Negotiating Boundaries in a Changing Media Ecosystem: The Case of Swedish Cultural Journalism

Kristina Riegert

Department of Media Studies, Journalism, Media and Communication section, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

ABSTRACT
This article investigates the way Swedish cultural journalists from press, radio and television perceive the core and boundaries of their sub-field at a time when digitalisation and “journalistification” blur them even more. It draws on 27 in-depth interviews with cultural journalists that have worked in the field since the 1980s. What is defined as cultural journalism has expanded since the inclusion of popular culture in its mandate in the early 1990s. Despite this, cultural journalists at different media share similar understandings of their remit, even if self-identification with current practices varies somewhat by generation. The study shows how cultural journalists defend and negotiate the boundaries towards debate and opinion, and news and entertainment journalism. Cultural journalists experience pressure by management to be relevant, newsworthy and “clickable”. Especially press respondents felt that cultural debates have become increasingly indistinguishable from societal debates, due to their visibility in the digital flow. How cultural journalists negotiate boundaries with entertainment and news desks varies somewhat depending on the media organisation. Boundary challenges appear through new genres related to liveness, personality-orientation and societal debate, all of which may conflict with the central task of cultural journalism—to provide in-depth reflection and expertise-based analysis.

KEYWORDS
Cultural journalism; journalistification; status; cultural debate; entertainment; digitalisation

Introduction
In the last decade, Western legacy media have been experiencing economic and legitimation crises: the business models that bore journalism in the public interest are floundering, while digital media platforms, active producers and “monitorial” citizens are eroding the position of media institutions (Deuze 2008). These challenges have prompted renewed scholarly interest in the notion of boundary work around questions such as, “who is a journalist?” and “what is journalism?” (Carlson and Lewis 2015). Boundary work is related to the time-honoured concept of journalistic professionalism to the extent that autonomy, ethics, norms, and skills help to demarcate journalists from non-journalists and journalism...
from that which is not journalism. This study applies the notion of boundary work to the sub-field of cultural journalism, at a time when its already blurred boundaries have become increasingly porous.

Cultural journalists are often considered to be “different” from other journalists by virtue of their education, role perceptions and professional practices (cf. Jaakkola 2015a). Hovden and Kristensen (2018), using data from the Worlds of Journalism Survey, found this to be true across many countries. Cultural journalists differed, not only from journalists at political beats, but also from those self-identifying as entertainment journalists. Cultural journalists were less likely to feel political, economic, production, or organisational pressures than other journalists, unlike entertainment journalists, who felt both economic and organisational pressures on their work (10). Cultural journalists’ role conceptions emphasise “telling a good story”, educating the public, and promoting tolerance. Hovden and Kristensen (2018, 13) attribute both these findings to the analytical, critical and commentary genres of cultural journalism (rather than deadline pressures of news beats), and to cultural journalists’ aspirations of providing alternative perspectives on issues of the day. Cultural journalism is a central component of the cultural public sphere (Gripsrud 2017), and insofar as it reflects debates on norms and values, it also encompasses discussions in the wider media ecology.

Comparative European research on the changes to cultural journalism since the 1960s has shown: (a) a broad expansion of cultural content in the elite press, especially since the late 1980s; (b) a shift to an omnivorous cultural hierarchy where popular and commercial culture have become legitimised, reducing fine arts to one among many aesthetic areas; (c) a noticeable increase in the use of visuals, and on personal characteristics, and (d) an increase in competition from other cultural sources due to digital convergence (Purhonen et al. 2018; Janssen, Verboord and Kuipers, 2011; Verboord and Janssen, 2015; Pasquier 2010). Despite digital convergence, Kristensen and From (2021, 230) found that Danish consumers of cultural journalism still valued the legacy press and television as “authoritative and trustworthy” sources of cultural information.

While Swedish cultural journalism reflects all of these changes, it also has a specific tradition of straddling aesthetic and societal critique in the form of debate, essays and reportage by intellectuals, artists and specialist journalists (Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm 2018). This is an indication that despite these broad changes to cultural journalism, there are also national differences (Janssen, Kuipers, and Verboord 2008; Hovden and Kristensen 2018). Furthermore, these changes may play out differently for cultural journalism in tabloid and quality newspapers, radio and television (Widholm, Riegert, and Roosvall 2019; Pasquier 2010). This study looks at how several generations of Swedish cultural journalists in the press, and public service radio and television define and negotiate the boundaries of cultural journalism during the period of expansion since the 1990s. The study asks:

- How do cultural journalists define the task of cultural journalism, and its boundaries to news, opinion journalism, and entertainment journalism?
- How does self-identification and the status of cultural journalism play into boundary work at different institutions?
- How does the type of media organisation influence boundary work in cultural journalism?
The focus is on journalists’ understandings of their remit and their sub-field’s place in their respective media organisations, such as how they negotiate or differentiate their work from their colleagues in other departments. It is based on an initial study (Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm 2015), where cultural editors were grouped according to medium, but this does not preclude that generations may be more similar than their media organisations.

**Boundary Work and Specialty Journalism**

Matt Carlson (2015, 3) citing Thomas Gieryn, characterises boundary work as a struggle for epistemic authority. The emphasis is on how the actors in a field negotiate the boundaries of the terrain over which they have credibility. It involves their “goals and interests”, or what the stakes are in these “credibility contests”, and the arenas where these struggles are played out (4). As Carlson points out, boundary work is not unlike Bourdieu’s field theory, which has to do with relations between and within the fields of politics, economic and cultural production (cf. Benson and Neveu 2005; Bourdieu 2005).

