



Image of Martin Kongstad by Petra Kleis

Theatricality, Body, Voice, Spatiality: Applying Performance Analysis to Persona-Driven Literary Journalism

Steffen Moestrup

Danish School of Media and Journalism, Denmark

Abstract: This inquiry explores the benefits of applying performance analysis to the study of journalism practices where the use and staging of the journalist's persona is a fundamental literary strategy. The focus of the analysis is a case study of persona performances of Danish novelist, food critic, and cultural journalist Martin Kongstad. In his persona-driven journalism and criticism, Kongstad makes use of literary strategies such as multiple voices, alter ego, dramatization of written text, and a blending of fictional characters with real-life sources. By proposing a framework that draws on concepts from performance studies, this study demonstrates how literary strategies adapted and developed across platforms can be examined fruitfully using performance analysis.

Keywords: persona-driven journalism – contemporary literary journalism – performance analysis – Martin Kongstad – food reviews – Denmark

The media environment of the early twenty-first century is in many ways a precarious and unstable work market¹ that challenges journalists to maintain a broad presence across various media to reinforce their voices in the media landscape. This is particularly the case for those who practice cultural journalism, where many practitioners have freelance contracts² and continually need to make themselves known. Some of these practitioners stage their own personalities to such an extent that it makes sense to identify the work they do as persona-driven cultural journalism.³ The approach has been defined as “journalism and criticism where the performance of the journalist’s or critic’s personality is a fundamental part of the media text.”⁴ Persona-driven cultural journalism is not just a matter of being subjective, using a textual “I,” or applying a Gonzo-style approach. Rather, the approach involves a profound and diverse staging of the journalist’s persona across media, platforms, and time. The persona-driven approach, then, is the sum of the journalist’s work, some of which is based on literary strategies in ways explored in this study.

Today, the world of literary journalism involves many media forms and platforms. The practitioners of contemporary literary journalism have an expanded digital toolbox with which to build their journalistic practices. That toolbox includes the written word as well as sound, visual, and interactive elements, all facilitated by social media platforms that increase interactivity. Dowling has demonstrated how digital innovations have enriched literary journalism, especially in the contemporary, second wave of digital narratives,⁵ while Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche have argued that digital tools are the “driving force behind a new period of literary journalism.”⁶ Furthermore, first-person narrative has gained renewed momentum in the digital era. As Phillips notes, “First-person articles of all kinds, from personal essays to op-eds to literary journalism, attract clicks and shares.”⁷ However, few researchers have studied the cross-media use of the first-person narrative. The present study examines how a performance analysis approach can fruitfully be applied when studying persona-driven journalism practices across media.

Danish journalist, critic, and novelist Martin Kongstad is the focus of this case study, which seeks to demonstrate how Kongstad can be interpreted as an *overflow persona* in several ways. The term *overflow* has been chosen because it captures how Kongstad’s literary and artistic practices spill over to his journalism and criticism practices. Kongstad often mixes the two spheres, applying literary strategies when practicing cultural journalism. First, Kongstad uses different media (radio, text, and social media) to stage his persona. Second, he employs literary strategies that include using multiple voices, applying an alter ego, dramatizing the written text, and mixing fictional characters with

real-life sources in his journalistic practice. Third, he works both as a novelist and a critic/journalist, often blending the two worlds. And last, he explicitly stages himself as an overflow persona. An example of this is his acting as both a novelist and a journalist in a written reportage from the Frankfurt Book Fair. Before embarking on the analysis of his work, the theoretical and conceptual framework will be outlined.

Persona and Performance

The theoretical framework for the study involves a media aesthetic approach that draws on concepts stemming from performance studies. The media aesthetic approach offers a conceptualization of media that accentuates the need to explore the uses of a medium and find media materialities based on use, rather than expecting numerous media characteristics.⁸ The academic field of performance studies offers a theoretical framework suitable for a study that investigates the multitude of doings inherent in media practices. The two key concepts guiding this analysis are *persona* and *performance*.

Auslander argues that persona can be defined as a contextualized self-construct that suits the specific performance situation and is not necessarily the same as an individual's self-presentation in other contexts. Understanding this last point is important to grasping Auslander's distinction between the persona concept and the many instances of self-presentation in which a person engages. The persona is a tool that is used "to serve the needs of the performance."⁹ Performance can be understood as "restored behavior."¹⁰ With his practice-based approach, Schechner has argued that "[r]estored behavior is living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film"; it is "me behaving as if I am someone else."¹¹ This is not to be interpreted as a personality that someone assumes, but "as if there were multiple 'me's' in each person,"¹² which makes the approach suitable for considering a persona as created from a multitude of doings.

