

Diversity through Dualism

The Balancing Principle as an Organizational Strategy in Culture Departments of Newspapers

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Abstract

This article examines the changes in cultural journalism in newspapers with regard to its dual field structure. The influence of media organizations' policies on professionalist dualism is discussed based on the results of a quantitative content analysis over the period 1978-2008 and semi-structured theme interviews with the heads of the culture departments of major Finnish dailies. The results indicate that culture departments have developed their own news production, with increased managerial control and the strengthening of the journalistic paradigm, whereas opinionated journalism, including criticism, is increasingly outsourced. The culture departments thus aspire to sustain a balance between the professional paradigms related to field-hybridity, which creates a distinct structural formalism in this specialized type of journalism and makes its evolution over time relatively stable.

Keywords: cultural journalism, art criticism, reviews, professionalism, specialization, newspapers

Introduction

In October 2013, the literary critic of the daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, Åsa Beckman, asserted that aesthetic consciousness had never been as low on the culture pages of Swedish newspapers as it is now: "The writers avoid talking about the literariness itself – in other words all which distinguishes a novel from a TT text¹ and makes literature literature" (Beckman 2013). Similar claims about a crisis in criticism within cultural journalism have recently been made in public debates elsewhere (for Finland see Jaakkola 2010). The cause of the deterioration is considered to be in succumbing to external forces, like the market (Lund 2005) and the masses (Elkins 2003, Berger 1998), instead of guarding the autonomy of art. The main argument underlying this criticism is that cultural journalism is moving away from what used to be its core, that is, the reviewing of artistic products in their own right.

In line with studies on source-fields of journalism that suggest a growing media influence in specialized fields of journalism (Benson 1999, Bourdieu 1998 [1996], Bauman 1987), it has been stated that cultural journalism is evolving in a way that implies an increased proximity of mainstream journalistic values through increased institutional profiling (Hellman & Jaakkola 2012, Kristensen 2010). To attain sufficient diversity in content and fulfil its functions in society, culture departments have traditionally balanced

dedicating space to a wide selection of different artistic disciplines with covering both ends of the continuum of genres, news and reviews (Hellman & Jaakkola 2012). The editorial choices made with regard to these fundamental issues in culture departments regulate the deployment of the physical, economic and human resources available in the organizational environment to support the implementation of certain strategic goals. By observing changes in the coverage of artistic disciplines and genres, and the allocation of resources to cover these variables, we can trace the changes in the journalistic ontology. The relevant issue from the perspective of balancing is whether the balance between the aesthetic and the journalistic is shown in the cultural coverage of newspapers over past decades.

Cultural journalism, in this context, is understood as coverage initiated by organizationally differentiated culture departments with specialized workforce, in contrast to journalism on culture (see also Kristensen & From 2011). The culture departments of the daily newspapers form the primary forum for the journalistic representation of arts and culture for the general public. On the basis that major regional papers strive to represent local cultural life in their region and to cover national and international artistic and cultural issues relevant to everyone, the changes in culture pages can be assumed to reflect the general changes in the position and role of arts in society. The cultural legacy of culture departments, originally formed during the second half of the 20th century to become an integral part of the modern newspaper (Hurri 1993), derive from a blend of professional, intellectual and organizational values, and explain the complexity of tensions and contradictions in the professionalism of cultural journalists. Historically, the most noticeable tensions have been observed in discussions about the concept of culture (Hurri 1993, Bech-Karlsen 1991, Hansen 1977) and, as suggested above, in the position and volume of reviews. Tensions in the definitions of culture and in reviewing reflect the dualistic structure of the cultural journalist's professional field, which will be discussed in more detail before proceeding to the analysis.

Methodology

Using the results of a quantitative analysis and semi-structured theme interviews with the editorial management of the departments of four major dailies in Finland, we considered the changes in cultural journalism between the structuration of the fields of cultural production and organizational change. The content analysis covers the story items (N=5795) published on the culture pages in five Finnish newspapers, showing the quality of the dailies from 1978 to 2008 (see Jaakkola 2013, forthcoming).

The newspapers studied included the leading nationwide capital-based newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS), and four regional newspapers with the largest circulations and with leading roles as cultural gatekeepers in their market areas, and located geographically evenly around the country: *Aamulehti* (AL), *Kaleva* (KAL), *Turun Sanomat* (TS) and *Savon Sanomat* (SS). The data was collected by systematically sampling two weeks per year every five years over the period 1978 to 2008. It included information about the change of artistic disciplines, generic distribution and the employment of freelancers.² In addition, to contextualize the historical development and to illustrate the organizational aims behind the published content, each of the heads of the culture departments of AL, HS, KAL and TS were interviewed about their ideas about quality in cultural journalism.

