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Abstract

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Title The missing manifesto: Underexplored encounters between extreme-right lone actor manifestos and genre research [“Det manglende manifest: Underbelyste interaktioner mellem højreekstreme manifeste og genreforskning”]

Abstract In recent years, extreme-right lone actors have increasingly used manifestos to justify violence. Yet research on this subgenre remains notably limited from a genre perspective, including within Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS). This article seeks to strengthen a much-needed dialogue between professionals who encounter extreme-right lone actor manifestos in their work – such as law enforcement – and established genre research. Drawing on a Danish court case centred on manifestos, the article demonstrates how insights from genre research can equip practitioners to navigate more confidently the genre’s deployment by extreme-right lone actors. For scholars of the manifesto, attention to this subgenre can likewise deepen understanding of its function as a tool in a contemporary anti-emancipatory project.

Keywords Targeted violence manifestos, Feuerkrieg Division (FKD), extreme-right lone actors, genre research

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Det manglende manifest

Underbelyste interaktioner mellem højreekstremer manifester og genreforskning

I de senere år har højreekstremer gerningsmænd i stigende grad anvendt manifester til at retfærdiggøre deres vold. Alligevel er forskningen i denne subgenre af manifestet begrænset set fra et genreforskningsperspektiv, herunder retoriske genrestudier (RGS). Denne artikel søger at styrke en tiltrængt dialog mellem fagfolk, der i deres arbejde møder højreekstremer gerningsmænds manifester, og den etablerede genreforskning. Med udgangspunkt i en dansk terrorretssag centreret om manifester viser artiklen, hvordan indsigter fra retorisk genreforskning kan ruste praktikere til det genrearbejde, som er nødvendigt, når de møder og skal afkode højreekstremer gerningsmænds manifester. For manifestforskere kan opmærksomhed på denne subgenre tilsvarende styrke forståelsen af dens funktion som et redskab i et samtidigt anti-empirisk projekt.

In recent years, extreme-right lone actors have intensified their use of manifestos to justify acts of mass violence, often directed at minorities or political opponents (Ware, 2020). Examples include the 2011 attacks in Norway, targeting the government quarter in Oslo and Utøya, and the 2019 Christchurch attacks on two Muslim places of worship. The former left 77 dead; the latter claimed 51 lives. Although manifestos are central to that *modus operandi*, there remains limited genre research on extreme-right lone actors' use of the genre. This includes Rhetorical Genre Studies (RGS), the genre research field that took form in the wake of Carolyn R. Miller's epochal article "Genre as Social Action" (1984). As another key theorist within RGS, Amy J. Devitt, describes it, what is innovative about RGS is how it investigates "genre as action rather than form, as a text-type that does something rather than is something" (Devitt, 1996, pp. 605–606).

This article demonstrates why genre research matters for practitioners working with extreme-right lone actor manifestos, who risk being disadvantaged without an explicit genre perspective. Practitioners may include social workers who engage with at-risk youth, law enforcement, or, as in the case discussed in this article, the judiciary. Therefore, this article examines a recently concluded Danish court case where extreme-right lone actor manifestos came to play a decisive role. In this case a teenager was found guilty of his involvement with the terrorist association Feuerkrieg Division (FKD) (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 1). FKD is a niche neo Nazi online association that advocates race war and agitates white supremacist and racist views (Anti-Defamation League, 2019). However, while the defendant received a lengthy prison sentence for allowing himself to be recruited into FKD, he was acquitted of one significant allegation — the intent to commit an act of terrorism. This court ruling was striking from a genre analytic perspective. What drew my attention was not the acquittal, but the court's justification: In the absence of a manifesto authored by the defendant, the court held that his intent to carry out an act of terrorism could not be proven beyond reasonable doubt (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 74). The genre work conducted by the court made the defendant's intention to commit an attack dependent on the existence of a manifesto. This expectation was enforced by invited experts on right-wing extremism who, by referencing similar cases, helped entrench the expectation that a manifesto would signify a genuine intent to carry out an act of terrorism.