Schechner also highlights an important notion for guiding the analysis in this study: that is, the "focus is on the 'repertory,' namely, what people do in the activity of their doing it."¹³ In other words, this analysis focuses on the actual creation and use of a persona and examines various practices where creating and using a persona is accomplished.

The notion of "repertory" stems from the work of performance studies scholar Diana Taylor, whose distinction between *repertoire* and *archive* seems useful in unpacking the performance of persona. Taylor notes that an archive refers to "supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)," while the repertoire consists of "embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)."¹⁴ The repertoire is any action that

outlines, establishes, manifests, or uses a persona, whether it be a particular interview style, a certain writing style, a personal appearance, the disclosing of details from the author's private life, a certain bodily behavior, and so on, while the archive is the container in which these repertoires are collected and form a somewhat tangle form. In the context of this study, archive would translate to a mediated product such as a print newspaper article, a radio show, or a social media update. In the persona context, the archive would consist of a repertoire of doings that showcase the persona of the doer.

Four Useful Concepts

To engage with the case, the performance analysis draws on four different concepts from performance studies, each of which sheds light on different aspects of the doings of the persona. Performance analysis is an interpretive, eclectic approach rooted entirely in the spectator's point of view,¹⁵ meaning that it is by engaging with the material in an explorative and abductive manner that it is possible to conceptualize the analytical approach.¹⁶ Abductive exploration of the empirical material led to an analytical conceptualization that consists of four concepts that enable the analyst to grasp the multitude of doings in the empirical material. The concepts and brief definitions follow. For a more extensive discussion of the concepts and an extended analytical model, see Moestrup.¹⁷

The first concept is *theatricality*, which addresses a quality that relates to the "world of theatre."¹⁸ According to Féral, theatricality is what happens when material, which is rooted in material reality, enters a relationship with the imaginary, and theatricalization often calls attention to whatever is being theatricalized.¹⁹ As Féral points out, theatricality is by no means limited to the theater but should rather be understood as a possible manifestation that can come from both the doer and the spectator of an action. Féral does not locate theatricality within an object, space, or agent but rather sees theatricality as "the result of a perceptual dynamics linking the onlooker with someone or something that is looked at."²⁰ This linking can occur if the agent declares an intention to act or if the spectator transforms something into a spectacular object. Theatricality is a concept that is useful when dealing with elements that are not considered theatrical but which can be deemed an attribute of the doer's theatricality. When looking for theatricality in material, it is useful to ask the following questions: What has been done in journalistic practice to make it feel like theater?

The second concept is *body*. The performance analysis of persona includes a multitude of doings, including bodily behavior. Here, a distinction between *bodily exteriority* and *bodily interiority*, based on the work of David Graver,

is useful.²¹ Bodily exteriority covers elements such as appearance, ways of dressing, gesture, manner, body language, posture, and verbal utterances, while bodily interiority includes factors such as emotion, attitude, opinion, thought, belief, and life approach or outlook. For instance, an aspect of bodily interiority, such as an emotion, can find an exterior expression in a gesture or a verbal utterance. Showcasing a public self by repeatedly dressing in the same kind of attire can suggest a certain approach to life. The word interiority should not be understood to mean a kind of essence. Similarly, exteriority should not be understood as fake or more constructed than interiority. Both exteriority and interiority are likely to resonate between the stable, the fluid, and the constructed. When looking for body in empirical material, it is useful to ask the following questions: How is the body used in the journalistic material? Which elements and practices evidence the interiority and exteriority of the agent's body as it appears to others?

The third concept, *voice*, has a long tradition in literary journalism studies that shows "that an author is at work," as Sims phrases it.²² Kramer writes that voice can be understood as the ways a writer presents or represents him or herself to the reader.²³ In the context of this study, voice addresses what could be called the position or point of view of the agent. Drawing on Auslander's work²⁴ and Graver's outline of the actor's seven kinds of presence,²⁵ the concept of voice addresses the multitude of possible first-person gestalts. These gestalts could, for instance, be a confessional "I," where details from one's private life are shared, or a character-like mobilization that functions within a given framework and presents itself in specific ways to promote a narrative. The first-person gestalt could also be a conversational voice manifesting itself through verbal interaction with other voices, even if these are fictional voices. Applying this way of thinking about voice makes it possible to unpack the different ways personas can assume various appearances or ways of being present, depending on factors such as theme, genre, platform, and media. This approach to understanding voice also equips the analyst to better comprehend alter egos and the general playful adaptation of identity that some personas may use. When looking for voice in the empirical material, it is useful to ask the following questions: What kind of voice is being used? From which position does the agent speak to us? What is the function of this voice in the performance of journalism?