The semi-structured theme interviews with the heads of the cultural journalism departments of HS, AL, KAL and TS were conducted by a theatre critic and journalism major at the School of Communication, Media and Theatre at the University of Tampere for her master's thesis (Salonen 2013).³

Among all genres applicable in cultural journalism, the categories news and review are both somewhat difficult to be fitted into the general ideals and norms of journalism. The genre of news is the cornerstone of the ideology of mainstream journalism. It draws on central professionalist features such as objectivity and neutrality, but as these features do not fit into the evaluative characteristics of cultural journalism, its position within cultural journalism is partly problematic. Criticism, in turn, is a peripheric phenomenon with regard to the entire institution of journalism to which the shared framework between journalism and its source-fields appears alien. News and reviews represent not only the guiding principles of two subfields but also the ends of the generic continuum of cultural journalism between objective/detached and subjective/attached. Changes in their position may thus be symptomatic of a more profound, structural change.

The organizational environment of cultural journalism is understood with regard to intra-organizational, extra-organizational and inter-organizational relationships. The core of content production forms the culture department as a single organizational unit within the main organization with two kind of specialized writers, journalists and reviewers. Culture departments, in contrast to other departments in the newspaper, have historically maintained an extensive network of freelancers. The freelancers are specialist writers who follow their areas as agents in artistic fields; by entering the media field they are able to enhance their power and scope for legitimate action. Although traditionally relatively autonomous in their activities, culture departments also maintain an operational relationship with the rest of the organization, including other departments and the organizational management. These three relations – the relationships between journalistic and aesthetic staffers within the culture department (intra-organizational), cultural department and other departments (inter-organizational) as well as culture department and freelancer networks (extra-organizational) – form the operational coordinates in allocating human capital in cultural journalism.

Dualistic Field Structure and Organizational Strategies

The organizational sub-culture of a specialized culture department is different to other, more news-oriented journalism produced by generalist departments (Harries & Wahl-Jorgensen 2007, Hurri 1993; for parallels between cultural journalism and sports see Salwen & Garrison 1998). The distinction basically lies in the relationships between the media and the source-fields. Cultural journalism stands out because of its notable proximity to its source and object fields of reporting. Specifically, what differentiates cultural journalism from less specialized types of news journalism is the connection between the professional fields and source-fields, seen in its dual professionalism. Although the media field regulates news production of specialized topics, the fundamental aspects of the dualistic structure than underpin cultural journalism influence the production by imposing cultural features that are deviant from the mainstream journalistic values (Hellman & Jaakkola 2012).

The journalistic and the aesthetic paradigms, (see Hellman & Jaakkola 2012 and Jaakkola 2012), are historically grounded approaches to art and culture within the profession of journalism, both contributing to the structure of the cultural journalistic field. The former relies on traditional journalistic values and norms, such as objectivity and immediacy. The latter has a different starting point – subjectivity – based on the activities of art experts and enthusiasts (amateurs). The paradigms are followed differently at the two poles of the field of cultural journalism. The heteronomous pole, with its emphasis on heteronomous connections of art and culture, and thus the journalistic paradigm, has its ideology closer to mainstream journalism than the autonomous pole of the aesthetic paradigm, which, by its aesthetic approaches, stresses the autonomy of art.

Bourdieu's field theory has, to a large extent, relied on the notion of homology that sets the fields in tandem through their internal operations (Couldry 2004, 171; Bourdieu 1993) instead of elaborating the internal workings of a particular field and the field interrelations (Benson & Neveu 2005, Couldry 2004, Benson 1999, Champagne 1999). To Bourdieu, the structure of the space of positions is the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties that govern the success in the field. Reviewers and art journalists serve their audiences through "an objective connivance" based on homology between the writers' position in their field and the readership's position (Bourdieu 1993, 94). However, even as double agents, not all writers can automatically enjoy equal recognition in both subfields or be equally recognized as representatives of both paradigms. Fully recognized double agents struggle to convey the characters required in both fields of cultural production to produce legitimate social action: the positions they take are recognized both in the journalistic and in the artistic fields.