I investigate the court's genre work from two different perspectives: genre theory and genre studies. Genre theory is the study of genre as a generalised concept, whereas genre studies is the study of a specific genre (Auken, 2020, p. 162; Freedman, 2020, p. 106). From a genre-theoretical perspective, it emerged as an underlying assumption that a manifesto could exist as an object that could be "found". This assumes that genres exist almost as physical objects in the world, as entities one might simply encounter, much as one comes across a stone by the roadside. This genre view stands in opposition to established RGS scholarship, which understands genre as something that emerges within social interaction. From a genre studies perspective, I draw on manifesto research that examines the genre's historical role. I do so to demonstrate that at least two of the texts presented to the court can be read as manifestos or, at a minimum, as manifestos-in-the-making, namely a collectively produced text named *The Feuerkrieg Division Handbook* and the defendant's diary. Therefore, my analysis examines the court's genre work, focusing on these two texts to show why genre research offers valuable insights for practitioners confronted with extreme-right lone actor manifestos.

Strengthening the dialogue between genre research and practitioners is not only beneficial for the latter, but it can also contribute to the ongoing discussion of the manifesto's role in the twenty first century (Ariel, 2022; Cooke, 2020; Junker, 2022; Yanoshevsky, 2009). I conclude that the manifesto's historic role as a genre used "against dominant forces" (Lyon, 1999, p. 4) requires substantial nuance, given that the genre is now widely employed by actors seeking to promote an anti-emancipatory political project. In addition, the long-lasting perception of the manifesto's

violent inclination must be considered less performative and more real due to the extreme-right lone actors' current use of the genre. From a methodological standpoint, the article enters a field that remains insufficiently explored. Whereas an RGS analysis would often begin with the text and work outward toward the rhetorical situation, the trial presents a case in which the genre appears absent. The analysis must therefore start from the situation and work inward toward a genre that may or may not be present. Doing so sheds light on an underexplored methodological challenge for RGS, since it examines a rhetorical situation in which the genre is missing.

The encounter between extreme-right lone actor manifestos and genre research

This section comprises two strands of genre research scholarship: research that examines the extreme-right lone actor manifestos from a genre-theoretical perspective and research that connects them to manifesto studies. Extreme-right lone actor manifestos can by no means be described as under-investigated; it is a phenomenon that has attracted contributions from a wide range of scholarly disciplines (Berntzen & Sandberg, 2014; Macklin & Bjørge, 2021; Nilsson, 2022; Wilhelmsen, 2022). However, the genre perspective is rarely made explicit. A notable exception is found in forensic linguistics, where researchers have engaged more directly with genre theory – primarily because of Julia Kupper and Reid Meloy's RGS-inspired definition of what they term a "targeted violence manifesto":

A written or spoken communication intended to justify an act of violence against a specific target by articulating self-identified grievances, homicidal intentions, and/or extreme ideologies for committing an attack. Generally composed by a single author before the incident occurs, it sometimes expresses beliefs and ideas to violently promote political, religious, or social changes (2021, p. 6).

What makes this definition RGS-inspired is its focus on what the genre seeks to do in the rhetorical situation, rather than on its formal features (Devitt, 2009). The definition has seen some adoption within forensic linguistics (Kriner et al., 2024; Kupper et al., 2024; Kupper & Meloy, 2021; Petersen et al., 2026). While the definition does not refer exclusively to extreme-right manifestos, it is this variation which is under investigation in this article. In addition to the research conducted in forensic linguistics, Helge Jordheim's analysis of the 2011 attacks in Norway deserves a mention. Jordheim recognises the perpetrator's manifesto as a product of the rhetorical situation and references rhetorical thinkers such as Lloyd F. Bitzer and Miller, thereby viewing the manifesto from a genre-theoretical perspective (2023, p. 89). These works represent the most important examples combining extreme-right lone actor manifestos with the genre-theoretical component of RGS.

We now turn to the other component of genre research, namely genre studies. Within manifesto studies the major contributions include Janet Lyon's *Manifestos*:

Provocations of the Modern (1999), Luca Somigli's *Legitimizing the Artist* (2014), Martin Puchner's *Poetry of the Revolution* (2006), Laura Winkiel's *Modernism, Race and Manifestos* (2008), and Marjorie Perloff's *The Futurist Moment: Avant-garde, Avant guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (2003). Yet none of these works addresses extreme-right lone actor manifestos, and all predate the extreme-right lone actors' consolidation of the subgenre around 2019 (Ware, 2020). One contribution that links extreme-right lone actor manifestos to established manifesto studies is Richard Branscomb's work, which uses Lyon's account of the manifesto as a response to the broken promises of modernity to explain how perpetrators mobilise concepts such as "white genocide" (2021, p. 146). Moreover, Julian Hanna, the author behind *The Manifesto Handbook*, includes the manifestos of extreme-right lone actors in his manifold empirical inspirations (2019, pp. 91, 94), just as Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei relates the manifesto published in relation to the attacks in Norway, 2011, to other non-extreme-right-lone-actor manifestos (2012). Despite these existing contributions, a more systematic comparison between extreme-right lone actor manifestos and manifesto studies remains absent.