Fourth and finally, the concept of *spatiality* is useful when examining how personas make use of space and how spaces are part of the manifestation of persona. In his pivotal work from 1984, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau outlines his theory of space and the distinction between place and space. De Certeau argues that place is often a physical location understood as

an ordered structure, while space is created by the very practices of living; in other words, space is practiced place.²⁶ Drawing on the work of de Certeau, it makes sense to differentiate between what could be labeled “media space” and what could be labeled “life space,” and thereby investigate the relations between these two spaces. In the following example, space and place intertwine as life space—a geographic location such as a specific house or street—is a space that the persona’s body can use as a performative scene/stage. The geographic location can also be a space located inside a media space, such as the frame of a print article or the mediated space of a radio show. Thus, it can be argued that what is called life space is somewhat like de Certeau’s notion of place,²⁷ whereas media space is similar to de Certeau’s notion of space (a practiced place). When looking for spatiality in the empirical material, it is useful to ask questions such as: What kind of space is present in the journalistic material? How does the agent use this space? What is the relationship between life space and media space?

As demonstrated in the analysis that follows, theatricality, body, voice, and spatiality overlap somewhat and function best when applied together, thereby allowing the analyst to decipher the literary strategies that are at work in the persona-driven, cross-media practice of the case. The four concepts are thus used to examine how Kongstad’s persona manifests within his work and across media.

The Analysis: Context and Case

Martin Kongstad has no formalized education but has worked in the cultural industry since the late 1980s, beginning as a music critic and music reporter. While working as a journalist for prestigious Danish publications, he also worked as a copywriter for several large Danish companies, as a drummer in different bands, as a writer for theater and variety shows, and as a screen actor in various productions. Kongstad has published short stories as well as three novels, some of which are narrated in the voice of his alter ego, Mikkel Vallin—a voice that Kongstad also uses in some of his cultural journalism.²⁸

Kongstad’s current occupations include novelist and journalist. The latter includes food reviewing for the national weekly newspaper, *Weekendavisen*, and hosting the radio show *Bearnaise er Dyrenes Konge* (*Bearnaise Is the King of Beasts*), which first aired on Radio24syv and, later, on the online media, *Heartbeats*, and the podcast platform, Podimo.²⁹ It is important to understand that Kongstad’s persona performance is rooted in the media for which he works. Strategies and possibilities available at an institutional level affect the individual agent and the scope for practices. Knowing and understanding Kong-

stad's two institutional affiliations is a necessary precursor to exploring his performance personas.

Weekendavisen (The weekend newspaper) and Radio24syv (Radio24s-even) are both branded as personality-driven media. *Weekendavisen* is an intellectual paper aimed at a high-end market that once carried the tagline, "The Newspaper of Personalities." But the paper now incorporates a promotional strategy that is rooted in the branding of individual journalists. This can be seen, for instance, in the weekly newsletter emailed to subscribers a few days before *Weekendavisen*'s publication. The newsletter is structured as a promotional text highlighting articles and specific reporters, journalists, and critics.³⁰ At *Weekendavisen*, Kongstad's cultural reporting includes interviews with authors as well as food reviews.

The national Danish radio station Radio24syv, which went to air on November 1, 2011, emphasized three keywords in its strategy: take an *experimental* approach to radio, deliver radio programming that gives listeners an *experience*, and allow *new kinds of voices* to be aired.³¹ These three keywords all carry an aesthetic ambition, making it possible to interpret the radio station and its programming as a literary journalism project that seeks to be creative and performative, as discussed by Kristensen.³² At Radio24syv, Kongstad hosted *Bearnaise er Dyrenes Konge*, which provides the first example of Kongstad's use of literary techniques in his persona-driven journalism.

A few remarks about the gathering and selection of the empirical material for analysis are in order. Dealing with the oeuvre of a case that spans several decades required choosing a selection of material to analyze. The purpose of the current analysis is not to undertake a comprehensive analysis of Kongstad's practices, but to investigate persona performances of the case. Finding the most profound and differentiated uses of persona that reflect different media, genres, and time points in Kongstad's career provided the criteria for the purposive sample in the analysis that follows.

Performing a Review as a Literary Strategy

Martin Kongstad hosted *Bearnaise er Dyrenes Konge* roughly every week from May 31, 2014, through May 1, 2020.³³ The fifty-five-minute show is structured around a restaurant meal attended by the host, Kongstad, and an invited guest. After the meal, Kongstad writes a review of the restaurant, which is read aloud on air by a professional actor. This read-aloud review is combined with short dialogue clips recorded on location at the restaurant where Kongstad converses with his guest but also includes longer monologues where Kongstad reflects on different aspects of life, such as loneliness, sexuality, and his relationship with his father.