In the present study, the focus will be on the boundary work taking place internally within media organisations between cultural journalists and other types of journalism. Henrik Örnebring (2016) distinguishes between “organisational professionalism” and “occupational professionalism” in his study of six countries’ news work. The former is characterised by management’s needs such as predictability, accountability and goal attainment, while the latter denotes news workers’ autonomous decision-making, skills and expertise, and the need to maintain prestige in the eyes of other fields. His point is that these two understandings of professionalism may be at odds, they may be integrated, or negotiated in different workplaces (Örnebring 2016, 20–23). Digitalisation, he concludes, has weakened the frameworks of occupational professionalism, since technological change was often used to increase economic and managerial control over news desks in media organisations (Örnebring 2016, 191). Kristensen, From, and Kammer (2017: 37) write that cultural journalists today gain “authority” through three potentially competing types of professionalism: organisational professionalism (producing effective and commercially viable coverage on several platforms), occupational professionalism in terms of the logics of news journalism (critical and independent coverage of culture) and, through aesthetic specialisation. Otherwise, cultural journalism has been characterised as one with a “dual professionalism”, where some orient themselves more within an “aesthetic” paradigm, and others within the “journalistic” paradigm (Hellman and Jaakkola 2012) regarding their values, goals or positions in the production of knowledge. The “journalistic paradigm” is more fact-oriented and immediacy-based and is associated with cultural news and interviews, whereas the “aesthetic paradigm” uses subjectivity, basing arguments on field expertise, and is more reflective and critical, as exemplified by the review, essay or column (Hellman and Jaakkola 2012, 788). Cultural journalists can and do work in both paradigms, but studies have shown that the increasing control of central management and the decreasing autonomy of the cultural desks has meant a stronger emphasis on the journalistic paradigm (Kristensen, From, and Kammer, 2017; Hellman, Jaakkola, and Salokangas 2017; Jaakkola 2015c). Jaakkola et al. (2015b, 819) argue that this increasing emphasis on organisational professionalism likely affects
those working at the cultural desks more than freelance critics, who often represent aesthetic specialisation.

Carlson’s (2015, 9–10) model of boundary work is about journalism and non-journalism, and involves demarcations around journalistic “expansion, expulsion and protection of autonomy”. This can be applied to cultural journalism’s boundary struggles with journalism at other beats. He says, expansion can involve “participants” like citizen journalists (here, cultural “generalists”); “practices” like journalists using social media (here, covering new aesthetic areas, using new formats or platforms), and “professionalism” like using social media platforms, but defending one’s distinct community (here, defending cultural journalism’s specific expertise). Expulsion is done by rejecting deviant “participants”, like those who falsify stories (here, lack of expertise in cultural journalism), deviant “practices” like rejecting paparazzi practices (here, interviews of politicians as cultural journalism) or deviant “norms/values” such as partisan news platforms (here, “quick opinions” rather than nuanced cultural debate, personality-led formats for culture). Protection of autonomy is exemplified by Carlson as regarding “participants” by keeping PR/advertisers out of journalism, in “practices” as fighting governments’ efforts to regulate, and in “professionalism” as “keeping management away from editorial control”. These instances are all applicable to cultural journalism as well, however, in terms of “practices”, a more appropriate example for cultural journalism is negotiation with news or entertainment departments about who “owns” a certain story, as we shall see below.

This rough framework may serve to identify cultural journalism’s boundary issues, even if not all of the aspects can be developed here, in part because this article is not focused on cultural journalism’s digital media practices or on external boundary struggles, as in Carlson’s original framework. Here, it should be noted that the expansion of the boundaries of cultural journalism took place in the pre-digital early 1990s (Purhonen, Heikkilä, and Hazir 2017; Widholm, Riegert, and Roosvall 2019).

Marchetti (2005) writes that specialist journalists must balance between achieving credibility with peers in their field of expertise, and mastery of basic journalist skills. Cultural journalism has been noted for having particularly close relationships with actors in the cultural sector. This has reinforced the aesthetic authority of cultural journalism, but left it open to charges of being less scrutinising, vulnerable to public relations, or championing arts for arts’ sake (Kristensen 2018). However, recruitment to cultural journalism is changing. A Norwegian study shows an increase in recruitment of those with a journalism/communication training rather than in a Humanities background. Hovden and Knapskog (2015, 7–8) argue that these recruits’ expertise in aesthetic areas is weaker than the academics and artists of previous generations, and this contributes to a loss of status in a field that celebrates hard news and investigative journalism. The increasing “generalist” orientation of cultural journalists has also been noted by Sarrimo (2017), as part of the general “journalistification” of Swedish cultural journalism. Of course, the importance of a cultural journalists’ expertise varies according to the type and position the media outlet and their ability to keep a stable of expert freelancers on hand.

Regarding status, this is not a clear-cut boundary issue for cultural journalism, since attributions of prestige are in the eye of the beholder. Internally, Swedish cultural journalism has traditionally been thought of as being “different”, due to its higher composition of academics, intellectuals, and freelancers. In the eyes of some, cultural journalism is the “soul of the paper”, which contributes “value, meaning, knowledge and expertise”
In the eyes of other journalists, however, cultural journalism can be "too Ivory Tower", not relevant, or too exclusive for the average reader. The aforementioned expansion of cultural journalism in the early 1990s at Swedish cultural desks entailed more popular culture, the hiring of specialty journalists, and in key quality newspapers, the merging of culture and entertainment into one section. This shift attracted more "middle brow" and younger audiences, and in the case of the press, more advertising, as in other European countries (Verboord and Janssen 2015; Purhonen et al. 2018) The pressure to appeal to broader audiences, prompted criticism of popularisation, commercialisation and "journalistification" (Jaakkola 2015c) and, some argued that this undermined the intellectual status of cultural journalism (Lundqvist 2012).

Due to these changes, one boundary struggle that has become more salient in the 2000s in Sweden is cultural journalism’s relation to the news beats. Marchetti describes how big stories evoke competition between various desks in a media organisation. He says, the news division will try to usurp the story and is bound to give it different angles and interpretations than if a specialist would have covered it.

So, one suggestion here is that boundary struggles are played out in competition for the "big stories", as well through the way cultural desks decide how to cover news and entertainment.

