an intelligent, interested, and detail-hungry listener? From the point of view of clarity, one of the most important tools is story structure. The structures that are typical and function well in the Black Box, such as chronology, were also used in the podcast. In addition, the fact that the writer of the first version, the producer, was

actually a listener helped in thinking about the structure from the listeners' point of view: What detail immediately aroused interest and which scene would be, for example, a good start? What kinds of transitions are needed to make the structure easy to follow?

Another important way to create a connection between the speaker and the listener is to think about how to speak. We tried to make the podcast sound like a journalist speaking in an authentic way, even spontaneously: As if they were telling their story to a friend at a dinner party or at a bar counter. For a podcast striving to create an intimate experience, authenticity and equality between the speaker and the listener is paramount.

One familiar tool for creating authenticity is to use a colloquial narratorial tone. In addition, compared to a theater setting, we aimed at bolder frankness but also heightened sensitivity—they convey the trust with which two people speak to another as peers. Therefore, when the journalists were editing the scripts, the speech trainer asked them to practice the text by speaking it aloud to trusted people and asking: Do I sound like myself?

The question of how to speak is also related to nonverbal communication, such as rhythm and tone of voice. When the journalists practiced their final scripts, they received the following instructions: Think about what you say. See the people you talk about. Go back to the confusions, excitements, joys, and failures as accurately as you remember them, and trust that these experiences will be communicated through your voice. Finally, when you identify the needed pauses, smiles, or vocal emphasizes during practice, mark those in the script as well.

The days in the studio gave us valuable lessons about how to create an intimate tonality. One of the obvious things was that the monologues that had been rehearsed most sounded also the most fluent and natural. The most interesting observation was that the speakers needed very different tools and aids to start sounding like themselves. One needed to move freely while reading the script from a music stand to turn their reading into speaking. Another narrator-journalist needed to sprawl in an armchair so that their overexcitement settled into peace. The third wanted to talk to a real person, the fourth wanted to be as alone as possible. The most important thing was this: We discussed with each speaker separately what felt good and what did not. We also learned that the elements that must have a precise rhythm, such as humor, would have been good to practice even more, and that even small non-verbal nuances might come across powerfully, as the listener is as close to the speaker as the microphone.

The third method for building presence and connection is the creation of the sound world. Sound designer Matias Harju built different ambiances to the speeches with sound, such as the scene of a bustling Chinese fish market, where Katriina Pajari, the China correspondent, interviews a Hong Kong man about his corona protective measures. Although there were no field recordings from the journalists' own reporting trips, authenticity was sought in the soundscapes. For example, the sounds of the fish market were actually from Hong Kong, although they were from a different fish market than where Pajari had conducted her interview.

The sounds were mainly obtained from sound libraries, and their role was to create illustrations and acoustic references rather than strictly journalistic documents. In addition to the ambience sounds, music was created for each episode to reinforce the flow of the story and the changes in mood. The sound world was like an omniscient narrator that intensified the feeling of the story or emphasized its contradictions.

## The journalist's relationship to the topic highlighted

As revealed by the Black Box audience research, the audience appreciated the fact that the speaker has a personal relationship with their subject in one way or another. This was valued not only as a tool to ease the understanding of the topic but also as a key to increase the transparency of journalism and thus its credibility.

This research result encouraged us to test a podcast whose core would be the relationship between the reporter and their subject, a podcast where the corona pandemic would be examined from a journalist's point of view, although typically in news journalism, the reporter's own experience is not discussed. In the Black Box show, the personal angle is always included but, in the podcast, we took it a step further. The reporter was not only the narrator of the story but also its main character.

As in the Black Box show, we wanted the personal tonality of the podcast to have journalistic relevance as well. Using a personal tone of voice is a way to tell the audience why something is important, why it is worth taking an interest in, and what wider significance it has. Subjectivity is—paradoxically—a way of putting things into a larger perspective, giving them context. These arguments also helped the journalists selected for the podcast to accept why it was important to bring personal elements to the script, even though they preferred to talk about their topics rather than their own experiences.