One of the most distinctive aspects of the radio show is the read-aloud performance of the food review, which is an example of theatricality. While audiences are accustomed to hearing novels and poetry read aloud and performed as live literature onstage, that is not the case with food reviews. Kongstad's reviews are read by professional actor Claes Bang, internationally renowned for his work in *The Square* (2017), *The Burnt Orange Heresy* (2019), and the Netflix series *Dracula* (2020).³⁴ Bang's voice provides intimacy. He speaks with what feels like heightened emphasis, giving Kongstad's work an air of authority. This extra weight is probably perceived as augmented because it takes place within a conversationally driven show where the other voices have more everyday qualities, with attendant mumbles, pauses, detours, and loops. The voice also conveys a level of familiarity that is partly due to the space the voice occupies. Again, there is a contrast between Bang's voice and the other voices in the show, which are all recorded on location, such as on the way to the restaurant or inside the restaurant during the meal. The recordings include the ambient sounds of the restaurant: knives touching plates, wine glasses clinking during toasts, or the distant chatting of the other guests in the restaurant. The reading-aloud voice is recorded in a studio that is devoid of any other sound, but in post-production, some ambient sound from the restaurant is added.

The review read by Bang is clearly not the voice of Kongstad reading aloud, as two voices are often heard temporally close to each other in the shows. However, because Bang reads aloud Kongstad's written food review in a show conceptualized by Kongstad, and because this performance is repeated over and over in the shows hosted by Kongstad, the listener comes to think of the Bang voice as part of Kongstad's persona.

The Bang voice is like a bodily extension of Kongstad—an alternative voice that listeners come to think of as an alter-ego voice. It is his way of speaking when reviewing. This kind of theatricality in Kongstad's food review resonates with Bombaci's work on performative criticism in its self-referential nature, where the work being evaluated and criticized often gets put to one side and is sometimes overshadowed by the critic's self-referentiality.³⁵ The theatrical aspect of this stylistic choice also provides some overemphasis to the review; it becomes a distinct element separated from the rest of the show and emphasizes the importance of the review. By separating the review from the conversation and dressing it in theatricality, Kongstad causes the review to stand out as something special, something to pay attention to. It acquires literary qualities, just as when an author reads aloud an excerpt from a book.

Using Multiple Voices

Another recurring strategy in Kongstad's work, both as a novelist and a journalist, is his use of multiple voices. In several food reviews, Kongstad adopts the voice of his alter ego, Mikkel Vallin, who is also the protagonist in two of Kongstad's novels. In the novels, Vallin is a somewhat struggling food critic based in Copenhagen (just like the author), fond of expensive wines (perhaps like the author), and divorced (unlike the author, who is married and has three children).³⁶ Using a fictional character as the author and voice of a review allows Kongstad to introduce elements from a fictional universe into the world of cultural criticism. Former *New York Times* literary critic Michiko Kakutani similarly used voices that were different from her own in reviews³⁷ as a way to expand the aesthetic breadth of the genre. Applying the voice of an alter ego makes it possible for an author to speak in a different way. Vallin's voice, for example, uses more irony and is more cynical than Kongstad's voice.

In a 2011 print review of the Copenhagen restaurant Fishmarket, Kongstad dines with his alter ego.³⁸ The two voices clash in the review, not only on an aesthetic level but also in the content. Vallin accuses Kongstad of selling out because he had started doing more copywriting assignments for commercial companies instead of living solely off cultural criticism, as Vallin does. In this text, Kongstad appears to engage at three levels. First, he reviews Fishmarket using traditional descriptive and evaluative sentences. Second, the text contains relational elements between Kongstad and Vallin that expand both the fictional universe (by allowing the alter ego to dine in real life with his maker) and the review itself (by allowing the review to enter the dialogue with a fictional text). Third, the text functions as a brief discussion on the value of critical writing vis-à-vis commercial writing. Kongstad defends copywriting as a style of writing that demands certain skills, not as something on which any cultural critic who needs quick and easy cash can embark.

Kongstad similarly uses voice creatively in other food reviews when he imagines his deceased friend Henrik is dining with him. Using a friendly voice, Kongstad adds at least two elements to the reviews: He establishes a dialogical dynamic in the review, and he highlights the social and conversational aspects of the meal (as is the case with the radio shows). Second, and more subtly, Kongstad writes an ongoing homage to a beloved friend who is no longer alive but whom Kongstad knows so well that he can incorporate him into the reviews by using dialogue that Henrik would probably have said in similar situations.

