

Introduction . . .

Danish Literary Journalism: Arts & Culture

Christine Isager, guest editor
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Christine Isager is associate professor of Rhetoric at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, where she teaches writing and rhetorical theory, criticism, and innovation. Her work in the field of literary journalism has previously appeared in Literary Journalism Studies as well as in Persona Studies and Rhetorica Scandinavica. She is co-editor (with Robert Alexander) of the volume Fear and Loathing Worldwide: Gonzo Journalism beyond Hunter S. Thompson (Bloomsbury, 2018).



The present three-essay section of *Literary Journalism Studies* puts a spotlight on literary journalism as performed in coverage of arts and culture in Denmark: What professional values, practices, and role conceptions are currently at play in this area? How does *cultural journalism*—traditionally defined by its specific *field*—overlap with *literary journalism*—traditionally defined by its approach—and what might be discovered at the intersections?

These questions are engaged, first, in a keynote essay by Nete Kristensen, who offers a tentative mapping and mirroring of the two paradigms. Kristensen writes as a specialist in cultural journalism in the Nordic region where specific media and culture policies are introduced as a distinct backdrop for the three studies. In her essay, “The Kinship of Literary Journalism and Cultural Journalism: Everyday Life, Interpretation, and Emotionality,” Kristensen conveys how a still broader conception of culture in media contexts more generally has moved coverage of arts and culture closer to literary journalism in terms of engaging everyday life matters rather than moving in more elite and/or more commercialized spheres. Moreover, the turns in contemporary journalism towards embracing both interpretation and emotionality are presented as good reasons to look more closely at cultural and literary journalism, the practitioners of which have traditionally—if each in their own traditions—stood out from mainstream journalism on account of taking exactly interpretative and emotional dimensions seriously.

Two different case studies by Christine Isager and Steffen Moestrup, respectively, follow up by taking a closer look at two contemporary Danish literary journalists who navigate the above-mentioned, intersecting terrains by toggling between the roles of cultural producer/artist and journalist within individual journalistic stories, as well as over the course of their careers.

Isager takes a cue from Kristensen in terms of considering the alternating or overlapping professional roles in the arts and culture sector by investigating how *de facto* familiarity with a subculture may—for better or worse—be transformed into a form of immersion journalism. Her essay, “The Passive-Responsive Journalist: An Offensive Case of Immersion in the Danish Film Industry,” looks specifically at the rhetoric of writer and cultural journalist René Fredensborg (b. 1972) who caused outrage in 2011 by exposing camaraderie in the Danish film and television business in a literary journalistic vein. The form of his reporting became an issue itself, which causes Isager to analyze Fredensborg’s peculiar blend of character appeals at the textual level. While subscribing to the generalized ethos of an engaged, responsive literary journalist, Fredensborg also adopts a number of Gonzo poses that were amplified in the magazine’s editing of his work and served to betray this same ethos in practice. This ambivalent style both of freelance career and

of literary reporting is identified as a “passive-responsive” rhetorical stance worth taking note of beyond the Nordic context.

Finally, Moestrup engages the work and career of Danish writer, journalist, and food critic Martin Kongstad (b. 1953). To capture the distinct literary journalistic features of Kongstad’s playful work across genres and media platforms, Moestrup argues for a *performative* approach to the study of what is more broadly referred to as persona-driven literary journalism. How the latter is flourishing among cultural journalists and critics was the topic of Moestrup’s doctoral work from which he here draws special attention to the four key analytical categories that are indicated also in the title of his essay: “Theatricality, Body, Voice, Spatiality: Applying Performance Analysis to Persona-Driven Literary Journalism.” Taking a performative approach enables a reading that is particularly sensitive to the cross-media literary quality and nature of Kongstad’s literary strategies that include, for instance, the use of multiple voices and presenting fictional characters alongside actual sources.

Early versions of these essays were presented as part of a panel on persona transformations across media and genres in Nordic literary journalism on arts and culture at IALJS-14 at Stony Brook University in 2019. Interested readers might also look up a third Danish case study by Rønlev and Bengtsson that originally formed part of this same panel and was developed for publication in *Journalism* (2020). Titled “The Media Provocateur: A Rhetorical Framework for Studying an Emerging Persona in Journalism,” Rasmus Rønlev and Mette Bengtsson’s essay engages the routes of so-called non-traditional actors, such as media provocateurs, (micro-)bloggers, and social media influencers, into journalism, that is, here too with the creative design and development of journalistic personas in contemporary media in focus.