The heads of the cultural departments tended to state that both paradigms are equally important (see also Hellman & Jaakkola 2012): they argued for the centrality of cultural forms and for a juggling act for both major genres in the paradigms, previewing (news) and reviewing (reviews). They spoke of "full service" which obliges them to follow culture on a wide scale, locally and globally, as well as high and popular forms of culture. The heads of cultural departments also stressed the significance of the reviewer's role as an extension of the intra-organizational content production. However, the aspect that the concepts of culture and journalism share is the tendency to emphasize in managerial discussions that both criticism and popular culture have to be taken into account *as well as* the traditional core content (news, high culture). Although "criticism still forms the basis of our activity", as the head of the cultural department of KAL declared, "we should always consider what the most appropriate way to say things is" (interviewed by Salonen on October 31, 2012). He stressed that criticism "is just one way of saying it but there are many others as well." To the head of the department in AL, criticism was "a specific form of expression, no way a sacrosanct genre in cultural journalism that should not be further developed" (interviewed by Salonen on October 29, 2012). So, the flexible shift from one form of culture or journalistic expression to another was emphasized, which forms the basis of balancing in both the culture (high-popular) and the journalism concept (news-reviews).

The distribution of artistic disciplines in cultural coverage is traditionally a widely shared concern in cultural journalism (see e.g. Kristensen & From 2011, Knapskog & Larsen 2008, Sucksdorff 2005, Hurri 1993). A number of studies on cultural production have suggested that artistic fields are facing growing heteronomy (Venrooij 2009,

Baumann 2007). For example, the increasing influence of television news criteria within journalism has increased the susceptibility of the other fields to external pressures, reducing their autonomy as fields and increasing their reliance on the media field (Couldry 2004, 170). In recent years cultural relations have been reconfigured in a way which may also challenge the traditional culture concept that relies on the dominance of the general rule of high culture and professionally produced product-centred reporting, pushing it towards a more heteronomous culture concept. The reconfigured cultural order may also move the generic balance towards heteronomously connected ways of reporting, as anticipated by advocates of low aesthetic consciousness.

Changes in Artistic Coverage

The disciplines of literature, classical music, theatre and fine arts dominate cultural coverage throughout the observation period (see Table 1). These four major artistic disciplines represent the classical high-cultural forms of culture. They show the strongest societal connection, not only because they have historically been a means of reinforcing the national identity, but also because they are the most financed by the state.

Table 1. *Coverage of Artistic Disciplines 1978-2008 (N=texts)*

	1978		1983		1988		1993		1998		2003		2008		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Literature	105	15.2	161	21.3	133	16.3	107	14.4	128	15.3	180	18.7	251	25.3	18.1
Classical music	138	20.0	147	19.4	158	19.4	141	19.0	147	17.6	121	12.6	100	10.1	16.9
Theatre	85	12.3	91	12.0	91	11.2	91	12.2	95	11.4	97	10.1	93	9.4	11.2
Fine arts	74	10.7	82	10.8	101	12.4	98	13.2	97	11.6	99	10.3	90	9.1	11.2
Film	56	8.1	45	6.0	49	6.0	49	6.6	81	9.7	90	9.3	132	13.3	8.4
Popular music	24	3.5	32	4.2	36	4.4	21	2.8	45	5.4	80	8.3	97	9.8	5.5
Cultural politics	53	7.7	76	10.1	57	7.0	63	8.5	36	4.3	53	5.5	52	5.2	6.9
Other	155	22.5	122	16.1	191	23.4	173	23.3	207	24.8	243	25.2	178	17.9	21.9
Total	690	100.0	756	100	816	100	743	100	836	100	963	100	993	100	-

However, the aggregate coverage of these four major disciplines has somewhat weakened during recent decades, from 58 per cent (1978) to 54 per cent (2008). Literature is the only discipline of the four that has shown an increase in coverage over the period 1978-2008, and currently represents 25 per cent of cultural coverage. Although the heads of the cultural departments dispute that their departments are emphasizing any particular areas, they admit that the coverage of Finnish literature, both fiction and non-fiction, is high on their agenda. For example, AL explicitly identified the promotion of national literature in their strategy and in 1994 HS established a prize for first-time authors, accompanied by specialized coverage of the nominees.