In a review published in *Information* on May 1, 2009, Kongstad does not

dine with Henrik but meets him (in his imagination, of course) immediately after having returned from a gourmet stay at the Hotel Louis C. Jacob in Hamburg.³⁹ The review is structured as one long conversation between the man who went abroad and the man who stayed at home. Kongstad describes the surroundings and food in detail, and Henrik adds small comments here and there, even correcting his friend when he mispronounces a word. Henrik states what he himself thinks of foie gras and the combination of Sauce Mousseline and white asparagus. Most importantly, he asks questions that propel the text forward. The questions make it possible for Kongstad to go from talking about a main course to talking about wine to talking about the price level of the hotel—all without creating a fragmentary text. Structuring the piece as a friendly conversation, Kongstad creates a voice of intimacy and honesty that not only carries the traditional ethos-driven statements that characterize his reviews but also feels personal because the reader is eavesdropping on a private conversation.

These multiple voices obviously belong to Kongstad and, as argued above, they help to manifest and clarify Kongstad's overflow persona. All the voices, whether the Bang voice on radio, the Vallin alter ego, or the voice of the deceased friend Henrik in print, provide building blocks in the foundation of persona.

Creating Spaces

The use and production of space calls for the distinction between life space and media space as outlined above. Life space signifies the geographical spaces and locations that exist in any given physical world, while media space signifies the same spaces as used by the persona in a mediated format. Kongstad's food-review radio show and podcast is recorded in part on location, and it makes sense to differentiate between two settings: the restaurant itself and the surroundings in which the restaurant is situated. Kongstad often uses the environment surrounding the restaurant, which he approaches in almost flaneur-like ways, to establish himself as a persona moving physically towards an existing life space where the activities of eating, speaking, and digesting will take place. This life space lays the foundation for the media space that is created when the (edited) conversation is combined with other elements, such as the read-aloud food review and monological elements performed by Kongstad when he approaches the restaurant.

In the episode that aired on Radio24syv on March 19, 2016, Kongstad deviates from the show's normal conversational structure and instead creates a program that is monologic and much more melancholic in nature.⁴⁰ "To be honest, it has been a really lousy week," is Kongstad's opening line, which

leads to an hour-long digression into themes such as solitude, friendship, childhood, divorce, and disappointment. The main structural component is not the meal, which Kongstad eats alone in the Copenhagen gourmet restaurant Kong Hans Kælder and takes up approximately twelve minutes of the total running time of fifty-five minutes, including the read-aloud review. Rather, the element that ties these different themes together is the way Kongstad creates media space from life spaces.

Early in the episode, Kongstad meets some of his friends, who are apparently going to have dinner at the apartment of some mutual friends in Copenhagen. For reasons not revealed, Kongstad has not been invited to the dinner, so he embarks on an evening of solitude in the streets and bars of Copenhagen. The recurring prop is his bicycle, which enables Kongstad to switch location both physically and in the narrative and, in this episode, it also emphasizes his solitude on this particular evening. At bars such as The Log Lady, Kongstad sits alone, but he is, in fact, there with his microphone, and through this technical device, the audience is there with him. Physically alone in the life space of the bar, he delivers a personal monologue into the microphone, which turns the bar into a media space that he can share with the audience and is brought to life through his persona-driven monologue.

In the successive monologues, Kongstad shares various aspects of his private life. The main theme is solitude, manifested through the lonely bar visits and emphasized through several telling details, such as when he receives a text message from the Kong Hans Kælder restaurant confirming a “table for 1 people.” The system is simply not able to provide the information in the singular form.

Kongstad’s creation of the media space displays the ongoing performance of his overflow persona. As the host of a food review show in which he reviews a restaurant and converses with a guest, Kongstad adopts a formalized, journalistic tone, fulfilling the repertoire of reviewing and interviewing. However, by creating the persona-performing space before reaching the restaurant, he situates himself not only as a food critic but also as a creative auteur who performs a narrative closely aligned with the literary sub-genre, autofiction. In this mode, Kongstad, as the author, enters a contract with the reader about being both autobiographical and fictional, which Behrendt has coined “the double contract.”⁴¹ This way of creating a character who is largely based on the author’s own life experiences is a fundamental element in the literary genre of autofiction, but it is important to note that it is an aesthetic component, not necessarily a truth component.⁴² Kongstad performs an autobiographical monologue using himself as a character; he is not giving an objective, journalistic report.