With the boundaries of literary journalism becoming still more permeable, and its professional ideologies and practices arguably turning more mainstream, the present, joined perspectives from media studies (Kristensen), performance studies (Moestrup), and rhetoric studies (Isager, and Rønlev and Bengtsson) should point also to scholarly boundaries that might happily be transgressed in further discussions of these developments and their implications. While the specific area of arts and culture has not hitherto been at the center of attention in the practice and study of literary journalism, it is hoped that these studies point to a turn of attention worth making that might inspire further literary journalism studies of creative coverage of arts and culture in nations and regions beyond the Nordic.



Image of AROS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Denmark by Anders Trærup.

The Kinship of Literary Journalism and Cultural Journalism: Everyday Life, Interpretation, and Emotionality

Nete Nørgaard Kristensen
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract: This exploration is a first attempt to bring together two strands of research in journalism studies—literary journalism studies and cultural journalism studies—to highlight some of the professional values and practices that literary and cultural journalists share. These include a commitment to everyday events, personal engagement, interpretation and emotions, voice, and providing cultural and aesthetic experiences. While it is important not to be blind to the differences between literary journalism and cultural journalism, it is also important to highlight their commonalities, because other forms of Western journalism, such as news reporting and political journalism, currently appear to be adopting features that literary and cultural journalism have in common. This suggests that while literary and cultural journalism may have gained momentum, they might also be losing some of their distinctive edge. To contextualize this analysis within the broader field of journalism studies, three journalistic trends are highlighted that serve as important perspectives for clarifying the kinship and momentum of literary and cultural journalism: the media's shift of attention from public affairs to everyday life, an interpretive turn in journalism, and a recognition of emotions as a part of journalism. The analysis suggests Denmark as a compelling geographic context for studying the links between literary journalism and cultural journalism because this Nordic country has recently seen media initiatives specifically encouraging literary approaches to cultural reporting.

Keywords: Cultural journalism – the Nordic region – emotionality – everyday life – interpretation

This exploration brings together two research strands in journalism studies that have previously been combined only to a more limited degree: literary journalism studies and cultural journalism studies. In fact, it seems that part of the DNA of literary journalism studies has been to explicitly differentiate itself from what has in recent years been labeled *cultural journalism*—that is, journalism about the arts, culture, and broader sociocultural issues. The International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, for example, defines its territory as that of “‘journalism as literature’ rather than ‘journalism about literature.’”¹ Nonetheless, this exploration focuses on the ways some journalists’ work spans literary journalism and cultural journalism, for example, by making use of aestheticized and performative styles when engaging with literature and other parts of the cultural field. Bombaci has pointed to a similar connection in her work on performative criticism, which she sees as a variation of literary journalism that uses irony and humor to engage audiences in the evaluation of literature and visual or performative arts.² While her argument is grounded in literary journalism studies and considers the female authors, journalists, and critics Gertrude Stein, Janet Flanner, and Dorothy Parker as cases, the present exploration is based in journalism studies more broadly. Applying a mainly sociological perspective, this study focuses on the professional, institutional, and technological factors affecting the roles and practices of literary journalists and cultural journalists, with special attention to the Nordic context. In-depth case studies of contemporary Danish cultural journalists applying features from literary journalism and of Danish literary journalists engaged in cultural reporting can be found in the work of Christine Isager and Steffen Moestrup.³

Although research should not be blind to the differences between literary journalism and cultural journalism, the purpose of this study is first and foremost to suggest some of their commonalities. This is important because both literary journalists and cultural journalists have long been side-lined, as their professional roles, attitudes, and practices differ in several respects from those of mainstream, Western news reporting or political journalism.⁴ The latter forms of journalism seem to increasingly adopt features that literary journalism and cultural journalism have in common, however, such as engagement with everyday events, interpretation, emotions and personal style, or tone of voice. This suggests that both literary journalism and cultural journalism may have gained momentum, but it may also suggest that these subfields are losing some of their distinctiveness. In both cases, reflecting actively on their interfaces, shared agendas, and values seems timely and useful, as this may add to both literary journalism and cultural journalism studies by increasing awareness in the respective research strands about their neighboring fields. The

inquiry may also add to the debate about trends in journalism more broadly, inspiring journalism scholars beyond these two research areas to look more systematically at the theories and practices of these subfields and thereby gain new insights about some of the features that increasingly seem to characterize mainstream forms of journalism but which have a long(er) history in these more specialized forms of reporting.