Subjectivity was naturally intertwined with the corona topic because the journalists themselves lived in the middle of the crisis they were writing about. An example of this is the beginning of the first episode, which starts from the kitchen of the China correspondent Katriina Pajari's home in Beijing in January 2020. She prepares her breakfast porridge, reads the news feed, and spots an article about the coronavirus for the first time. She sends the article to the HS newsroom in Helsinki but does not focus on the story, as she is busy with other topics and is also about to leave for a vacation. Later in the episode, it is told how, because of the pandemic, Pajari has to leave her home in China and relocate to Finland.

Through the podcast, we also wanted to highlight the so-called professional subjectivity. The journalists discussed why the topic of their episode—for example, the government's purchases of protective gear or banning the visits of relatives to care homes—was important and interesting to themselves. What was special, surprising, or difficult about reporting on it?

Another important goal of professional subjectivity was to shine a light on the difficulty and uncertainty of reporting on the pandemic. We succeeded quite well in this task, perhaps because the background interviews with the journalists were conducted while the first wave of the pandemic was still ongoing. In addition, the interviewer was a colleague who was easy to talk to directly. Much of this openness was distilled into the final manuscripts as well. For example, in the second episode of the podcast, Päivi Paulavaara, the chief editor of the domestic news desk, talks about the arguments between newsroom bosses about how serious the situation threatening Finland was and how it should be reported.

Science journalist Annikka Mutanen, on the other hand, discussed in her episode the struggle with conflicting information coming from different experts and the difficulty of obtaining reliable facts. Though the journalists were made to be the main characters of the podcast, they did not position themselves as omniscient or at a level above the listeners—instead, they were their readers' companions who tried to find out on behalf of them which information could be trusted and which could not.



## Behind-the-scenes information about journalistic work

From the interviews conducted for the audience research of the Black Box, it became clear that the charm of live journalism is partly based on the fact that the audience gets to hear background information, unpublished observations, and behind-the-scenes “gossip” from a journalist who has been present in news situations—in other words, the audience is offered something that cannot be Googled.


For this reason, we wanted the podcast to offer its listeners perspectives on where and how news is made. The idea is that transparency can also be entertaining. For example: How did the tip about the government's murky purchases of protective masks come to the HS newsroom? What was Onni Sarmaste, the businessman involved in the mask business, like? Where did Minister Krista Kiuru disappear to when there was a political power struggle over the travel restrictions? What kind of a person was Anders Tegnell, the Swedish epidemiologist, whose corona policies puzzled many Finns?

In addition to the background of news events, we also opened up the processes of journalistic work. The podcast revealed, for example, how investigative journalists Paavo Teittinen and Maria Manner obtained information about the mask purchases, how they checked the facts, and how that story was written under time pressure in the middle of the night.

How can one develop the process of such a podcast in the future? We realized that the story processes could have been further opened up if the podcast's sound world were produced in a more proactive, comprehensive, and journalistic way. In practice, it would mean that, when a journalist goes on a reporting trip, they would record not only the scenes related to the story but also ambiances and individual spot sounds. There were hardly any field recordings in the podcast because the vast majority of episodes were scripted only after the reporting had already been done.

## Positive feedback about increasing transparency

The podcast received a total of 24,000 starts on different platforms (HS, Spotify, Supla, Apple, and so on). It also received a positive reception on social media:



*By far one of the best Finnish podcasts I've listened to. Great dramaturgy, music, sound design, subjectivity. And really accurate observations, self-reflection, and media criticism.*

**[Ville Blåfield, Facebook post, December 12, 2020]**

*In these times, when so many people are tempted to believe in fake news, opening journalistic processes to the general public is really important. Most people don't know what you journalists do, and how you weigh different journalistic choices.*

**[Ida Pimenoff, Facebook comment, December 5, 2020]**

*It was really interesting to listen to these @hsfi reporters' stories about their work during the corona year, even though the #coronavirus and the daily news about it are not so interesting anymore. The story processes of different types of journalists are opened up in a great way.*

**[Sara Tuxén, Twitter post, December 7, 2020]**

A few commentators, however, were annoyed that the journalists were brought into the spotlight.