Genre theory and genre studies

This section presents the genre research insights that I consider essential for the article's analysis and particularly relevant for practitioners who encounter the genre in their work. I begin by outlining the genre-theoretical perspectives before presenting relevant insights from manifesto studies. However, although genre theory and genre studies are distinct fields, they inevitably overlap; genre theory depends on empirical material to make its concepts meaningful and genre studies often require reflection on what a genre is and how genres operate.

The first perspective to note is RGS's emphasis on the dynamic relationship between genre and the rhetorical situation, a focus that departs from earlier, more formalist approaches within genre theory (Devitt, 2009). Formal features remain relevant but must be subordinated to an analysis of the situation in which the text occurs. The criteria used to identify genres are not static but "may be [...] best described in terms of social setting" (Freadman 1994, p. 49). The text may change genre depending on the situation, so the same text can be a love letter in one context, a testimony in another, and evidence in a third. This context-based definition of genre makes it natural to regard genre as an epistemological rather than an ontological phenomenon, meaning that genre is first and foremost a concept tied to the ways in which we understand an utterance in its rhetorical situation (Miller, 2017, p. 4). But it is not only genres that are defined by the situation – genres are also instrumental to the construction of the situation (Bawarshi, 2000, p. 340; Devitt, 1993, p. 578; Winsor, 2000, p. 157). As an example, a wedding in which no vows are exchanged risks not being recognised as a wedding. Certain situations call for certain types of genres. This is what Robert Jauss, a pre-RGS genre theorist, describes as a "horizon of expectation" – an anticipation of a genre's presence shaped by knowledge of earlier rhetorical actions and the situations in which they occurred (1982, pp. 79, 108).

The second genre-theoretical perspective concerns agency. RGS's view of genres as operating in rhetorical situations shapes how to think about the rhetor's agency. While there are nuances to how agency is viewed within RGS (Freadman, 2014), the general perception is that the situation invites certain actions, but it does not determine them. One way agency manifests itself is in the rhetor's attempt to secure a desired uptake – to make the genre perform the intended action (Freadman, 2002). Assigning a genre label to the text is one means of improving the prospects for a desired reception. However, while genre labels “do matter,” they do not in themselves carry authoritative force; and the recipient of the text does not need to accept the validity of the genre label (Nyboe, 2016, p. 364). These points underscore the rhetor's agency. Yet, while agency is certainly at play, it would be misleading to assume that rhetors engage in genre work consciously; often, they do not. People make numerous genre-related decisions on any given day, but the knowledge involved in this process is mostly learned and applied “tacitly” (Auken, 2018, p. 20).

Turning now to manifesto studies: Since genres, in the view of RGS, are continually evolving, it is relevant to consider what is known about the predecessors of the extreme-right lone actor manifesto. New genres can be seen as related to their predecessors and are, to quote Miller, “connected to and yet distinct from a tradition” and emerge to address “new social arrangements” (2017, p. 2,4). Understanding the extreme-right lone actor manifesto as a variation of the manifesto genre acknowledges its similarities to earlier manifestos while marking their distinct response to a new rhetorical situation. In this article, the term *manifesto studies* refers to research on manifestos that, despite different scholarly interests, participates in an ongoing shared conversation about the manifesto genre. Within this field, some of the canonical works include the above-mentioned works by Lyon, Somigli, Puchner, Winkiel, and Perloff. Another notable contribution is the special issue on “Manifestos of the Contemporary” published in the journal *Culture, Theory, and Critique* (2022). In the following, I outline two aspects of the manifesto genre addressed in manifesto studies that are particularly relevant to the analysis: the genre's inclination toward violence and its complex rhetor position.