**Media-Specificity in the Swedish Cultural Journalism Ecosystem**

As cultural journalism differs in different countries, it also can be expected to vary between media organisations and media forms. As argued by Widholm et al. (2019) if seen as a media ecosystem, cultural journalism in the Swedish press, public service radio and television have developed complementary roles over the last century, although digitalisation may be changing this. The big city press, both quality and tabloid play leading roles and employ well-known intellectuals and critics, and see it as their job to initiate cultural and societal debate. However, in the 2010s the Swedish press has been weakened by the loss of advertising and readership. Since 2013, 698 journalist jobs have “disappeared”,1 and this has also reduced the number of positions at the cultural desks of the press. While the cultural desks have traditionally had numerous freelancers, the permanent staff has been reduced to a minimum, at the same time that cultural journalists must work in a multiplatform environment and cover several aesthetic areas at once (Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm 2015).

In contrast to the press, the Swedish public service organisations SR (radio) and SVT (television) have significantly raised their cultural journalism profiles since 2000. The main talk channel P1 at SR Radio (which has the largest cultural desk) doubled its cultural news output between 2012 and 2015 (Asp 2015, 15). In 2016, SR made it a priority to

---

1 See Widholm et al. (2019) for a detailed account of the changes in the Swedish press.
increase their local and regional cultural coverage, against the background of closure or conglomeration of cultural pages in the local press (Sveriges Radio 2017, 89). Regarding SVT, a major reorganisation of the company in 2000 led to the introduction of its first ever cultural news programme directly following nightly news bulletins, as well as to several new cultural magazine formats (Riegert and Roosvall 2017, 104). Despite the public service media’s mandate to “monitor, reflect and scrutinise” the cultural public sphere, they are still bound by statute to reflect the existing debate rather than to “drive” opinion, which is the provenance of the press. Apart from other medium-specific differences, such as radio’s dependence on sound and television’s visuality, there has been a historical cultural journalism hierarchy, where the cultural desk at SR radio was considered more successful in establishing critical reflective genres similar to the press, more so than television (Riegert and Roosvall 2017).

In a study of cultural journalism content across three Swedish media types, there are signs of the increasing prevalence of the journalistic paradigm, as seen through descriptive text-types and genre-hybridisation. Although the review genre in the press, for example, shows no unambiguous decline in absolute numbers, there is an increased heterogeneity of genres (Widholm, Riegert, and Roosvall 2019; cf. Purhonen et al. 2018, 295). That is, columns that review several offerings, an increase in cultural news, background articles, and preview interviews (see also Verboord and Janssen 2015, 841; Kristensen 2010, 84–85), as well a strong increase in visuals (cf. Heikkilä, Lauronen, and Purhonen 2017). What seems clear is that some cultural journalism genres have better visibility in the digital flow than others.

Method

Those interviewed for this study work or have worked for various newspapers’ cultural desks, the cultural desks of the public service organisations at the P1 channel and both the SVT main television channels (see Appendix). Semi-structured interviews help facilitate analysis of societal matters from the perspectives of the actors involved (Bryman 2012). The perspectives of the cultural journalists provide context about the media organisations, highlight the changes at the cultural desks at different points in time, and how this is related to the practices of boundary work. This article analyses only a few questions in 27 hour-long interviews. What is the definition of cultural journalism and what is its task? What are the boundaries between cultural journalism and news, opinion and entertainment? The interviews allow for comparison regarding boundary definitions and negotiations (with news, debate, entertainment), and how cultural journalists’ perceptions of these have changed. In order to ensure that relevant information embedded in the answers to other questions was included, the transcribed interview corpuses were coded with MAXQDA software. The respondents’ views are taken to be opinions from established cultural journalists that give insight into the culture of this type of journalism from the perspective of different media organisations.

The journalists interviewed are not representative of the majority of cultural journalists who work as freelancers or precarious workers at the cultural desks of many media organisations. The choice of respondents reflects the historical development and change at the most influential Swedish cultural desks at newspapers, radio and television. This includes cultural editors, producers, hosts, critics and reporters of cultural news, cultural magazine
programmes, or cultural documentary producers. Those interviewed for the press were chosen with an eye to geographic diversity, with three out of six from regional papers from the north, south and west of the country, while the other three are the major Stockholm papers, both quality and tabloid (see Appendix). The fact that the respondents are older is part of a broader journalistic development. Wiik (2015, 122, 126) shows that the proportion of Swedish journalists over 60 years of age has increased from 5% in 1989–17% in 2011. The sample is relatively evenly divided between those born in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, with a few outliers born on both sides of these decades. They are also relatively evenly divided according to gender, and between those who were editors/managers (10), hosts/producers/reporters (12) and critics (13)—although these categories overlap, since a number of critics had been editors/managers at one time. Finally, this sample also included a number of journalists who either had migrated to or from news or the foreign desk, due to the larger project of which this is a part. This indicates that they are aware of boundary crossings.

The Task of Cultural Journalism and Self-Identification

How are the boundaries drawn when discussing the definition or task of cultural journalism and how have these changed over time? Similar to the aforementioned study of nine cultural editors in Swedish press, radio and television (Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm 2015), the 27 respondents delivered very similar definitions. Swedish cultural journalism denotes subjective and initiated treatments of ideas, values, history, art works, and events of relevance to the cultural or political public sphere. It also includes the monitoring of cultural events, and the scrutinising of cultural institutions. Most respondents say cultural journalism is broad, and it is not defined by a set of aesthetic disciplines, but by the licence to approach a diversity of topics—anything from climate change, to Covid 19, to racism through a “cultural filter”—often by someone with cultural or intellectual credentials. Common words describing this approach were contextualisation, evaluation, and knowledge, even when cultural journalism deals with current events or public debate. Here are voices from three media:³