Kongstad also, on occasion and on social media, mixes the professional food critic with the human being. In 2018, Kongstad embarked on a diet, informing users on his personal Facebook profile, as well as the show's Facebook profile, about what kind of food he ate and how his weight evolved over time. The March 17 update looked like the image at right:

The photos displayed the status of the diet (the weight) and the reason for the status (the dish). The update read: "The Gazpacho diet—day 3. I used to weigh 83.1 kilos. Now I weigh 81.3 kilos." The text then switched to brief reflections and a recipe.⁴³

The text can be read as an overflow between Kongstad's personal account and his review practice. It includes remarks from backstage about his weight and his plan to play football with friends, but it also includes a recipe and Kongstad's satirical speculation about what a pretentious restaurant would name this dish (that Kongstad invented). The update is just one in a series of updates structured in the same way, beginning with the pre-diet weight and then displaying the current weight. Each update involves the same performance and emphasizes Kongstad's ongoing mission to lose weight. The repetitiveness of the updates makes them readily recognizable as Kongstad updates. Furthermore, the updates accentuate Kongstad's public profile as a food critic and elucidate his persona by merging his personal ambitions and doings (losing weight, preparing a meal) with his professional review practice (describing the food in detail, naming the dish in a satirical way). The social media reports serve as examples of repertoires from two spheres merging into one archive.⁴⁴

Performing an Explicit Overflow Character

In author interviews and cultural reporting for the Danish weekly, *Weekendavisen*, Kongstad has performed a more explicit overflow persona. Choosing to conduct author interviews can itself be seen as a way for Kongstad to stage himself within the sphere of literature and the practice of novel writing, which is the focus of most of the interviews.



In the 2013 newspaper piece, “Kunne man præsentere mig som Houellebecq light møder Fifty Shades?” (Could you pitch me as Houellebecq light meets Fifty Shades?),⁴⁵ Kongstad alternates between the personae of journalist and author. The article is a report from the Frankfurt Book Fair, one of the world’s largest book industry events. Kongstad reports from the fair in a traditional journalistic way, using descriptive scenes as well as interviews with a literary agent and a publisher—once again fulfilling codes of practice such as fairness and balanced reporting.⁴⁶ However, Kongstad is present at the fair not because he is a journalist but because he is an author. The article begins by announcing that prior to the fair, Kongstad’s new novel *Fryser Jeg (Am I Cold?: A Novel)* has been purchased for the English market.⁴⁷ He and his agent are now bound for Frankfurt, seeking to sell the novel for publication in other parts of the world.

Especially toward the end of the article, it becomes clear that Kongstad is an author, and he stages himself as an author rather than a reporter in the text. He is no longer a reporter but a novelist. This is evidenced in the dialogue between Kongstad and Danish crime writer Jussi Adler-Olsen, who has an international following:

“You write extraordinarily well,” says Jussi Adler-Olsen and informs me that he is using his only free time at the fair on me. “You have the right attitude. You know that it takes a toll on your private life and I respect you for that.”⁴⁸

Kongstad here refers to a dialogue that most likely took place at the fair, but it is clearly a dialogue about Kongstad as a novelist (receiving compliments from a successful novelist) rather than Kongstad as a journalist. Kongstad changes the way he situates himself in the piece, from an observing, commenting reporter to a novelist who is addressed by a fellow novelist. The change in voice also involves physical movement at the end of the article. Having received advice from Jussi Adler-Olsen, who suggests that Kongstad should try to reach out to a Scandinavian publisher, Kongstad writes:

I walk directly towards the Norwegian publishers, circle around for a while and stop at one whom I find suitable. “Can I help you with anything?” a lady asks me. “I am Danish author looking for the right Norwegian publisher for my book.”

“All the editors just left.”⁴⁹

These lines conclude the piece and draw further attention to Kongstad as an author. Not only is the conversation directed toward him as an author, but in this part of the article, he is also physically moving through the book fair as an author rather than as a journalist. As the article’s final lines, the passage also affects the reading of the previous lines and conveys the impres-

sion that Kongstad visited the book fair primarily because he wanted to sell his new novel in other territories, not because he had a journalistic piece to write for *Weekendavisen*. The exchange perhaps adds to the authority and personality of the piece as Kongstad presents himself as someone who is not only from the outside but also part of the literary game. On the other hand, the structure of the piece and the decision to act as both novelist and reporter also point to one of the downsides of being an “overflow” character. The last lines suggest Kongstad has not succeeded as a novelist to the extent that he had hoped. Perhaps this also indicates one of the pitfalls of the persona-driven approach. It is not possible to know for sure, but Kongstad’s persona performances in journalism and criticism might be obstructing some of his ambitions as a novelist. Maybe he cannot be fully recognized as an author because of his work in journalism and criticism.