The genre's inclination toward violence can be traced back to its premodern origin, where the label manifesto designated a sovereign's “declaration of war” – marking a quite direct connection between the text and actual real-life violence (Junker, 2022, p. 5). In the modern era the purpose of the manifesto genre changed significantly. Political groups then took up the genre and adjusted it to their needs. The manifestos proclaimed their demands to the sovereign and the groups threatened the sovereign with mob rule if their demands were not met (Lyon, 1999, p. 19). But the threat had to be articulated with sufficient discretion so violence could be averted if the sovereign yielded, or the groups could withdraw if it proved strategically advantageous – although they simulated the sovereign's power, they did not possess it. The widely recognised subgenre of the manifesto, the artistic avant-garde manifestos of the early twentieth century, could likewise assume a markedly violent tone. The following sentence by the surrealist André Breton serves as an example: “The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand,

and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd” (Breton, 1972, p. 125). Since nothing indicates that either Breton or his followers acted out such deeds, it is plausible to interpret the utterance as a creative use of scandalous behaviour, a well known strategy among avant garde groups at the time (Puchner, 2006, p. 149). The examples above illustrate how the manifesto genre has always been entangled with violence. Apart from the premodern manifestos, which can be understood as inaugurating acts of war, the violent tendencies of later manifestos are more subdued. It was never certain that the political groups’ threats would be carried out, just as the avant-garde movements’ violent inclinations were largely theatrical.

However, there are manifestos more closely related to actual violent actions. The most notorious examples are Theodore Kaczynski’s *Industrial Society and its Future* (1995) and Valerie Solanas’ *S.C.U.M Manifesto* (1967). Both manifestos have been noted and discussed within manifesto studies (Hanna, 2019, p. 93; Lyon, 1999, p. 7; Somigli, 2014, p. 22). Kaczynski, the so-called Unabomber, terrorised the United States for nearly 20 years by sending letter bombs to apparently random targets (Federal Bureau of Investigation, n.d.), and Solanas is famous for her assassination attempt on Andy Warhol. She self-published her manifesto a year before committing the crime, and at the time no one knew it would later be used to justify realised Violence. Warhol misplaced a screenplay she’d written, and this loss apparently led her to choose him as her target. After the attack she allegedly told a reporter to “read my manifesto, and it will tell you what I am,” underlining the link between the shooting and the manifesto (Starkey, 2023).

Turning to the manifesto’s rhetor position, it becomes clear that it has always been a notably complex one. The manifesto is associated with the rhetor as a collective, often through the presence of the pronoun “we”. Lyon traces this tendency back to the emergence of modernity and legitimacy sought found in the concept of “we the people” (1999, p. 1). It is often unclear who are included in this “we,” and Lyon notes how, in reality, most manifestos have been produced by one or a few authors (1999, p. 26). A good example of this is how the rhetor position in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) is strategically constructed to be unclear. The manifesto is authored by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels; however, it is a commissioned work for the Communist League, and within the text the rhetor is one that claims to represent all proletarians (Puchner, 2006, p. 33). Lyon describes this marginalised rhetor position in the following manner: “To write a manifesto is to participate symbolically in a history of struggle against dominant forces; it is to link one’s voice to the countless voices of previous revolutionary conflicts” (1999, p. 4). At the same time, *The communist manifesto* exemplifies how, in terms of rhetor position, two very different positions become intertwined: that of the sovereign and that of a marginalised collective subject. The working class, in all its powerlessness, writes as if it were the sovereign who is able to issue commands. From the reader’s perspective, it is unclear who is speaking and the extent of the authority with which they do so. In *The Communist Manifesto*, this ambiguity is used strategically to give the impression that the rhetor position does not merely represent the two conspiratorial authors but con-

stitutes a social force to be reckoned with. Likewise, it is evident that Kaczynski and Solanas constructed a similar performative “we”; Kaczynski noted “Freedom Club” as author of his manifesto and Solanas the “Society for Cutting Up Men.” Nothing indicates that either “Freedom Club” or “Society for Cutting Up Men” existed in any meaningful sense when the manifestos were written.