/ … / whether it is about a poet or social media or riots in a suburb, if we look at it from a cultural journalistic standpoint, we put it into context, do an analysis and explain to people why it can be this way, and taking it a step further, to a higher plane of abstraction, as I interpret it. Then that is cultural journalism/ … /cultural journalism is about the way you approach things, the depth and complexity in the story-telling. (1971, F, SVT)

Cultural journalism is current events about art and discussions about it, but it is also able to raise and problematise the big questions about migration and alienation/ … / but in the best of worlds it should reflect and analyse. Put things into their proper contexts. Increase our understanding of society. (1962, F, SvD)

Cultural journalism’s task is to evaluate and mediate. Before, when the cultural arena was branded by somewhat authoritarian taste hierarchies regarding highbrow culture, the cultural journalist was backed up by an institution. Today, a cultural journalist’s evaluation is less highly valued and each individual must stand on his/her own. Cultural journalism must evaluate and go against the market values, and build on education, cultural heritage and other controversial concepts. The ability and the courage to evaluate is what gives cultural journalism its charge. (1953, M, SR)
Even if the notion of an “approach” and a “cultural filter” are key to its broad definition, most respondents highlight the subjective and evaluative side, and play down the fact that a large part of the output is monitoring, descriptive cultural coverage (Widholm, Riegert, and Roosvall 2019). One reason could be that to define cultural journalism is to differentiate it from other types of journalism, so the subjective side of cultural journalism is a clear way to differentiate it. This in itself is a boundary-marker because it downplays the journalistic paradigm—cultural news. Interestingly, some of the cultural desks of the press deal with this tension by limiting their engagement with cultural news. Respondents from one of the regional qualities and the two Stockholm tabloids say they limit cultural news (see next section).

The majority of respondents mentioned that cultural journalism previously had stronger boundaries when focused on the fine arts, but now covered everything from “IT and gaming, to democracy and freedom of speech issues, and the working conditions of artists” (1975, M, SVT). One of the oldest respondents said that cultural journalism used to be based on the aesthetic fields, but these boundaries were “obliterated”, so “now it is about how one writes”, for example, questioning “uncomfortable truths” or “digging into the past” (1937, M, press). Cultural journalism has the ambition to provide alternative in-depth perspectives on norms and values in society and is less news-driven, said another (1974, M, Expressen). A radio respondent said that one form of evaluation was decisions about what types of cultural production were “worthy of discussion” (1957, M, SR). Thus the expanded definition of cultural journalism protects the professionalism of the cultural desks, because it claims to provide a more complex and initiated perspective, even in monitoring cultural news, by making it different than, for example, entertainment journalism.

Some of the older public service respondents did not self-identify with current practices in cultural journalism. Their comments are comparable to those press critics who embrace the aesthetic paradigm, and do not identify with the journalistic paradigm of cultural journalism (cf. Jaakkola 2012; Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen 2007). For one respondent,

Facts are not important for cultural journalism, since it is about the artwork and subjective meetings around them, or essays that put art into its historical context, none of which is objective or factual … I have never considered what we did to be cultural journalism/ … / I think that cultural journalism has not been around for most of my working life, until radio became more societally focused. (1950, M, SR)

A retired radio producer explained that the job of the cultural desk was to “present and evaluate art forms and be educational”. She dates the transformation of her department to cultural journalism to the time when cultural news was introduced in the early 1980s (1942, F, SR). This respondent had been instrumental in developing what was described as high quality “performative” radio reportage, a genre which was said to have become scarce in the 2000s, due to it being expensive to make. News and live talk formats were more common in radio today, said another respondent, who has extensive experience in all three media (1957,F, SVT). A similar shift was identified in the late 1980s at SVT, with new specialist journalists recruited to a cultural division consisting mainly of academics and artist-producers. The goal was to improve and broaden SVT’s cultural monitoring, and its ability to scrutinise cultural institutions and industries (1964, F, SVT; 1955, F, SVT).
The younger generation’s greater acceptance of the journalistic paradigm (cf. Jaakkola 2015c) can be exemplified by the fact that the youngest radio respondent highlighted in her definition both the objective (news) and subjective (criticism) parts of cultural journalism, the boundaries set by being a public service employee (“you are not supposed to … be too subjective”), further emphasising, “nowadays all parts of the cultural industries are supposed to be scrutinised. … / even if the artwork is the core of the field, cultural journalism covers much more today. Now, we monitor the cultural industries / … / just like other types of branch journalism do” (1973, F, SR).

The expanded cultural remit is defined by the respondents as an approach - subjective, initiated and context-oriented—-to a diversity of topics, ideas and issues. This “cultural filter” can also be used to include cultural monitoring and scrutiny, which appear more important for the public service respondents, than those in the press. The journalistification of cultural journalism appears to be related to age and genre. The younger respondent embraces the hybridity of the subfield, using scrutiny rather than evaluation as a lotus star, while some of the older respondents could not identify with the journalistic paradigm, since they worked at a time when the boundaries around a mainly fine arts orientation were stronger.

**Boundary Practices: Drawing Boundaries to Opinion Journalism**

Cultural journalism’s expansion has blurred its boundaries with two closely related subfields: the editorial pages of the press, and news and entertainment journalism. Both of these are deeply connected to international structural changes: the inclusion of popular culture in cultural journalism, and digitalisation, which has led to increased competitiveness and unpredictability in the market for cultural journalism. Regarding popular culture, entertainment was always a subject of recurring debate among Swedish cultural journalists, ever since the 1960s (Lundqvist 2012). As for cultural “idea” debates, this genre has been a profiling point for the Swedish press for many decades, and by 2010, media organisations began to notice that cultural debates were more clicked on in the digital flows, especially if the debates touched on identity, gender and ethnicity (Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm 2015). Several scholars have pointed to newspapers’ increased interest in opinionated genres (Steensen, 2018; Coward 2013). Add to this the resurgence of societal interest in norms and values, a typical Swedish cultural debate topic, and this part of cultural journalism becomes perceived as more relevant in the digital media ecosystem.