Conclusion

This study has examined how Martin Kongstad performs as an overflow persona by applying four literary strategies across diverse media forms. The findings give evidence of a persona-driven, cultural journalism that overlaps in multiple ways with literary journalism.⁵⁰ Kongstad’s practice can furthermore be read as an example of what Kristensen and From have interpreted as journalism being a cultural product in itself.⁵¹ This is accentuated by Kongstad’s repeatedly pointing to himself as a cultural producer rather than just a cultural mediator between cultural producers and cultural consumers.⁵² Kongstad not only identifies his cultural-producer persona as something adjacent to the spheres of journalism and criticism, but he also activates this persona within the spheres of journalism and criticism, thereby creating a kind of merged journalism and criticism that becomes a cultural product. Sometimes this creation stems from an expansion of the cultural product being covered; at other times, the creation of Kongstad’s cultural product has little to do with the cultural product or topic being covered. In Kongstad’s case, the cultural product is the performance of the persona. The persona is the message.

This analysis demonstrates the usefulness of applying performance analysis when examining the work of persona-driven journalists, especially in the digital age.⁵³ With this extended digital toolbox, the journalist is equipped with a vast array of communicative opportunities for producing first-person narratives that extend well beyond the limits of a textual “I.” By conceptualizing the extended, cross-media “I” as a performing persona, the analyst can engage more substantially with the many kinds of doings a journalist and critic perform in the creation of journalism, which also means that the conceptualization of performance feeds into the ongoing discussion on journal-

ism's fluidity and the negotiation of what journalism is and could be.⁵⁴

More specifically, the approach has proven useful in unpacking the intermingling of the literary and the performative, which are central to the practice of persona-driven journalism across platforms, particularly in the field of arts and culture when artists engage in journalistic practice.

Steffen Moestrup, PhD, is senior associate professor at the Danish School of Media and Journalism in Aarhus, Denmark. His research areas include persona-driven journalism, documentary film, digital storytelling, and cultural criticism. His PhD was a case study on persona-driven journalism and criticism at the Danish radio station Radio24syv. Moestrup has a background in print and television journalism and has produced a number of documentary films. He is a freelance film and media critic for various publications including Indiewire, the Scandinavian edition of Le Monde diplomatique, Norwegian newspaper Ny Tid, and Danish online film journal 16:9. Furthermore, he is the host of the film show "film:syn" aired on Danish national television. Moestrup is a FIPRESCI member and a board member of Humanities and Social Sciences Association at the University of California, Berkeley.



Notes

- ¹ See, for instance, Hovden and Knapskog, “Doubly Dominated: Cultural Journalists in the Fields of Journalism and Culture,” 807; and Hovden and Kristensen, “The Cultural Journalist around the Globe: A Comparative Study of Characteristics, Role Perceptions and Perceived Influences,” 15–16.
- ² Hovden and Kristensen, 7.
- ³ Moestrup, “Performing the Persona,” 7.
- ⁴ Moestrup, 7.
- ⁵ Dowling, “Literary Journalism in the Digital Age,” 529–42.
- ⁶ Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, “The Digital Animation of Literary Journalism,” 528.
- ⁷ Phillips, “From Major to Minor: Literary Journalism and the First Person,” 392.
- ⁸ See Hausken, *Medieestetikk. Studier i estetisk medieanalyse*, 9; and Hausken, *Thinking Media Aesthetics, Media Studies, Film Studies, and the Arts*, 31–32.
- ⁹ Auslander, “On the Concept of Persona in Performance,” 66.
- ¹⁰ Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 28–29, 35; and Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 33, 35–116.
- ¹¹ Schechner, 35, 37.
- ¹² Schechner, 37.
- ¹³ Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 1.
- ¹⁴ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 19.
- ¹⁵ Auslander, “Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto,” 4.
- ¹⁶ Pavis, “Analysing Performance,” 229.
- ¹⁷ Moestrup, “Performing the Persona,” 74–84; and Moestrup, “The Use of Wine as a Performance,” 43–65.
- ¹⁸ Postlewait and Davis, “Theatricality: An Introduction,” 1–2.
- ¹⁹ Féral, “Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language,” 98.
- ²⁰ Féral, 105. *Agent* is defined for the purposes of this study as “one that acts . . . or is capable of producing an effect.” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (2014), s.v. “agent.”
- ²¹ Graver, “The Actor’s Bodies,” 222, 227.
- ²² Sims, “The Literary Journalists,” 3; Keeble, “Literary Journalism,” 15.
- ²³ Kramer, “Breakable Rules for Literary Journalism,” 28–30.
- ²⁴ Auslander, “On the Concept of Persona in Performance,” 63–67.
- ²⁵ Graver, “The Actor’s Bodies,” 222–32. Graver’s seven kinds of actors’ presence are character, performer, commentator, personage, group representative, flesh, and sensation.
- ²⁶ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.
- ²⁷ de Certeau, 117–18.
- ²⁸ Kongstad, “Jeg er skuffet over Mikkel” [I’m disappointed with Mikkel].
- ²⁹ As of September 2021, the radio show *Bearnaise er Dyrenes Konge* [*Bearnaise Is the King of Beasts*] is on hiatus. The last episode was aired on May 1, 2020, <https://heartbeats.dk/series/bearnaise-er-dyrenes-konge/>.