The remainder of the study has four parts: The first part provides a brief introduction to cultural journalism because, unlike literary journalism studies, cultural journalism has emerged only more recently as a scholarly subfield. The second part highlights three trends in contemporary journalism that contextualize the potential kinship of literary journalism and cultural journalism: The first trend concerns the turn in the media's attention from public affairs to the domain of everyday life during recent decades.⁵ The second and third trends are related in their concern for the respective interpretive and emotional turns in journalism.⁶ These changes may have opened up the broader field of journalism—and journalism studies—for embracing reporting styles drawn from literary journalism and cultural journalism. In the third part, the study presents Denmark as a pertinent case in point for studying the kinship of literary journalism and cultural journalism because the country has seen media initiatives explicitly encouraging literary forms of cultural reporting, especially during the past decade. The fourth and concluding part discusses the potentialities and challenges created by approaches common to literary journalism and cultural journalism seeping into more traditional forms of journalism—that is, in their becoming more mainstream.

Focus, Research, and Professional Traits

As a backdrop for identifying the kinship of literary journalism and cultural journalism, this section takes a closer look at cultural journalism. Compared to literary journalism, the study of cultural journalism is a relatively new scholarly phenomenon that has matured especially over the past decade.⁷ As is the case for literary journalism, different terms have been used to refer to cultural journalism, and these terms may mean slightly different things in different contexts.⁸ One reason for this is the polysemic and complex concept of culture itself,⁹ which may refer to a broad spectrum of artifacts (from arts to entertainment, including particular cultural subfields or genres, such as opera, design, TV series, or crime fiction), to more everyday dimensions of lived culture (such as food and fashion), and to more politicized dimensions (e.g., norms, values, and traditions; and gender, ethnicity, or identity). In addition to covering the arts, cultural goods, and the creative industries, cultural journalism may thus engage with a broad range

of sociocultural and sociopolitical issues. One example is the #MeToo movement. Although this movement has been a topic across many journalistic beats, cultural newsrooms have been important drivers during the past five years, with investigative, analytical, opinion, and cultural stories focusing not only on sexual misconduct in the cultural industries and beyond but also on the broader sociocultural and human implications of inequality and the abuse of power. Although the study of cultural journalism is not yet a global phenomenon, the term *cultural journalism* has become more commonly used in international scholarship during the past decade and is, for that reason, also the term used in the present context.¹⁰

Cultural journalism studies have taken a particular interest in analyzing, first, the changing genres and cultural outlook of cultural journalism. Comparative and single-country studies have shown that coverage of culture in the broad sense has increased considerably in many countries and across platforms during the twentieth century in view of changing cultural hierarchies, cultural globalization, and the transformation of media institutions.¹¹ Second, research has focused on the characteristics, professional role conceptions, and actual practices of cultural editors and journalists.¹² Comparative survey research involving journalists from around the globe has shown that cultural journalists are more well-educated and more often work in magazines and radio, and in public service or state-owned media, compared to other journalists.¹³ Furthermore, they experience less production pressure and more freedom in story selection and framing, and they value purposes such as educating the public, telling stories, and promoting tolerance more than other journalists do.¹⁴ In the British context, Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen have, for example, found that “arts journalists” see themselves as being on “a crusade to improve society by educating the public about the arts,”¹⁵ and Danish production studies have shown that cultural journalism allows for greater creativity and personality in journalistic writing.¹⁶ Swedish scholars Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm have argued that cultural journalism is “not necessarily defined by content, it is the artistic or literary perspective that matters, and *who* is producing it,”¹⁷ again indicating a creative span. Although these studies do not equate cultural journalism and literary journalism, they do indicate a kinship between the two approaches.

Everyday Life, Interpretation, Emotionality

Three trends in journalism are of importance to the arguments about the commonalities of literary journalism and cultural journalism. They focus on reporting *everyday life*, *interpretation*, and *emotionality*. They are also important as some of their features currently seem to be seeping into other forms of Western journalism.