In addition, we asked about 60 teenagers (9th graders) to listen and comment on the podcast. Their feedback was positive, and based on their answers, the podcast increased their understanding of the journalists' work. One 16-year-old listener summed up their thoughts thus: "My understanding of the start of the pandemic and what it was really like in China changed. The podcast opened my eyes to the work of a journalist and how alert they have to be all the time to the events around them."

From the authors' point of view, the strengths of live journalism lent themselves well to the format of a narrative podcast. Opening up the journalist's own thoughts, uncertainties, and insights, as well as the background of the journalistic story process, were well-suited to a podcast which was not corona journalism but journalism about the backgrounds of corona journalism. Traditionally, journalists refrain from revealing their own thoughts and feelings in their stories. However, in this case, all the participating journalists were ready for it, because in this podcast, subjectivity and the revealing of the behind-the-scenes were journalistically justified. Moreover, on a societal level, it was significant to know what kinds of choices were made in the newsroom regarding what information about the coronavirus was published and what was not, or what information was available and what was not.

However, when conducting background interviews, it became clear that the journalists themselves did not always consider their findings worth publishing or did not always think that some of the behind-the-scenes information was interesting. The interviews conducted by the producers were necessary for this reason. They tried to dig up facts that are usually left out of the news.

Increasing transparency meant that the journalistic work done had to be viewed with critical lenses as well. It required journalists to evaluate their own work and that of their colleagues. This task was not easy: How can one look critically at one's past work without the luxury of hindsight? How can one talk about their colleagues' mistakes without offending them? What are the issues that are exclusive to the internal discussions of the newsroom and what are the issues that can be freely disclosed? These questions were discussed with every journalist who appeared on the podcast.

It was easier to criticize one's own work than that of others, and transparency was sometimes selective. However, our podcast experiment can still be said to have significantly increased the transparency of corona journalism. It was also noteworthy that the HS leadership did not, at any point, try to define what could and could not be told in the podcast. Hopefully, in the future, this kind of transparency and shedding light on the process of creating a story, as well as combining journalistic expertise and subjectivity—all things that, as research shows, increase public trust and interest in journalism—will gain a foothold in other types of journalism as well.

## 3.2

# THE PLACE OF LIVE JOURNALISM IN THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE— DOES LIVE JOURNALISM CHALLENGE THE DIGITAL FUTURE OF JOURNALISM?

Live journalism, and especially the Black Box show, represent a future where journalism is primarily funded by audience fees. The engagement that attracts the paying public to the Black Box is based on a deep, eudaimonic reflection on the world and one's own life. Basically, the appeal of live journalism is built on the same factors as digital and social media: creating a community, media-mediated self-realization, and internal motivation in both the production and consumption of journalism.

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Juho Ruotsalainen & Mikko Villi

In what directions does live journalism take journalism, and what kind of future of journalism does it represent?

Although today's journalism generally tries to take its audience into account better than before, live journalism represents a certain kind of future of audience-oriented journalism. In this possible future, instead of data analytics, an increasing number of media outlets will create the basis for engaging audiences through direct, communal, and reciprocal encounters between journalists and audiences<sup>52</sup>.

In live journalism, the relationship between the journalist and the audience takes place face-to-face and is, therefore, particularly powerful. A close and reciprocal relationship can still be built in journalism on other platforms as well—for example, in shared, often closed groups of social media or messaging applications such as WhatsApp<sup>53</sup>.

Subchapter 1.3 shows, based on our research results, that live journalism represents reciprocal and eudaimonic journalism. The third trend emerging through live journalism that gives hints about the future of journalism is related to changes in the journalists' work. The stories in the Black Box show are highly relevant to the journalists themselves as well<sup>54</sup>. The journalists are encouraged to choose a topic that feels particularly meaningful to them and to which they have a personal relationship at best. Performing is often a powerfully affective experience for journalists. In this way, the Black Box represents a development of media work where engagement also includes the

52 Lewis, S. C., Holton, A.E. and Coddington, M. (2014). [Reciprocal Journalism: A Concept of Mutual Exchange Between Journalists and Audiences](#). *Journalism Practice*, 8(2), 229–241.

53 Kligler-Vilenchik, N., & Tenenboim, O. (2020). [Sustained journalist-audience reciprocity in a meso news-space: The case of a journalistic WhatsApp group](#). *New Media & Society*, 22(2), 264–282.