In contrast, classical music has suffered the most extreme decline in its coverage during the research period. In line with the recent decrease in concert attendances, and that the proportion of space devoted to classical music in elite papers has significantly decreased elsewhere, the share of its coverage has decreased from 20 per cent to 10 per cent since the 1970's. The same trend applies to reviews, for which the share of coverage

diminished the most dramatically of all the artistic disciplines from about 24 per cent (1978) to only 17 per cent (2008).

Simultaneously, popular disciplines, such as film and popular music, have become an increasingly important part of the total coverage. In reviews, film improved its ranking despite the fact that HS placed all film reviews in a supplement founded in 1995 which was not included in the data. Both popular music and film almost doubled their share, both in total coverage and in reviews: popular music increased from under 4 per cent to 10 per cent in total coverage and from under 4 per cent to 7 per cent in reviews. Film increased from 8 per cent to 13 per cent in total and from 8 per cent to 14 per cent in reviews. In comparison, the share of films in reviews was only 5.5 per cent on average in Hurri's (1993) data.

Preserving the Generic Balance

The share of reviews in Finnish dailies has, according to Hurri's (1993) study, accounted for a third of all texts on culture pages on average. Table 2 shows that the average share has remained the same during the subsequent decades as well. However, after a period of slow increase until the end of the 1990's, the proportion of reviews decreased, settling down to under a third. There has not been a total decline of criticism, but there are signs that reviews have not been able to hold their position.

Table 2. Coverage of Genres 1978-2008 (N=texts)

	1978		1983		1988		1993		1998		2003		2008		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Review	184	26.7	230	30.4	262	32.1	258	34.8	235	28.3	266	27.7	259	26.1	29.4
News	320	46.4	309	40.8	345	42.3	305	41.1	340	40.9	421	43.8	403	40.7	42.3
Other commentary ¹	49	7.1	62	8.2	70	8.6	65	8.8	76	9.1	80	8.3	95	9.6	8.5
Person feature	20	2.9	31	4.1	30	3.7	44	5.9	47	5.7	52	5.4	65	6.6	4.9
Feature	87	12.6	96	12.7	82	10.1	58	7.8	95	11.4	117	12.2	86	8.6	10.8
Other	30	4.3	29	3.8	26	3.2	12	1.6	38	4.6	25	2.6	83	8.4	4.1
Total	690	100	757	100	815	100	742	100	831	100	961	100	991	100	-

¹ Columns, comments and causeries.

The average length of reviews, as seen in Table 3, has been cut by more than a half over the period from approximately 3600 characters in 1978 to 2000 characters in 2008. In comparison with other genres, the average length of reviews has decreased the most, and the decrease has been greatest in the newspapers with the largest circulations (HS, AL). The length of reviews shows significant decrease even in those newspapers where the story length has been cut less than the average. In all, the average shortening rate between 1978 and 2008 has been 44 per cent in reviews, 34 per cent in news and 26 per cent in total.

Table 3. *Average Length of Texts 1978-2008*

	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008
Average story length (in characters)	2360	2394	2279	2148	2167	2097	1691
Average length of reviews (in characters)	3596	3213	2916	2686	2620	2689	2005
Average length of news (in characters)	2389	2310	1982	1498	1749	1598	1542

Despite the shortening of the length of reviews, in times of economic difficulty organizations consider that reviews bring added value to printed and paid content. In regional papers reviews are thus written with a strong focus on the printed version of the newspapers. For example, in 2010, KAL removed all the paper's reviews from the Internet, in order to centralize their production behind a paywall. This is apparently one reason why reviews have not been included as a specific format in the new (online) versions of the papers. Its standardized form of the review allows cultural journalists to commission outsourced labour to fulfil certain tasks that are pre-defined and of stable quality.

Table 4. *Coverage of Articles (%) Written by the Various Types of Journalists by Genres 1978-2008*