Everyday Life: The first trend is acutely summarized by Hanitzsch and Vos, who have claimed that “One of the most significant transformations of our time has been a remarkable shift from a media focus on public affairs to a focus on the domain of everyday life.”¹⁸ This shift has had implications for the roles journalists play in society, as today these roles pertain not only to the domain of political life but also to the domain of everyday life, including areas such as “consumption, identity, and emotion.”¹⁹ From a study of more than 5,300 news stories published by multiple U.S. news outlets from 1980 through 1999, Patterson, for example, shows there have been increases in stories without a public policy component, in stories with a human-interest perspective, and in stories with journalistic self-references.²⁰

This has led to the emergence of a range of new(er) journalistic sub-fields beyond the hard news paradigm. Examples include *service journalism*, which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, offering advice and life help to audiences on everyday life issues in an increasingly complex society;²¹ *constructive journalism*, which emerged in the 2010s and provides productive, positive, and solutions-oriented stories about social and everyday issues, among other things, as an attempt to reconnect the news industry and their audiences, but with clear traces back to action journalism, public journalism, and service journalism;²² *feature journalism*, which has a longer history but has increased with time and, Steensen notes, involves a family of genres dominated by “a literary discourse and discourses of intimacy and adventure”;²³ and *lifestyle journalism*, which engages with issues related to consumerism, individualism and identity, and has become more prominent in the journalistic supply as the media have taken over the role of providing “collective orientation in an increasingly multi-optional society,” as Hanitzsch and Vos put it.²⁴ Of particular importance in the present context are, however, *literary journalism* with its focus on routine events and ordinary lives,²⁵ which has expanded and perhaps even been “mainstreamed” in the second half of the twentieth century, as argued by, among others, Collins;²⁶ and *cultural journalism* with its focus on arts, culture, and the creative industries but, as indicated, sharing its topical interest with literary journalism by also addressing larger cultural themes and current trends rather than the immediate news of the day. A broad understanding of culture and a sociocultural commitment are in many ways key to both literary journalists and cultural journalists: Sims, for example, argues that “literary reporters view cultural understanding as an end,”²⁷ and Hovden and Kristensen argue that cultural journalists see their role as “providing alternative perspectives on the world, or ‘a cultural filter’ on pertinent issue[s] of society.”²⁸

Literary journalism and cultural journalism, among other journalistic subfields, thus exemplify the broader topical refocusing of parts of journalism from public affairs and disruptive events to everyday life, culture, human interest, and routine events. These subfields have, at different points in time, been associated with a need to rethink the role of journalism in Western societies, exemplifying the ever-changing “interpretive community” of journalism.²⁹

Interpretation: The second trend is, in many ways, related to this shift of attention in both practice and research, but it has more to do with form, style, or technique than with topical focus. It concerns the *interpretive turn* in news and journalism.³⁰ Based on a literature study, Salgado and Strömbäck put forward the following definition of this turn:

Interpretive journalism is opposed to or going beyond descriptive, fact-focused and source-driven journalism. On the story-level of analysis, interpretive journalism is characterized by a prominent journalistic voice; and by journalistic explanations, evaluations, contextualizations, or speculations going beyond verifiable facts or statements by sources. It may, but does not have to, also be characterized by a theme chosen by the journalist, use of value-laden terms, or overt commentary.³¹

Various empirical studies support this: In the U.S. context, Barnhurst points to the increase in explanation, judgment, and opinion across daily news outlets since the 1960s;³² Soontjens demonstrates that explanation, evaluation, and speculation have become more prominent in Belgian political journalism since the mid-1980s;³³ and Swedish scholars have shown a change in television news reporting from reflection, through investigation, to interpretation during the second part of the twentieth century.³⁴

Looking at the histories of both literary journalism and cultural journalism provides evidence that techniques such as going beyond the descriptive, fact-focused, and source-driven, journalistic voice, explanations, evaluations, and contextualization are not new. In literary journalism, a key discussion has concerned the continuum between presenting an “increasingly alienated objectified world on the one hand, or, on the other, a solipsistic subjectivity in the most personal of memoirs,” as Hartsock puts it.³⁵ Referencing Sims, Pauly notes that literary journalists “imagine themselves on an interpretive quest in which reporters deploy an ensemble of literary techniques to make sense of ‘true stories’ . . . ”³⁶ Similarly, a key debate in cultural journalism studies and practice concerns the dual or hybrid nature of the beat, which has one leg in more traditional forms of cultural reporting, epitomized by the cultural preview genre, and another in more evaluative, critical or interpretive approaches, epitomized by the cultural review and feature genres.³⁷ In addi-