³⁰ *Weekendavisen* and the newsletter, *Denne uges avis* [This Week's Paper].

³¹ Knudsen and Ramskov, *Radio24syv Public Service Redegørelse 2011*.

³² Kristensen, "The Kinship of Literary Journalism and Cultural Journalism," 10–31.

³³ Kongstad has hosted close to 200 episodes of the show. A limited selection of *Bearnaise er Dyrenes Konge* [*Bearnaise Is the King of Beasts*] podcast episodes, in Danish, is available at <https://podimo.com/dk/shows/c60d6e23-19e2-4cb9-870b-cb00361b37fb>.

³⁴ Östlund, *The Square*; Capotondi, *The Burnt Orange Heresy*; and the Netflix series, Gatiss and Moffat, *Dracula*.

³⁵ Bombaci, "Performative Criticism and the Problem of Modernist Chic," 130–33.

³⁶ Tauning, "Den udtalelse har jeg lænet mig op af i svære stunder" [I've been leaning on that expression during hard times].

³⁷ Michiko Kakutani took on a range of voices, such as Mike Meyers's Austin Powers character and Truman Capote's Holly Golightly character, in several book reviews. The style of the reviews changed according to the voice in use. See Kakutani, "Tru, Dear, There's Only One Holly. Moi"; Kakutani, "'Dangerous Kiss': Those Lips! Those Eyes! That Mojo's Working!"

³⁸ Kongstad, "Jeg er skuffet over Mikkel" [I'm disappointed with Mikkel].

³⁹ Kongstad, "Man bliver et digt på Hotel Louis C. Jacob" [One becomes a poem at the Hotel Louis C. Jacob].

⁴⁰ The March 19, 2016, episode of the podcast is not currently available. It was originally online at: <https://www.24syv.dk/programmer/bearnaise-er-dyrenes-konge/13054109/martin-kongstad-helt-alene-pa-kong-hans>.

⁴¹ Behrendt, *Dobbeltkontrakten: en æstetisk nydannelse* [The double contract: an aesthetic innovation], 13.

⁴² Helt Haarder, *Performativ Biografisme* [Performative biography], 9.

⁴³ Kongstad, "GAZPACHOKUREN – dag 3. Jeg vejede 82.1, nu vejer je 81.3 kg."

⁴⁴ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 19.

⁴⁵ Kongstad, "Kunne man præsentere mig som Houellebecq light møder Fifty Shades?" [Could you pitch me as Houellebecq light meets Fifty Shades?], 8.

⁴⁶ Kinsey, "Objectivity," 176–78.

⁴⁷ Kongstad, "Kunne man præsentere mig som Houellebecq light møder Fifty Shades?" 8; Kongstad, *Fryser Jeg* [*Am I Cold: A Novel*].

⁴⁸ Kongstad, "Kunne man præsentere mig som Houellebecq light møder Fifty Shades?," 9.

⁴⁹ Kongstad, 9.

⁵⁰ A broader discussion of this overlap can be found in Kristensen, "The Kinship of Literary Journalism and Cultural Journalism," 10–31. Another case study of the overlap can be seen in Isager, "The Passive-Responsive Journalist," 32–51, an analysis of the highly persona-driven approach of journalist René Fredensborg.

⁵¹ Kristensen and From, *Kulturjournalistik: journalistik om kultur* [Cultural journalism: journalism about culture], 247–55.

⁵² Janssen and Verboord, “Cultural Mediators and Gatekeepers,” 440.

⁵³ For additional case studies in which performance analysis is applied to the study of persona-driven journalism, see Moestrup, “Performing the Persona”; and Moestrup, “The Use of Wine as a Performance,” 43–65.

⁵⁴ Zelizer, *What Journalism Could Be*, 12–15; and Witschge, Deuze, and Willemssen, “Creativity in (Digital) Journalism Studies: Broadening Our Perspective on Journalism Practice,” 974–75.

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