The increased emphasis on cultural debates by media management has created a defensive posture among the press respondents who worry that they’ve become increasingly indistinguishable from the editorial and debate pages (1971, Male, AB; 1962, Female, SvD). The blurring of the boundaries between cultural and political/societal opinion is also mirrored in new editorial recruitments. Well-known authors or cultural journalists now have regular columns in the editorial pages of the “journal of record” Dagens Nyheter, and the former Political Editor of Sweden’s largest newspaper, the tabloid Aftonbladet, was named Cultural Editor in December 2019. This type of boundary crossing could be attempts brand the newspapers through the cultural pages, something that applies also to Danish cultural journalism (Kristensen, From, and Kammer 2017, 41). A respondent working for the cultural debate page said that criticism and debate fulfil the following functions:
This respondent also said that cultural debates had of late “gravitated towards the controversial, conflict-ridden and quick opinions”, which was problematic, “since it is related to business model considerations” (1975, Male, GP). In other words, the character of the cultural debates may satisfy management, since they are more visible in the digital flow, but these types of debates are deviant to the values of knowledge and analysis in cultural journalism, and the pressure to publish them undermines cultural journalism’s professional autonomy.

Another respondent complained that some debates in her Stockholm-based quality paper were not really “cultural” but more “societal”, and that, furthermore, a portrait interview of a political leader done by the cultural desk had no clear connection to culture. She fears that cultural journalism risks losing its ability to cover minor aesthetic subject areas when space and resources are diverted from the core task of cultural journalism. Her defence of these boundaries from the intrusion of societal issues is related both to protecting professional autonomy from interfering editors, and defending the importance of aesthetic expertise in cultural journalism’s expansion. She also rejects the politician interview since “cultural journalists cannot scrutinise politicians the way news journalists can” (1962, F, SvD). Another respondent, who had worked in all three media, said that one of the most important changes for cultural journalism since digitalisation and the “business model collapse” is the increased competition and pressure to publish quickly, and the fact that “politics as a sphere has eaten its way into the sphere of cultural production” together with a new generation who are “more Anglo-Saxon-oriented and more personalised” (1957, F, SVT). Criticism of the changing character of cultural debates in the digital flow was mentioned by numerous respondents, even if several pointed out that this applies more to the press than other cultural desks. Talk of the pressure to publish quickly is to defend the traditional norms of reflectivity in cultural journalism, however to imply that the political Zeitgeist of the 2010s is new overlooks the political aspects of cultural journalism since the 1960s (Riegert et al., 2018).

Thus, due to digitalisation and the interest from other parts of the media organisation, cultural debate feeds organisational professionalism mainly in the press. This is rejected since it affects resource allocation towards aesthetic subjects, and erodes the boundaries of cultural journalism. The pressure to publish cultural debates highlights cultural journalism as an opinion purveyor in the press, but it interferes with autonomy and may also undermine cultural journalism’s core task.

**Boundaries Practices: Drawing Boundaries to News and Entertainment Journalism**

In answer to the question of what boundaries there are between cultural journalism and entertainment, the responses show a number of practices that differ between the newspapers, and between the press and public service media. This can be attributed to the media organisation in question and the type of audience. The Nordic tradition of tabloids
is that they include more ambitious journalism than the tabloids of other regions (Syvertsen et al. 2014, 57), but also a plethora of entertainment-oriented content. For this reason, the cultural desks in the Stockholm tabloids have more articulated boundaries to entertainment than most of the quality papers do. At the tabloid Expressen, if other desks want to cover the same author, an agreement can be reached that culture does the review, and entertainment does interviews around the book. There is also a standing agreement that commercial theatre is covered by the entertainment desk and state-funded theatre is covered by the cultural desk. The cultural desk does not do news (1974, Male, Expressen). The former cultural editor for a regional south Sweden quality also saw cultural news as a slippery slope that brought with it more popular culture, blurring the boundaries to entertainment. So, she said, they decided to stop doing cultural news:

There are many in the business who are worried that commercial popular culture is taking over too much/ … / A number of years ago, there was great anxiety, and pressure to ‘now we have to write a lot about gaming and tv series’, and I think we were accused and people had an inner fear that we had gone too far towards popular consumption culture/ … / Somewhere we need to decide what we think is most important, and many more are now saying that some of these entertainment phenomena survive without our help, and we don’t need to spend the resources and time on them. There are areas that no one cares about if we don’t do it: reviews of art exhibitions and Swedish literature are two examples.

Most of the respondents describe the following division of labour: the entertainment desks take the commercially viable aspects of culture and are quicker to publish daily news (some liken it to the sports section), whereas the cultural desk covers more “lasting” popular culture contributions to the cultural public sphere, as well as minor or highbrow aesthetic fields. Many respondents admitted that the boundaries can be nebulous and need negotiating on a case by case basis. Some press respondents said that the criteria for covering, for example, a bestselling book would depend on its “importance” to the cultural public sphere (cf. Hellman, Riegert, and Kristensen 2018). Still others mentioned that the cultural desks needed to be more critical and analytical in their approach than entertainment journalists needed to be. In fact, the justification for merging culture and entertainment sections in the quality press in the 1990s was to scrutinise the latter from a more critical perspective (Lundqvist 2012). One SVT host said that it was much harder and required more knowledge to get interesting interviews from authors than from a politician (1963, M, SVT). The references to expertise and judgement in cultural journalism practices are reminiscent of what Kotisova (2020, 14) called “emotional labour”, a form of engagement which together with the individual’s expertise and skill, reinforces the boundaries between the cultural critic and other journalists.