tion to sharing a broad sociocultural interest, literary journalism and parts of cultural journalism thus share an epistemology grounded in analytical and interpretive approaches. Pauly writes, “Literary journalists assert a knowledge claim when they reject the traditional news story’s contrived display of objectivity and routinized, formulaic structure. They seek to capture social complexity in all its richness and nuance, and to celebrate the integrity and cultural authority of the individual reporter.”³⁸ Kristensen presents a similar understanding of the epistemology of cultural journalists as adhering “more to a subjective belief in how reality or truth can be conveyed, often basing their claims to truth on an analytical approach.”³⁹

What is new is that these dimensions seem to be (re)entering parts of Western journalism that have subscribed to the separation of news and views, distance and immersion, during large parts of the twentieth century as part of the professionalization of the field.

Emotionality: The third trend links to the interpretive aspects of journalism, as it concerns *emotionality*. While interpretation can be connected to an analytical approach, emotionality is tied to a subjective approach, because a key trait of emotions—a term often overlapping with feelings, moods, and affect—is that emotions can, according to Stenvall, be “deduced to be basically subjective experiences.”⁴⁰ Like interpretation, emotions are not new to journalism, but the use of emotionality has become more prominent and multifaceted. This is due to, among other things, new media technologies blurring the boundaries of not only fact and interpretation but also of rational and emotional discourses,⁴¹ the emergence of an increasingly confessional culture,⁴² and because emotionality and emotionally stimulating journalistic narratives may be a means for media producers to cater to audiences in an increasingly competitive and diverse media ecology.⁴³

In her study of Pulitzer Prize–winning journalism from 1995 to 2011, Wahl-Jorgensen shows that emotionality—in the shape of personalized storytelling, anecdotal leads, and human interest perspectives—is found across a range of prize categories, including explanatory, international, national, investigative, feature, and public service reporting.⁴⁴ Maguire also shows how Pulitzer Prize–winning journalism employs literary journalism techniques, which he sees as a sign of literary journalism having matured and even being mainstreamed in the early twenty-first century.⁴⁵ Wahl-Jorgensen also argues, however, that “objectivity as strategic ritual,” a concept coined by Tuchman in the early 1970s and key in the professional self-understanding of Western journalists for decades, has made emotions a criticized aspect of journalistic practice and a topic not prioritized by scholars.⁴⁶

What is characteristic of current research about emotionality in journal-

ism is that it focuses especially on the reporting of public affairs and disruptive events. Less attention is devoted to those parts of journalism that have a longer tradition of being emotional and raising emotions, for example, by means of a distinct voice and emotion-laden words and wording. Literary journalism scholars have, for instance, long emphasized the role of emotion in this journalistic subfield. Sims has argued that audiences expect “literary journalism to raise emotions not evoked by standard reporting” and that “[l]iterary journalists bring themselves into their stories to greater or lesser degrees and confess to human failings and emotions.”⁴⁷ Kramer has argued that the voice of the literary journalist is one that “doesn’t blank out emotional realities of sadness, glee, excitement, fury, love,”⁴⁸ and Keeble argues that literary journalism is “practiced by artists of integrity and passion.”⁴⁹ Going back to the seminal work of Wolfe, Collins writes that Wolfe “drew attention to writers who wrote with individual, idiosyncratic voices . . . They wrote with attitude, humor, anger, frankness, style. They incorporated a wider set of emotions than what was allowed in conventional journalism, . . .”⁵⁰ Similarly, cultural journalists—and critics in particular—have long reacted emotionally to aesthetic expressions and cultural trends. This is not only because that is what arts and culture do—that is, evoke emotions—but also because critics use emotional language to perform their distinct, critical voice to guide members of the public in their cultural consumption.⁵¹ However, as Kotisva argues, critics perform a “strategic ritual of objectivization of emotionality” as they consciously reflect upon, question, and analyze their emotional and subjective responses to cultural artifacts rather than provide mere subjective responses.⁵² Such approaches are also visible in other genres key to cultural journalism. Based on a study of the developments in the cultural pages from 1960 through 2010 in Spain, France, Finland, Great Britain, and Sweden, Purhonen and colleagues conclude that there has been an increase in the length of stories and in the frequency of interviews and features since the beginning of the 2000s, which they interpret as a “trend towards personalized styles of writing, which can be seen as linked to the changing professional ethos of cultural journalism oriented towards emotional appeal, human-interest aspects and storytelling.”⁵³