A competing interpretation to Lyon’s is that the manifesto’s “we” derives from the sovereign’s rhetorical strategy of bridging the gap between the “prince” and his “audience” through the first person plural “we” (Somigli, 2014, p. 21). In this interpretation the modern rhetor imitates the sovereign’s rhetorical position, capable of altering reality through declarative force. Since manifestos try to change the world by declaration, they have been described as “ideal instances of performative speech in the sense used by J. L. Austin” (Puchner, 2006, p. 5). The genre performs as if it can, in fact, “change reality with words” (Yanoshevsky, 2009, p. 264). Hanna describes manifestos as “all action, even when they’re all talk” (2019, p. 11) and that the genre entails a “fantasy of stepping beyond the limitations of language – beyond rhetorical into actual violence” (2019, p. 93). However, transgressing from word to action is a difficult task, and there will always be a pause between the utterance and the “act now,” marked by the “period” or “exclamation mark” at the end of the last sentence (Puchner, 2006, p. 43). In that sense, the manifesto genre promises more than it delivers. Feminist manifestos seldom make the patriarchy shiver and extreme-right lone actor manifestos rarely start race wars: “the failure rate of manifesto writing is much higher than average, since manifesto writers are working in a performative space in which words are often forced, against the odds, ‘to do things’” (Hanna, 2019, p. 13). The above considerations shape the analysis that follows to nuance the court’s conclusion that it was not presented with a text that could be regarded as a manifesto. In addition, genre-theoretical perspectives are used to examine the court’s genre work and to explain how it arrived at its argument for acquitting the defendant on the charge to commit an act of terrorism. The court’s conception of genre as something that can be “found” is central here.

The Feuerkrieg Division court case

In court, the defendant stood accused of having allowed himself to be recruited into the terrorist network FKD, and his many activities – primarily online – were therefore documented and scrutinised during the proceedings. I participated in the relevant court sessions and received notes and descriptions from other observers when I did not participate myself. Since textual evidence plays such a central role, I also sought access to the court records. I have relied mainly on the textual sources, including the publicly available records of the case, but my observations have nonetheless been important for my understanding of how the court worked regarding genres and especially the manifesto. The documents to which access was granted included transcripts of some of the defendant’s online chats and *The Feuerkrieg Division Handbook*. Most of the evidence presented in court was in English, including the defendant’s own diary, even though he is otherwise a Danish speaker.

English was also the preferred language when the FKD members communicated online. In contrast, all court files and records are in Danish. While recognising the inherent risk of losing some linguistic nuance, I have translated quotes from the Danish material into English for the sake of clarity.

During the trial, the testimony of two invited expert witnesses came to play a significant role. Although they had been invited to speak about their area of expertise – right-wing extremism – the topics they addressed constantly demanded assessments of genre-related issues. The proceedings shed light on how the defendant had participated in an online culture in which genres such as bomb making manuals, perpetrator manifestos, and violence glorifying and racist memes were circulated extensively. Other genres that appeared in the court’s inquiry were GIFs, videos of real-life violence, Islamist propaganda, and various examples of extreme-right violent material. Although the court never explicitly framed its engagement as a dispute about genre, this was often the case. One example concerns the treatment of memes. The perception, promoted by the defendant, was that memes were a genre used exclusively for entertainment. However, this view was countered by the statements made by a Europol expert witness. The expert witness told the court that memes are utilised by members of the extreme right “to lower the bar” for “acceptance of violence” (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 37).

Another expert witness, this time a representative from the Danish Center for Terroranalyse (Centre for Terror Analysis), also helped create the court’s expectation that a manifesto would be found. The expert witness informed the court that FKD is a part of an online culture that promotes lone-actor terrorist attacks and that some of these promoted lone actors “have released manifestos in relation to their attacks...” (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 32). The expert witness highlighted examples of this modus operandi and referenced the 2019 Christchurch Mosque attacks and the perpetrator’s manifesto. An online chat between the defendant and one of his acquaintances documented how they discussed the Christchurch perpetrator’s manifesto. In the court, the log of the chat came to prove that the defendant had knowledge of manifestos by extreme-right lone actors. The statements and evidence presented left the court with the impression that the manifestos were circulated by members of FKD and that the manifestos carried cultural significance to them. Knowledge of them and possession of them was expected and apparently advanced the members’ status within a wider extremist community. The testimonies from the expert witnesses contributed to the jury’s expectation that a manifesto would be presented at the court, and that this would be a precondition if the defendant was to be considered serious about intentions to commit an act of terrorism.