The respondents from SR and SVT gave similar criteria for their cultural desks’ coverage of popular culture, but emphasised that the artwork/cultural product must have a certain “quality”—it must provide new insights, new thoughts, or contribute in some way to the cultural sphere. They also acknowledged times when a big story or event takes place and coordination was necessary with the news desks, because there are many events,
especially with regard to film and music, that can be covered by both desks. SR and SVT differ regarding how they draw the boundaries to entertainment, in part this is due to different types of organisation and different target audiences. Regarding SR, this study does not include the main popular culture channel P3, directed at younger audiences, so popular culture at P1 does not have coordinate its output with another channel. For breaking cultural stories or big events, the cultural desk will discuss who will do what with the news division. The boundary practices are not as systematic as for the press, since anecdotes describe regretful incidents when the news and cultural news programmes covered the same event on the same day. One respondent described how news departments have become more interested in culture than in the 1990s. He said that cultural prizes are easy for the news to cover—they mean money and prestige. Further, the news division is “much better” at covering “breaking” cultural news, like the death of a cultural personality on a Saturday (1966, Male, SR). The coordination problem may be more problematic when the news is interested in, for example, a Nobel Prize winner like Bob Dylan, since the cultural desks normally “own” the annual event of the Nobel Prize for Literature. In cases where news programmes want to do these stories, they lead the discussion, which results in the cultural journalists taking on the role of expert commentators (1950, Male, SR; 1966, Male, SR) while the cultural programmes will go for more in-depth coverage. The Nobel Prize example could be seen as a loss of prestige for the cultural news programme, but since the value of analysis trumps that of immediacy, cultural journalists claims to expertise are not threatened, and cultural programmes are free to do their own in-depth work. In other words, they see it as successful boundary maintenance.

The cultural news programme at SVT reaches the largest audience segment among the media discussed here. One respondent estimated that SVT’s cultural news is about 60% popular culture, but due its short length, these few segments should showcase works of a certain “quality” (1955, Female, SVT). Like at SR, there should be an “alternative” take, a more analytical, complexity-oriented approach to culture than entertainment needs to do (1971, Female, SVT). Unlike SR, the discussion of the boundary to entertainment was not about negotiation with the evening news, instead respondents emphasised that cultural news was tasked to scrutinise entertainment—even the entertainment offerings of SVT itself, like Eurovision Song Contest (1964, Female, SVT). When pressed to distinguish the boundaries between cultural factual programming from entertainment factual, the former Head of Division said, “Entertainment is there to entertain, period. And we also want to entertain, but there must be a cultural value, something to learn, to get a new insight into, a new perspective, a new thought, for us to do it” (1964, Female, SVT). Thus, folkbildung or pedagogy, the aims of the programme, rather than the format is decisive for the cultural factual programming. In theory, SVT’s cultural factual programming should provide “new insights”, “cultural value”, and be educational, which is also related to its public service remit. In practice, however, the boundary between SVT cultural factual programming and entertainment may not be that clear, since they both share personality-led or competition formats (1971, F, SVT). This strategy of expansion into new formats for cultural factual programming aims to capitalise on the success of the historical reality show “History Eaters” (1964, F, SVT). Even if it can be argued that the personalisation of these formats blurs the boundaries between factual culture and entertainment (Bondebjerg 2008), there is no “expulsion” by management since audience
focus groups have approved of these formats (1971, F, SVT). For the SVT respondents, then, the boundaries to entertainment were demarcated through monitoring culture of a certain quality and scrutinising the entertainment industries. More nebulous were the boundaries to entertainment when it comes to personality-led formats in cultural factual programming; this is defended by management as an expansion with cultural aims to find new audiences (1964, F, SVT).

Conclusion

Matt Carlson’s (2015) notions of expansion, expulsion and protection of autonomy helped to pinpoint how and where the salient boundary work takes place in the hybrid sub-field of cultural journalism. Despite the different media organisations, respondents had similar broad definitions of cultural journalism that highlighted the subjective, critical and contextualising nature of their task, subordinating the cultural news coverage aspect of it. Despite this, cultural news and popular culture are where much of the daily boundary work around expansion and the protection of autonomy take place. This boundary work differed depending on the independent decisions of some cultural desks and the position of the cultural desk in the media organisation, and its place in the wider media ecosystem (cf. Marchetti 2005). Some press minimised their cultural news, others (SR) coordinated “big events” with the news desks, while still others (SVT) emphasised their scrutinising role of entertainment. The expulsion aspect could be seen in the criticism of the thinning boundary between societal editorialising and cultural debate in the press, where the latter was said to be leaning towards “quick opinions” and societal controversy. Also rejected were attempts to co-opt the cultural desk into doing portrait interviews of politicians. These were attributed to organisational professionalism and cultural journalism’s increased visibility in the digital flow.

These perceptions contrast with Hovden and Kristensen’s (2018) results that cultural journalists are more protected from production and organisational pressures, like demands for immediacy. To be sure, negotiations with the news desk were perceived to ensure respect for cultural journalism’s autonomy and expertise, but pressure for timeliness and visibility still entails a risk that cultural desks will be encouraged to do more such stories. On a daily basis, the boundary work to entertainment is drawn by respondents’ autonomous assessments of “quality” or “importance” of the work, where the analytical work of critical appraisal is contrasted to what entertainment journalism needs to do, which Hovden and Kristensen (2018) also point out (cf. Kotisova 2020). This indicates self-perceptions of the higher status of cultural journalism in relation to news and entertainment. Regarding television, however, SVT management has adopted personality-led formats for cultural factual programming, which is an expansion that arguably blurs the boundaries to entertainment, and may undermine perceptions of the status of the cultural division.

Paradoxically, despite the fierce defence against the blurred boundaries between cultural debate and other opinion journalism, widely shared cultural debates increase the relevance and the status of cultural journalism in the wider media ecosystem, satisfying organisational professionalism’s goals by making cultural journalism more “clickable” in the digital flow. This contrasts with the blurred boundaries towards entertainment, which decrease the status of cultural journalism within the organisation. Genre
changes in the public service media: from reportage to live talk (SR) and personality-led magazine programmes (SVT) entail more actuality. It can thus be argued that the boundaries of the sub-field are challenged through genres related to actuality, personality-orientation and societally relevant debate, which may conflict with the central task of cultural journalism—to provide in-depth reflection and perspectives from knowledgeable authors.