Emotionality in literary journalism and cultural journalism thus does not per se signal a change or disruption from the previous logics of these particular forms of journalism. It does, however, emphasize their momentum in the current media landscape, because emotionality and voice have come to the forefront in many forms of media work. Wahl-Jorgensen and Schmidt even argue that, today, the “mastery of the strategic ritual of emotionality is a prerequisite for success in the profession.”⁵⁴

The (Nordic) Context Matters

While literary journalism has a strong Anglo-American tradition in both practice and research, cultural journalism has a strong tradition in Northern Europe, especially in Nordic newsrooms.⁵⁵ One explanation is the Nordic culture policy model—including the Nordic media model—which supports the production, circulation, and communication of arts and culture in society. Accordingly, research about cultural journalism is particularly robust in the Nordic context. This may be one of the reasons why the similarities between literary journalism and cultural journalism seem to become particularly visible in the Nordic setting. This is a reminder of the importance of the historical and geographical context for understanding new directions within or new forms of journalism,⁵⁶ and it is exemplified in the following, which uses Denmark as a case in point.

Culture is a central pillar of the Nordic welfare model. Harding, among others, argues that following World War II, Nordic cultural policy has largely been “characterized by a combination of two, somewhat opposed, normative concepts; the autonomy of the arts, and the democratization of culture.”⁵⁷ These normative concepts have materialized in considerable public funding for arts and culture to guarantee an arm’s length principle between politicians and artists/creatives and to enable all citizens to participate in a broad range of cultural activities. In Denmark, the Ministry of Culture (originally The Ministry for Cultural Affairs) is the main body responsible for the distribution of these funds. Today the Ministry applies an inclusive definition of culture, as its purview includes “Visual Art, Music, Theatre, Film, Libraries, Education in the Arts, Archives, Museums, Zoological Facilities, Cultural Environment, Sport, Broadcasting and Copyright.”⁵⁸ Eurostat data show that Denmark ranked number three among EU countries in public expenditure on recreation, culture, and religion in 2020, devoting 1.7 percent of the GDP to these areas.⁵⁹ Part of this funding is allocated to the media: around 4.9 billion Danish Kroner (DK KR) in 2019, approximately 700 million U.S. dollars.⁶⁰ Funds are based on taxes, profits from the national lottery, and football pools, and on media license fees (the latter gradually turned into a tax by 2022). The Danish population of around 5.8 million people are very active users of these cultural offerings and may be labeled cultural omnivores, because they engage in many different forms of both highbrow and popular culture activities.⁶¹

National news media and their adoption of cultural journalism play a key role as intermediaries between these cultural institutions, producers, and audiences, as they remain relatively strong and authoritative cultural gatekeepers, communicators, and tastemakers. The Nordic media model sup-

ports this mediator role. In Denmark, the key obligations of the main public service media provider, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), include the production, distribution, and communication of arts and culture.⁶² DR continues to be the top Danish news brand in terms of audience reach and trust.⁶³ Furthermore, to qualify for subsidies for the production of digital and/or printed journalism, Danish news media have to “primarily treat political, societal and cultural topics,” according to §3 of the present *Lov om mediestøtte* [Danish law of media subsidies].⁶⁴ This points to the importance of culture—and by extension, of cultural journalism—in Danish media policy. This is one reason this particular domain of journalism has drawn the attention of Danish media and journalism scholars. This is the case not only for Denmark but also for the other Nordic countries.⁶⁵