During the trial, no one provided the court with a definition of what a manifesto should entail, and the court therefore formed its own situated understanding of what to expect from an extreme-right lone actor manifesto. In “The court’s reasoning,” it states that in comparable cases “manifestos are often found, where the perpetrator, prior to his attack, amongst other things, has outlined the background for his actions” (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 74). While this definition is

admittedly less fully developed than the one proposed by Kupper and Meloy, it nevertheless functions as the court's operative description of what a text must contain for them to conclude that the defendant had written a manifesto. It is essential to understand that judges are employed for their advanced legal expertise, while the jury is, by design, composed of laypersons. Prior to entering the courtroom, neither judges nor jurors are selected for any specialised knowledge of the far right milieu introduced in court or of the genres at issue. Consequently, it falls to both defence and prosecution to provide the court with the necessary grounding to reach sound decisions. In the subsequent section the court states:

On the basis of the above and following an overall assessment of the remaining information in the case, we find that there is sufficient doubt as to whether the defendant had the intent to personally commit one or more acts of terrorism (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 74).

The absence of the manifesto constitutes a central reason to acquit the defendant of the charge against him – that he intended to commit one or more acts of terrorism himself. However, as this article argues, some of the textual evidence presented to the court could be considered manifestos, whether the court's own definition of a text "outlining the background for their actions" or Kupper and Meloy's definition is applied. At least two texts could plausibly be read as a manifesto or a manifesto-in-the-making.

The first piece of textual evidence is *The Feuerkrieg Division Handbook*. The text, labelled a handbook, was a document created collectively by FKD members. The extent of the defendant's involvement in producing the text was disputed, but it was ultimately concluded that he had contributed, to some degree, to its creation and was familiar with its content. The court record states that the handbook "describes the association's purpose and its expectations regarding members' promotion of Feuerkrieg Division's activities and their operational security, and which also contains incitements to commit acts of terrorism" (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 2). The content suggests that the handbook is primarily intended for internal use in FKD and includes sections such as "What is the Feuerkrieg Division?", "Be Educated," and "Fitness Manual." As an example of how the handbook is intended for internal use, the section "Fitness Manual" outlines how the FKD members should take care of themselves by means of exercise and nutrition. Therefore, the genre label 'handbook' can be viewed as a fairly accurate description of the content. However, in addition, the text includes a section called "Action" that could do some of the things expected of a manifesto. In the "Action" section it states that:

LIVE YOUR LIFE AS AN INSTIGATOR, SOW CHAOS AND
RELISH IN THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE TYRANNY; it is our duty to
dip our hands in to the filth to clean up this mess so that our children's
hands may stay clean (with original errors; *The Feuerkrieg Division Handbook*).

Further, the final sentence in the "Action" section is, in all its simplicity: "Be the Terror Machine." With manifesto studies in mind, sentences like "Be the Terror

Machine” or “Live your life as an instigator” bear the marks of both violent inclination and a desire to transgress from words to action. In addition, the handbook performs the marginalisation as we know it from other manifestos. The handbook justifies its call for members to “Be the Terror Machine” and “Live your life as an instigator” by claiming that such actions may spare future generations (“our children”) from a harsh fate. In the narratives of extreme-right lone actors, society is turned on its head, and, within this logic, being a white heterosexual male becomes the marginalised position, expressed through the narratives of “white replacement,” “white genocide,” or “Eurabia” conspiracy theories (Davis, 2025).

And while it is true that targeted violence manifestos are “generally composed by a single author,” as noted by Kupper and Meloy, it is not a given. *The Feuerkrieg Division Handbook* could arguably be considered a manifesto. If not an individual manifesto of the defendant, then the manifesto of FKD. Especially the “Action” section bears a striking resemblance to a manifesto. If so, it could be an example of a lone actor who acts based on a collectively produced manifesto. Shaped by the expert witnesses’ single-authored examples, the court seems to have developed an expectation that a manifesto must be produced by one actor: the defendant. This expectation may account for why the court declined to consider the text as a manifesto.