Notes

1. Studies carried out by the journalist union and SVTs Cultural News programme. https://www.dn.se/ekonomi/hundratals-journalistjobb-forsvann-under-2019/. https://www.svt.se/kultur/800-jobb-forsvann-forra-aret
2. The interviews were carried out by the “The Worlds of Cultural journalism” project researchers: Anna Roosvall (press) Andreas Widholm (radio) and Kristina Riegert (television).
3. The respondents can be found in the Appendix listed by media organisation, birthyear, gender and titles or position. All quotes are translated from Swedish by the author.
4. https://www.expressen.se/kultur/nu-tappar-aftonbladet-sin-radikala-kultursida/
5. According to MMS television ratings, SVTs Cultural News is often in the top ten news programmes. For the week of 6 February 2020, for example, they had a rating of 646,000 viewers. http://mms.se/wp-content/uploads/_dokument/rapporter/tv-tittande/ar/rsrapporter/rsrapport2017.pdf/ Accessed 6th February 2020.
6. To be sure, traditional cultural “reportage” is kept alive on the long-running K special, the weekly cultural documentary programme.

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions. This project was funded by the Swedish Science Council. Project number 2015-01091.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Vetenskapsrådet: [Grant Number 2015-01091].

ORCID

Kristina Riegert http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8429-3028

References

Asp, K. 2015. Svenskt medieutbud 2015 [Swedish Media Content 2015]. Report for the Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority. https://www.mprt.se/globalassets/dokument/publikationer/svenskt-medieutbud/svenskt-medieutbud-2015.pdf (accessed 6 January)
Benson, R., and E. Neveu. 2005. Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Bondebjerg, I. 2008. Virkelighedens Fortællinger: den Danske tv-Dokumentarismes Historie. [Stories of Reality: The History of Danish TV Documentary] 1 ed. Frederiksberg: Samfundslitteratur.
Bourdieu, P. 2005. “The Political Field, the Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field.” In Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field, edited by R. Benson, and E. Neveu, 29–47. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bryman, A. 2012. Social Research Methods. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carlson, M. 2015. “Introduction: The Many Boundaries of Journalism.” In Boundaries of Journalism: Professionalism, Practices and Participation, edited by M. Carlson, and S. C. Lewis, 1–18. London: Routledge.

Carlson, M., and S. C. Lewis. 2015. Boundaries of Journalism: Professionalism, Practices and Participation. London: Routledge.

Coward, R. 2013. Speaking Personally: the Rise of Subjective and Conessional Journalism. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Deuze, M. 2008. “The Changing Context of News Work: Liquid Journalism and Monitorial Citizenship.” International Journal of Communication 2: 848–865.

Gripsrud, J. 2017. “The Cultural, the Political and the Functions of Cultural Journalism in Digital Times.” In Cultural Journalism in the Nordic Countries, edited by N. N. Kristensen, and K. Riegert, 181–194. Gothenburg, Sweden: Nordicom.

Harries, G., and K. Wahl-Jorgensen. 2007. “The Culture of Arts Journalists: Elitists, Saviors or Manic Depressives?” Journalism 8 (6): 619–639.

Heikkilä, R., T. Lauronen, and S. Purhonen. 2017. “The Crisis of Cultural Journalism Revisited: The Space and Place of Culture in Quality European Newspapers from 1960-2010.” European Journal of Cultural Studies 21 (6): 669–686.

Hellman, H., and M. Jaakkola. 2012. “From Aesthetes to Reporters: The Paradigm Shift in Arts Journalism in Finland.” Journalism 13 (6): 783–801.

Hellman, H., M. Jaakkola, and R. Salokangas. 2017. “From Cultural Wars to Combat Games: Differentiation and Development of Culture Departments in Finland.” In Cultural Journalism in the Nordic Countries, edited by N. Kristensen, and N. Riegert, 49–68. Gothenburg: Nordicom.

Hellman, H., K. Riegert, and N. N. Kristensen. 2018. “Millennium 4 – Medierna och Kvalitetsförhandling av en Bästsäljare [Millennium 4: the Media and Negotiations of Quality in a Bestseller].” In Kvalitetsförhandlingar: Kvalitetsbegrepet i Samtidens Kunst och Kultur, edited by J. F. Hovden, and Ø Prytz, 403–436. Oslo: Fagbokförlaget.

Hovden, J. F., and K. Knapskog. 2015. “Doubly Dominated: Cultural Journalists in the Fields of Journalism and Culture.” Journalism Practice 9 (6): 791–810.

Hovden, J. S., and N. N. Kristensen. 2018. “The Cultural Journalist Around the Globe: A Comparative Study of Characteristics, Role Perceptions, and Perceived Influences.” Journalism, Online first. 16 August. doi:10.1177/1464884918791224.

Jaakkola, M. 2012. “Promoting Aesthetic Tourism: Transgressions Between Generalist and Specialist Subfields in Cultural Journalism.” Journalism Practice 6 (4): 482–496.

Jaakkola, M. 2015a. The Contested Autonomy of Arts and Journalism: Change and Continuity of the Dual Professionalism of Cultural Journalism. PhD Thesis. Tampere: Tampere University Press.

Jaakkola, M. 2015c. “Witnesses of a Cultural Crisis: Representations of Media-Related Metaprocesses as Professional Metacriticism of Arts and Cultural Journalism.” International Journal of Cultural Studies 18 (5): 537–554.

Jaakkola, M., H. Hellman, K. Koljonen, and J. Väliverronen. 2015b. “Liquid Modern Journalism with a Difference.” Journalism Practice 9 (6): 811–828.