54 Lilja, E. (2020). [Toimittajat parrasvaloisissa – Helsingin Sanomien Mustatikko -esiintyjien kokemuksia livejournalismista](#). Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.





journalists themselves—where journalists are expected to be passionate about their work<sup>55</sup>. Pekka Mykkänen, HS staff writer, told in his Black Box speech how “passionate” he is about the European Union, the beat he actively follows.

Live journalism and especially the Black Box represent a future where journalism is primarily financed by audience fees and where the engagement that brings and maintains a paying audience is based on a deep, eudaimonic reflection of the world and one's own life. The relationship between journalists and audiences is communal and reciprocal.

However, these kinds of trends also have their downside. They threaten to take journalism toward dispersed, small, and specialized elite audiences<sup>56</sup>. The reciprocal relationship between journalists and audiences directs the news media to serve paying audience groups and their interests at the expense of journalism's public mission<sup>57</sup>. Engaging audiences in itself encourages investing in niche audiences, as it is significantly more effective to engage small and specialized audience groups than mass audiences<sup>58</sup>.

The nature of journalism can therefore change into passionate, specialized information production that affects narrow audience segments. This can also lead to a situation where the audience is increasingly divided into segments according to their ability to pay: The more financial resources a consumer has, the higher the number of excellent and specialized journalistic content they can access<sup>59</sup>. Moreover, in live journalism, the audience is also challenged by location, as live journalistic shows are often produced in big cities.

On the other hand, the eudaimonic features of the Black Box show foresee a kind of journalism whose content serves the prevailing ethos of self-improvement. Eudaimonia promises not only meaningful experiences but also spiritual change, development, and transformation. Although the basic psy-

▲ At the end of the spring 2022 Black Box, the 9C class of the Oulunkylä comprehensive school came on stage and sang the Helsinki provincial song written by Jussi Lehmusvesi.  
Photograph: Rio Gandara / HS

- 55 Lindén, C.-G., Lehtisaari, K., Grönlund, M., & Villi, M. (2021). [Journalistic Passion as Commodity: A Managerial Perspective](#). *Journalism Studies*, 22(12), 1701–1719.
- 56 Usher, N. (2021). *News for the rich, white, and blue. How place and power distort American journalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ruotsalainen, J., Heinonen, S., Hujanen, J., & Villi, M. (2021). [Pioneers as Peers: How Entrepreneurial Journalists Imagine the Futures of Journalism](#). *Digital Journalism*, Online first.
- 57 Nechushtai, E., & Zalmanson, L. (2021). 'Stay informed', 'become an insider' or 'drive change': Repackaging newspaper subscriptions in the digital age. *Journalism*, 22(8), 2035–2052.
- 58 Nelson, J. L. (2021). [The next media regime: The pursuit of 'audience engagement' in journalism](#). *Journalism*, 22(9), 2350–2367.
- 59 Kalogeropoulos, A. & Nielsen, R.K. (2018). [Social Inequalities in News Consumption](#). Reuters Institute.

chological needs of the self-determination theory are universal<sup>60</sup>, autonomy, ability, and community are partly related to the current social climate that emphasizes individual creativity, success, and networking. As a weak signal of the strengthening of such journalism, Carlquist et al.<sup>61</sup> found that especially eudaimonic emotional vocabulary has increased in the self-improvement-themed lifestyle stories of Norwegian newspapers.

Digital technologies have facilitated the formation of communities around shared interests, self-actualization, and identity-building<sup>62</sup>. One of the key questions for the future of journalism is its relationship with communities formed around niche interests. The public's willingness to pay, journalism's goals of engaging the public, and data analytics that can dig out small interest groups all guide journalism to target niche audiences.

Although live journalism is a non-digital or even "anti-digital" form of new journalism, it does not live apart from these developments in digital journalism. Basically, the appeal of live journalism is based on the same factors as digital and social media: community, self-realization, and internal motivation or "passion" in both the production and consumption of journalism<sup>63</sup>.