	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008	Mean
News								
Freelancers	3.8	2.6	2.6	3.6	5.9	5.0	4.0	3.9
Cultural journalists	0.9	1.9	3.5	3.9	13.5	7.1	16.1	6.7
Journalists from other departments	8.8	7.4	4.4	5.2	11.2	5.5	3.7	6.6
No signature	86.6	88.0	89.5	87.3	69.4	82.4	76.2	82.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Review								
Freelancers	56.0	53.7	61.1	60.5	79.1	66.5	69.9	63.8
Cultural journalists	35.3	31.2	30.9	29.1	14.5	26.0	23.9	27.3
Journalists from other departments	8.2	15.2	7.6	10.5	6.4	7.4	5.4	8.7
No signature	0.5	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Stories in total								
Freelancers	21.4	23.1	27.6	31.4	34.7	28.8	26.5	27.6
Cultural journalists	14.3	17.5	18.3	20.6	19.1	20.8	24.7	19.3
Journalists from other departments	9.0	10.4	6.0	8.7	9.4	7.3	5.2	8.0
No signature	55.3	49.0	48.1	39.3	36.8	43.1	43.6	45.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 4 shows that the development of generic modes has resulted in a situation where staff workers in culture departments ("cultural journalists" in the table) have increasingly taken responsibility for news production and the production of reviews has increasingly been outsourced. Previously, journalists from other departments produced most of the news. Now, according to the interviews of the heads of departments, the requirements for cultural journalists within their departments have increased, as they are expected to produce stories for supplements, other departments and the online versions. Freelancers

are hired to obtain specialized skills for coverage directed at special audiences as well as to increase efficiency and to cope with peak demand.

The tendency to employ workers as an organizational resource for different kinds of tasks is denoted by the term “functional flexibility” (Atkinson 1984). An organization with increased functional flexibility expects workers to transfer from their mono-functional roles into task-flexible and multi-functional roles (Reilly 2001, 40). Intra-organizationally, while the other departments’ news generalists are now less involved in the domain of culture, the cultural staffers’ functional flexibility within the entire organization is increasing.

Among the freelancers, who are mostly reviewers, functional flexibility has not grown significantly. In 1978 the writers of reviews wrote in 1.1 genres on average, while in 2008 the average number of genres per freelancer critic had increased to 1.3. The increase consisted of commissions in opinionated genres, rather than news, so the writers were still employed on the basis of the aesthetic paradigm. However, the number of unique reviewers has still increased, potentially indicating more multi-voiced criticism.

In other words, the boundaries between departments have been blurred, in that cultural journalists have recently been turned into more desirable members of the workforce in relation to other, more news-oriented departments. They can, and are expected to, replace generalists in times of peaks in reporting. The head of KAL explained how he had even tried to shelter his staff from the external pressure to work for other departments, as they are not equally replaceable by generalists in the specialist department of culture, and commissioning freelancers is expensive.

Conclusion

The heads of culture departments typically make claims for the equality of the two major genres, reviews and news. They also tend to emphasize the significance of criticism on culture pages and the importance of specialized freelancers in journalistic production. Despite the support for reviews, the recent development of news production within culture departments indicates that news characteristics are now highly valued in the professional culture. When speaking about reviews the heads of the culture departments indicated strong support for criticism, but they evidently encountered pressures to develop content other than criticism. Reviews have been outsourced and shortened in length. For advocates of the aesthetic paradigm, increased outsourcing may be seen as an opportunity to increase the use of specialized labour from the artistic fields that mark the foundation of aesthetic expertise.

Hurri (1993) noted that rather than the change in content, the characteristic of the content produced by culture departments was its constancy. As seen from the data, even the more recent changes are relatively minor and cultural departments appear to form a seemingly stable reserve of established culture within the newspapers. Besides the fact that cultural change is slow in general, the balancing principle may affect temporary fluctuations in coverage. While specialized cultural journalism substantially preserves its basic structures, traditions and policies, more revolutionary changes may have occurred in the free- and lifestyle coverage that leads up to the culture section of a newspaper, or in emergent online criticism.

The balancing principle, where the organizational unit of the culture department allocates resources to both the expert and generalist workforce, and attempts to cover

a wide variety of artistic disciplines, is synchronic with the idea of “full service”. The coverage of as wide a range of cultural offerings in their circulation area as possible is motivated not only by the mixed variety of readers with heterogeneous backgrounds and different habits and tastes but also by the unique role of reviews in society, which implies that reducing the space dedicated to reviews is not just a matter of media policy but it concerns the entire societal function of reviewing arts. Even if the principle of balancing is becoming increasingly challenging in a more complex cultural environment, the idea of full service is considered to redeem the democratic mandate of culture on culture pages and, in this way, maintain the democratic underpinnings of cultural journalism. This eventually justifies cultural journalism as a type of journalism in society.

Notes

¹ TT Nyhetsbyrån is a Swedish press agency.

² For an evaluation of the validity and reliability of the analysis, see Jaakkola (2013, forthcoming).

³ The author wants to thank Aino Salonen for permitting the re-use of the data.

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