Janssen, S., G. Kuipers, and M. Verboord. 2008. “Cultural Globalization and Arts Journalism.” American Sociological Review 73 (5): 719–740.

Janssen, S., M. Verboord, and G. Kuipers. 2011. “Comparing Cultural Classification: High and Popular Arts in European and U.S. Elite Newspapers.” Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie 63 (51): 139–168.

Kotisova, J. 2020. “An Elixir of Life? Emotional Labour in Cultural Journalism.” Journalism, Online first April 28. doi:10.1177/1464884920917289.

Kristensen, N. N. 2010. “The Historical Transformation of Cultural Journalism.” Northern Lights 8 (1): 69–92.
Kristensen, N. N. 2018. “Churnalism, Cultural (Inter)Mediation and Sourcing in Cultural Journalism.” Journalism Studies 19 (14): 2168–2186.

Kristensen, N. N., and U. From. 2021. “The Survival of the Critic: Audiences’ Use of Cultural Information and Cultural Reviews in Legacy Media.” In Rethinking Cultural Criticism; New Voices in the Digital age, edited by N. N. Kristensen, U. From, and H. K. Haaststrup, 209–233. Springer Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kristensen, N. N., U. From, and A. Kammer. 2017. “The Changing Logics of Danish Cultural Journalism.” In Cultural Journalism in the Nordic Countries, edited by N. N. Kristensen, and K. Riegert, 29–48. Gothenburg: Nordicom.

Lundqvist, Å. 2012. Kultursidan: Kulturjournalistiken i Dagens Nyheter 1864–2012. Stockholm: Bonniers.

Marchetti, D. 2005. “Sub-Fields of Specialized Journalism.” In Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field, edited by R. Benson and E. Neveu, 64–82. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Örnebring, H. 2016. Newsworkers: a Comparative European Perspective. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Purhonen, S., R. Heikkilä, and I. K. Hazir. 2017. “The Grand Opening? The Transformation of the Content of Culture Sections in European Newspapers, 1960–2010.” Poetics 62: 29–42.

Purhonen, S., R. Heikkilä, I. K. Hazir, T. Lauronen, R. C. J. Fernández, and J. Gronow. 2018. Enter Culture, Exit Arts: The Transformation of Cultural Hierarchies in European Newspapers Culture Sections 1960-2010. Oxon: Routledge.

Riegert, K., and A. Roosvall. 2017. “Cultural Journalism as a Contribution to Democratic Discourse in Sweden.” In Cultural Journalism in the Nordic Countries, edited by N. N. Kristensen, and K. Riegert, 89–108. Gothenburg: Nordicom.

Riegert, K., A. Roosvall, and A. Widholm. 2015. “The Political in Cultural Journalism.” Journalism Practice 9 (6): 773–790.

Riegert, K, Roosvall, A and Widholm, A. 2019. Abundance or Crisis? Transformations in the Media Ecology of Swedish Cultural Journalism Over Four Decades Journalism. Online first, 6 August 2019. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919866077.

Wiik, J. 2015. “Internal Boundaries: The Stratification of the Journalistic Collective.” In Boundaries of Journalism: Professionalism, Practices and Participation, edited by M. Carlson, and S. C. Lewis, 118–133. London: Routledge.
Appendix

Respondents: Year of birth, gender, position and media

| Year of Birth | Gender | Position | Media | Interview Dates |
|---------------|--------|----------|-------|-----------------|
| 1937          | Male   | Free intellectual for major Stockholm press, columnist, author | Press | 2017-01-06 |
| 1962          | Female | criticism editor, critic, Svenska Dagbladet | Press | 2017-10-27 |
| 1971          | Male   | vice cultural editor, Aftonbladet | Press | 2018-01-15 |
| 1974          | Male   | author, literary critic, Expressen | Press | 2017-11-28 |
| 1975          | Male   | debate pages, author, Göteborgsposten | Press | 2017-05-16 |
| 1978          | Female | former cultural editor, Sydsvenska Dagbladet/Helsingborgs Dagblad | Press | 2018-04-03 |
| 1980          | Female | cultural editor, Västerbottenskuriren | Press | 2017-04-25 |
| 1934          | Male   | Former head of cultural news division, author, critic | SR Radio, P1 | 2017-12-04 |
| 1942          | Female | producer, critic | SR Radio, P1 | 2017-12-04 |
| 1950          | Male   | reporter, critic, author | SR Radio, P1 | 2017-05-23 |
| 1953          | Female | former radio critic, Svenska dagbladet | SR Radio, P1 | 2018-03-07 |
| 1953          | Male   | former head of cultural news, author, former foreign correspondent | SR Radio, P1 | 2017-12-05 |
| 1957          | Male   | host, critic, former foreign correspondent | SR Radio, P1 | 2016-10-20 |
| 1953          | Male   | host, critic, former foreign correspondent | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-04-17 |
| 1962          | Female | host, producer, critic | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-05-28 |
| 1973          | Female | and producer | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-05-19 |
| 1973          | Female | cultural correspondent, foreign correspondent. | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-05-19 |
| 1973          | Male   | former critic, author, film producer | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-09-19 |
| 1940          | Male   | former host, reporter | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-09-11 |
| 1945          | Female | former administrative project producer | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-03-22 |
| 1955          | Female | cultural journalist, producer, film-maker | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-04-04 |
| 1957          | Female | former host, critic, cultural editor | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-09-14 |
| 1957          | Female | former host, critic, author, freelance. | SVT, Cultural Division | 2016-10-10 |
| 1963          | Male   | host, producer, reporter. | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-09-14 |
| 1964          | Female | former host and former Head of Culture and Society Division, SVT | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-02-20 |
| 1971          | Female | reporter, producer, filmmaker | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-09-20 |
| 1975          | Male   | former reporter, producer | SVT, Cultural Division | 2017-11-30 |