- 60 Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). [Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being](#). *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
- 61 Carlquist, E., Nafstad, H.E., Blakar, R.M., Ulleberg, P., Fave, A.D., & Phelps, J.M. (2017). [Well-being vocabulary in media language: An analysis of changing word usage in Norwegian newspapers](#). *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(2), 99–109.
- 62 Jenkins, H., Ford, S., and Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
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- 63 Lindén, C.-G., Lehtisaari, K., Grönlund, M., & Villi, M. (2021). [Journalistic Passion as Commodity: A Managerial Perspective](#). *Journalism Studies*, 22(12), 1701–1719.
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◀ In her spring 2022 speech, science journalist Tanja Vasama discussed how the brain strongly filters our everyday visual perceptions even though we usually do not notice it. Photograph: Rio Gandara / HS

# CLOSING WORDS

Riikka Haikarainen

Becoming a live journalist, I have often thought, is similar to starting mountain climbing as a new hobby.

When a journalist, who is primarily trained as a writer, starts practicing for a live speech, it constitutes a marked departure from their everyday job. For such an adventure, where the journalist joins a tightly knit project team, it is thus crucial that they prepare carefully.

When the journalist finally finds an angle and narrative structure that works for the genre of their speech, it is akin to a new landscape revealing itself before them: They seem to discover new aspects about themselves and new perspectives from which to see their journalistic content. With the help of live journalism, together with their colleagues, the journalist can test new ways of offering meaning, illustrating, and contextualizing their topic.

When they perform—like when a climber reaches the top of the mountain—the journalist witnesses an unprecedented sight. A new kind of connection reveals itself: The live audience reacts to and, at best, empathizes with the true story offered by the journalist.

At the live journalism conference organized by our research project in May 2022, Kaius Niemi, the senior editor-in-chief for Helsingin Sanomat, was asked what the future of the Black Box looks like in the newsroom. The show, Niemi offered, is a living innovation process whose end results cannot be predicted in advance, and where there is always room for trying out something new.

Similar to the live journalists interviewed for our research project, I think that the goal of an all-night live journalism show is not only to tell individual stories but also to restore interest and trust in journalism. At its best, the show offers the belief that we can find meaningful information, strive to get closer to the truth, and, at the same time, learn about the world around us and about ourselves. This kind of awakening is especially important now, when you do not necessarily grow up with journalism around you as children and young people anymore. The average audience of longform text stories is growing older, and in many age groups, news avoidance<sup>64</sup> (Villi et al., 2022) is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon.

In this critical situation for the future of journalism, live journalism can, at best, serve as a much-needed invitation to engage in high quality journalism produced with a lot of heart.

64 Villi, M., Aharoni, T., Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K., Boczkowski, P. J., Hayashi, K., Mitchelstein, E., ... Kligler-Vilenchik, N. (2022). [Taking a Break from News: A Five-nation Study of News Avoidance in the Digital Era](#). *Digital Journalism*, 10(1), 148–164.



# BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

M. Soc. Sc., M.A. **Riikka Haikarainen** (b. 1981) works at Aalto University as a senior communications manager and has been leading the Power of Live Journalism research project funded by the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation since 2019. Between 2006 and 2017, Haikarainen worked at the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper as a news reporter, producer, and sub-editor for various theme sections and weekly inserts. In 2016, Haikarainen initiated the Black Box live journalism show series, the first Finnish live journalism production. She got the idea for it after watching the Pop-Up Magazine live journalism show in the US, where she completed a Master's program in science journalism at the University of Southern California (USC) between 2014 and 2015. Haikarainen is interested in how emotions can carry information, and how a journalist can simultaneously speak as an expert on the subjects they report on and as a human whom the audience perceives as an equal.

M. Soc. Sc. **Anna Eveliina Hänninen** (b. 1985) is a doctoral researcher in journalism at the University of Tampere. Her dissertation focuses on journalistic voice and voice-related professional practices in journalism. While collecting and analyzing the audience research data from the Power of Live Journalism research project, Hänninen grew interested in the talking journalist as a focus for her dissertation. In her dissertation, she also studies several podcasts from Finnish newspapers. In addition to her dissertation, Hänninen works as a staff reporter for Sanoma Corporations' local newspapers; she also has previous work experience in radio journalism. Moreover, her undergraduate degree in music gave her a solid foundation for sound-related research.