The defendant’s diary likewise contained features that resembled a manifesto. The physical diary was found by law enforcement during a house search in the defendant’s home (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 20). The defendant said the diary was used to write about “personal topics and emotions” and that the diary was not meant for anyone else (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 2). However, the court found it relevant as evidence, since “[I]n his diary, the defendant expressed statements that must be understood as an indication that he supported and endorsed the use of terrorism” (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 73). In other words, the text exhibits the manifesto’s characteristic inclination towards violence. This passage from the diary is illustrative of this claim:

A new chapter in my life, I have become a Nazi and now im about to join a Nazi Terror Group. [...] I know That I am willing to join the cause and die for it I am soldier of Hitler and I will First stop my ... when im Dead an gone I am white power. I am white Power (with original errors; The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 20).

Another section reads:

I have been correcting tons of files with stuff like car bombs pipe bombs and guns and survival guides and everything you will need for a terrorist attack... (Ibid.)

In court, the defendant explained that “correcting” was likely a spelling mistake and that he meant ‘collecting’ (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 21). The diary continues:

I have come to the realisation that there is no way to politically take back our nation we must use terrorism (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 22).

In addition, the diary's rhetor position resembles the complex rhetor position of a manifesto. An example of the complex rhetor position in the diary is the presence of a "you" in the sentence "everything you will need for a terrorist attack." It remains open to interpretation whether the defendant is referring to himself, a co-conspirator, the reader, or someone else. Another example of the complex rhetor position is how the rhetor describes himself as respectively a member of a "Nazi Terror Group," a "soldier of Hitler," and "white power." Additionally, in another section of the diary the defendant describes himself as a "martyr" (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 23). There is a certain self inflation at work, echoing the manifestos of Solanas, Kaczynski, and others who have sought to magnify their own stature through the genre. Two other examples of this are the manifestos published in connection with the 2011 attacks in Norway and the 2019 attacks in Christchurch. Both manifestos were single authored; however, both framed themselves as belonging to a broader international brotherhood of "crusaders" (Macklin & Bjørgo, 2021, p. 17; Ware, 2020, p. 6). This international brotherhood is, by any conceivable measure, entirely fictional (Macklin & Bjørgo, 2021, p. 17).

In conclusion, while it can be argued that either passages of the diary or the handbook can be seen as textual evidence resembling a manifesto, the court dismissed them. One reason neither text was treated as a manifesto may lie in the court's claim that no manifesto was "found" (The Danish Courts of Justice, 2023, p. 69). The sentence suggests that the manifesto is treated as an ontological object, as something you can go out and locate as an objective fact. But for RGS, the manifesto only becomes a manifesto within the rhetorical situation. The fact that the defendant understood the text as his diary did not stop the police from treating it first and foremost as evidence. By the same logic, the court could have classified it as a manifesto-in-the-making. Had the defendant committed a terrorist attack, the rhetorical situation would have been entirely different, and the text would likely have been seen not as a diary but as a manifesto. It is possible that the genre labels obscured the court's ability to view the texts as manifestos. This could be an example of overstressing the rhetor's own genre label. It is not uncommon for perpetrators to assign a different genre label to what the public considers their manifesto. As an example, perpetrators have labelled their texts both "open letter" (McGowan, 2019) and "compendium" (Jordheim, 2023, p. 92). But in those specific cases, the original genre label came to hold little significance in later reception, and they were subsequently referred to almost exclusively as manifestos.

Further, had the court been informed about the complex rhetor position in manifestos, the genre's inclination toward violence, or the genre's embedded desire to transgress from word to action, the court might have concluded that a manifesto or a manifesto-in-the-making had been presented to the court either in the form of *The Feuerkrieg Division Handbook* or the diary. In short, insights from genre research can be valuable when practitioners are confronted with extreme-right lone actor manifestos. However, it is not only practitioners that have something to gain from

this encounter. In addition, if the presence of extreme-right lone actor manifestos is considered, it offers manifesto studies an opportunity to advance our understanding of the genre's role in the twenty-first century.

Implications for manifesto studies

The manifestos of extreme-right lone actors share features with earlier variants, including avant garde, feminist, leftist, or postcolonial manifestos, but because their rhetorical situation and purpose differ, they also diverge from these traditions. Manifesto scholars may adopt the position that the extreme-right lone actor manifesto differs so substantially from the other variations that it no longer makes sense to consider the two genres to be connected. However, if scholars treat the extreme-right lone actor manifesto as both distinct and recognisable as a manifesto, they can begin to assess what this subgenre means for how we understand manifestos.