Of particular importance in the present context is that newer Danish media initiatives have explicitly encouraged literary and performative forms of cultural journalism. Two such examples are highlighted in the following: The first example is the public service radio channel Radio24Syv (Radio24Seven), publicly funded and licensed from 2011 to 2019, with the aim of, among other things, providing room for journalists doing experimental, persona-driven cultural journalism and using techniques known from literary journalism. As Moestrup argues, the people behind this media initiative “wanted to do talk radio in ways that [were] different from the norm,” and their vision included three recurring keywords: “an *experimental* approach to radio,” radio programs that give “listeners an *experience*” and that “allow *new kinds of voices* to be aired.”⁶⁶ Over the years, the program portfolio has included various formats devoted to cultural news and/or reviews, typically experimenting with genre conventions and putting the personality and voice of the host at the center. Examples include a conversational wine show, *Flaskens Ånd* (The Spirit in the Bottle), hosted by a well-known Danish journalist, Poul Pilgaard Johnsen, who is both an investigative reporter and a flamboyant wine connoisseur, and who uses his own life story in his narrative wine journalism and criticism;⁶⁷ the theatricalized food review show, *Béarnaise er Dyrenes Konge* (Bearnaise Is the King of Beasts), hosted by a well-known Danish multi-artist (novelist, playwright, drummer, and actor), cultural journalist and critic, Martin Kongstad, who, among other techniques, mixes his fictional writing and culture critical work to stage his reviews;⁶⁸ and a daily cultural news program, *AK24Syv* (AK24Seven), hosted by a controversial cultural journalist, René Fredensborg, known for his two novels and his gonzo-like and offensive approaches in his cultural reporting, including quite harsh criticisms and exposures of the close ties between cultural journalists and the cultural industries.⁶⁹

The second example is the independent digital-only news platform Zetland established in 2012, specializing in longform journalism and occasionally producing intimate, live-stage journalism shows.⁷⁰ Based on a hybrid business model of public subsidies and subscriptions (called “member fees”), Zetland publishes a news overview and a few feature stories each day. The medium is framed by its founders as a (cultural) community, involving the journalists and its members (aka readers), who all contribute to the journalistic production, as Zetland aims to integrate its members in the editorial process. More specifically, the editorial staff produces journalism based on six commitments, among them that “#1 We *are* our members” and “#6 We are passionate about our journalism and honest about everything we do.”⁷¹ The journalists are staged as journalistic personalities, present in their texts, and expected to have an active social media presence.⁷² This public visibility and staging are key elements of the construction of Zetland’s cultural community and voice. Culture is among the topics treated, but from a broad, sociocultural perspective rather than from the perspective of artists, cultural producers, institutions, or industries. One of Zetland’s key (cultural) journalists is freelancer Torben Sangild, who writes not only about culture but also about science, psychology, philosophy, comedy, and debate, thus exemplifying Zetland’s broad sociocultural approach.

Neither Radio24Syv nor Zetland is representative of conventional Danish media outlets. Both do, however, exemplify strong media brands cultivating alternative forms of journalism, connoting literary styles of reporting when engaging in cultural issues. Both Radio24Syv and Zetland have influenced the cultural journalism of established media institutions such as DR, which has developed more narrative and persona-driven cultural formats,⁷³ indicating the broader circulation of such approaches.

Conclusion

The ambition of this exploration has been to start a scholarly conversation about the kinship of literary journalism and cultural journalism. Both forms engage with sociocultural themes and everyday life events more than with disruptive day-to-day news, and they share a passion for artistic, narrative, or otherwise aestheticized approaches, presenting their stories in a distinct voice.⁷⁴ Both are concerned not only with reporting events but also with providing audiences aesthetically and linguistically pleasurable experiences performed by writers, novelists, intellectuals, critics, and aesthetically trained academics—perhaps also to a larger degree than by professionally trained journalists.⁷⁵ In brief, both groups of journalists follow their own set of (breakable) rules⁷⁶ or are journalists with a difference.⁷⁷

There are also important differences between literary journalism and cultural journalism, however. Most literary journalism engages with a broad range of social matters rather than with arts and culture in the narrower sense, as is the case for large parts of cultural journalism. Much cultural journalism is not literary, as cultural journalism basically walks on two legs—partly an artistic, creative, and immersive dimension rooted in the humanities and aesthetics and often associated with cultural criticism; and partly a news-driven and more traditional form of news reporting about arts and culture rooted in journalism.⁷⁸ It is especially the former—that is, the artistic, creative, and immersive dimension rooted in the humanities and aesthetics—that links cultural journalism to literary journalism. Furthermore, rather than engaging with ordinary people as literary journalism does, cultural journalism often engages with the cultural elite, their cultural production, creative processes, and everyday lives. Cultural journalists could indeed themselves be considered part of this elite, as they move in the same circles as their creative and cultural-industry networks.⁷⁹ Finally, literary journalistic practice requires narrative style and technique along with reporting skills, while cultural journalism—and criticism in particular—requires aesthetic expertise, as knowledge about particular cultural domains has long been a prerequisite for practicing this particular subgenre of journalism.⁸⁰ It may be stretching the argument too far to argue that literary journalism is closer to “literature” than cultural journalism is, and that cultural journalism is more “journalistic” than literary journalism is, to rephrase the definition of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, cited in the introduction. But some parts of cultural journalism do involve more conventional forms of reporting than literary journalism uses.