Since 2005, M.A. **Tuomas Kaseva** (b. 1982) has worked as a reporter, producer, and supervisor at Helsingin Sanomat, most recently in features editing. He has worked with cultural, science, health, and lifestyle-related content. One of the founders of the Black Box, he has worked as one of the producers in all Black Box shows over the years. He has also worked as a media and journalism lecturer both at the Kallio Upper Secondary School of Performing Arts in Helsinki and at the University of Jyväskylä. He has been involved in editing dozens of Finnish language and literature textbooks for schools and several non-fiction books.

M.A. **Esa Lilja** (b. 1978) works as a feature writer and sub-editor for the Teema magazine at Helsingin Sanomat. Since 2008, he has worked at Helsingin Sanomat as a staff writer and sports news editor. He has been a member of the Black Box production team since the autumn of 2016. Lilja's Master's thesis in journalism, published in 2020, was the first Finnish thesis on live journalism.

M. Soc. Sc. **Jaakko Lyytinen** (b. 1973) works as a feature writer at the Sunday section of Helsingin Sanomat and is one of the founders and producers of the Black Box show. He has worked, among other things, as the supervisor of the HS culture desk and as a columnist, reporter, and supervisor in several different media outlets. In the 2019–2020 academic year, Lyytinen was a visiting journalist fellow at the Reuters Institute in Oxford University with a Helsingin Sanomat Foundation scholarship. In Oxford, together with other journalists who participated in the fellow program, he produced an international live journalism show and prepared a report on live journalism. He has previously published, among other things, a history of MTV's (a Finnish commercial TV channel) news.

M. Soc. Sc. **Kaisa Osola** (b. 1980) is a public speaking coach and a teacher of speech communication, speech art, and radio journalism. She has worked as a speech coach for the Black Box and as a member of the production team since the beginning of the show. She has 14 years of experience as a teacher of speech communication and radio journalism at the Kallio Upper Secondary School of Performing Arts in Helsinki and has also coached speakers in several different organizations, such as the Bank of Finland and the Finnish Broadcasting Company. She is also a print and radio journalist. In live journalism, Osola is particularly interested in how the classic elements of skillful public speaking, such as sense-making and the speaker's relationship with their subject, support the fundamental mission of journalism, as well as how a print journalist, focused on writing or photographing, can orally present themselves convincingly in front of an audience.

M. Soc. Sc. **Juho Ruotsalainen** (b. 1983) works as a doctoral researcher at the University of Turku. His dissertation, which represents the field of futures research, explores with how pioneer journalists imagine the future of journalism and the journalistic practices they employ to implement these imagined futures in the present. Live journalism and the Black Box show are one of the case studies in his dissertation. In the Power of Live Journalism research project, Ruotsalainen analyzed the scripts of the speeches presented in the Black Box show to examine the ways in which the journalists made their content meaningful.

PhD **Mikko Villi** (b. 1971) is a professor of journalism at the University of Jyväskylä. He is particularly interested in the development and future of media and journalism. His research topics include media work, new media platforms, media consumption, and media management. In The Power of Live Journalism project, he was fascinated by live journalism's audience relationship and developing that relationship also through other forms of journalism. Moreover, he was inspired by the project's strong cooperation with journalistic practitioners.

M. Soc. Sc. **Heidi Väärämäki** (b. 1983) is a staff reporter for Helsingin Sanomat. She has worked at Helsingin Sanomat since 2010 as a staff writer and producer for lifestyle and feature content. She joined the Black Box production team in the fall of 2017 after returning from Shanghai, China, where she studied at Fudan University with a scholarship granted by the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation. As part of the Power of Live Journalism research project, Väärämäki led HS's podcast project that applied the strengths of live journalism.

*In March 2018, the Black Box production team was awarded the Bonnier Journalism Award (Journalistic Act of the Year) for developing a novel format that has brought journalists closer to their readers in a completely new way.*



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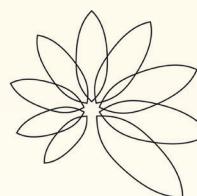
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