An obvious point of interest is the extreme-right lone actor manifesto's relation to violence. Even though there has always been a relation between violence and manifestos, it is evident that the extreme-right lone actor manifestos underline this relationship in a highly direct manner. If this subgenre is considered a part of the overarching genre, the manifesto's violent tendency should be reassessed and regarded as less performative and more real, simply because the empirical data changes when this variation is included alongside the manifestos of feminists, artists, workers, etc. The manifesto of the extreme-right lone actor is not Breton's performative, scandalous provocations but an indisputable "pledge to harm" (Hurt & Grant, 2019, p. 155).

In addition, the findings of this article suggest that our understanding of the manifesto as an emancipatory genre requires nuance which is an implication of clear significance for manifesto studies. A survey of the topics addressed within manifesto studies reveals a recurrent focus on groups – whether or not one agrees with the underlying premise – that are typically associated with emancipatory political projects: artists (Somigli, 2014), different strands of the feminist movement (Cooke, 2020; Fahs, 2024; Lyon, 1999; Moser, 2025), communists (Puchner, 2006), the working class (Junker, 2022), and (post)colonial subjects (Winkiel, 2008). It can be seen as a reflection of Lyon's idea about the manifesto genre as concerned with the broken promise of modernity that many groups writing manifestos are part of emancipatory projects. The existence of extreme-right lone actor manifestos complicates this general impression, and once they are included in the manifesto canon, our understanding of the manifesto as an emancipatory genre must be revised.

However, when reading the canonical works in manifesto studies, it is often difficult to tell whether the manifesto should be understood as a genre genuinely aligned with the emancipatory aims of marginalised groups, or whether the genre's rhetor simply adopts that stance as a performance. To illustrate this ambiguity, it is useful to return to one of Lyon's central formulations once again: "To write a manifesto is to participate symbolically in a history of struggle against dominant forces; it is to link one's voice to the countless voices of previous revolutionary conflicts"

(Lyon, 1999, p. 4). I would argue that the quote entails a certain theoretical ambiguity and lends itself to at least three plausible interpretations: 1) the manifesto is a genre reserved for advancing the agenda of the oppressed; 2) this has historically been the case; or 3) the role of the oppressed is simply the rhetor position one takes when writing a manifesto. The presence of extreme-right lone actor manifestos must be an argument against interpretation number one. Instead, it is more productive to view the manifesto as a genre where the rhetor position first and foremost writes ‘as if’ it belongs to a marginalised group.

Conclusion

The aim of this article is to show how a dialogue between practitioners who are confronted with extreme-right lone actor manifestos and genre research can be beneficial. And although genre work is often carried out tacitly, I would argue that the court’s genre work could have been strengthened through greater genre awareness. Had either the defence or the prosecution invited expert witnesses to address questions of genre – just as experts were brought in to inform the court about other matters – this could have qualified and enriched the genre work performed. Doing so could have changed the court’s decision, or at minimum the reasoning behind it. This is perhaps most clearly exemplified by the court’s conception of a manifesto as something that can be “found” like an objective fact.

For obvious reasons, there has been considerable interest in law enforcement’s ability to foreshadow terrorist attacks on the basis of manifestos (Williams et al., 2023). However, doing so would always be an interpretive task involving genre work. To prove this point, another Danish man was acquitted of charges similar to the defendant in the FKD case, even though this man did in fact produce a manifesto (Mølgaard, 2023). In that court case, no one disputed that the defendant was the author of the manifesto presented, nor that it was explicitly violent. Nevertheless, the court deemed it insufficient to establish that he intended to carry out an attack. The courts’ conclusions stresses how individuals may commit violent acts without writing about them and they may write about violent intentions without ever acting on them.

For scholars of the manifesto, the extreme-right lone actors’ current use of the manifesto genre should prompt a revision of key assumptions about the genre. Of course, the extreme-right lone actor manifesto represents only one contemporary use of the genre; manifestos continue to be employed by feminists, artists, political organisations, and others to advance their agendas. However, the view of the manifesto’s violent inclination as primarily performative must be supplemented by recognising how extreme-right lone actors use the genre in highly concrete ways to legitimise and enact actual violence. Further, manifesto studies have focused on empirical material produced by groups that are generally considered as emancipatory. Perhaps it is time to supplement the dominant narrative with a corrective that acknowledges a counter current, one that performs marginalisation in the service of a violent, anti-emancipatory political project.

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