A key reason for highlighting their commonalities more than their differences in this analysis has been that recent years’ expansion and mainstreaming of traits from both literary and cultural journalism tap into broader trends in journalism—the shift of topical attention from public affairs to everyday life, and the shifts in journalistic style from mainly descriptive to added interpretation, and from rationality to the inclusion of emotion. This has challenged the normative idea that factual, objective reporting about the most important events of the day is the main, legitimate form of Western journalism. A key question for future research is whether the trend that some of the values, traits, and professional logics shared by literary journalism and cultural journalism are seeping into these more mainstream forms of journalism signals momentum or dilution for literary journalism and cultural journalism. One could argue that it is a testament to the broader professional recognition of the potential of such journalistic modes for engaging audiences. But one

could also argue that when such modes become mainstream to the journalistic toolbox, they lose some of their “power to shock and motivate,” as Maguire noted,⁸¹ which may challenge their role in the broader societal narrative of journalism. This paradox is further accentuated by digital media technologies, which have, on the one hand, given “the people formerly known as the audience”⁸² access to tell stories, perform cultural and societal criticism, and cultivate everydayness in a distinct voice on (v)logs, in podcasts, and other innovative formats.⁸³ On the other hand, new media technologies have also provided professional literary journalists and cultural journalists with new means of audience engagement and innovative storytelling—potentially reinforcing the momentum of literary and cultural journalism. That is one reason why studying the kinship of literary and cultural journalism seems particularly pertinent today.

Nete Nørgaard Kristensen is professor of Media Studies in the Department of Communication, University of Copenhagen, where she chairs the Section of Media Studies. She specializes in research about media and popular culture, cultural journalism and cultural criticism across platforms, and political communication. Her work has appeared in international journals such as Celebrity Studies; Communication, Culture & Critique; Digital Journalism; Information, Communication & Society; International Journal of Cultural Policy; Journalism; Journalism Practice; Journalism Studies; Media, War and Conflict; Sociology Compass; and Television & New Media.



Notes

- ¹ International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, "About Us."
- ² Bombaci, "Performative Criticism and the Problem of Modernist Chic," 132.
- ³ Isager, "The Passive-Responsive Journalist," 32–51; Moestrup, "Theatricality, Body, Voice, Spatiality," 52–73.
- ⁴ Keeble, "Literary Journalism," 3–5; Kristensen, "Cultural Journalism—Journalism about Culture," 3; Maguire, "Literary Journalism at the Center," 213.
- ⁵ Hanitzsch and Vos, "Journalism beyond Democracy," 146–64.
- ⁶ Salgado and Strömbäck, "Interpretive Journalism," 144–61; Wahl-Jorgensen, "An Emotional Turn in Journalism Studies," 175–94.
- ⁷ Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen, "The Culture of Arts Journalists," 619–39; Hellman and Jaakkola, "From Aesthetes to Reporters," 783–801; Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm, "Cultural Journalism," 1–21.
- ⁸ Keeble, "Literary Journalism," 1; Kristensen, "Cultural Journalism—Journalism about Culture," 2–3; Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm, "Cultural Journalism," 3.
- ⁹ Williams, "Culture," 87.
- ¹⁰ Kotisova, "An elixir of life?," 1–17; Kristensen, "Cultural Journalism—Journalism about Culture," 4; Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm, "Cultural Journalism," 3.
- ¹¹ Janssen, Kuipers, and Verboord, "Cultural Globalization and Arts Journalism," 719–40; Purhonen et al., *Enter Culture, Exit Arts?*, 52, 120, 146.
- ¹² Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen, "The Culture of Arts Journalists," 619–39; Hellman and Jaakkola, "From Aesthetes to Reporters," 783–801.
- ¹³ Hovden and Kristensen, "The Cultural Journalist around the Globe," 695–97.
- ¹⁴ Hovden and Kristensen, 697–702.
- ¹⁵ Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen, "The Culture of Arts Journalists," 635.
- ¹⁶ Kristensen, *Journalister og Kilder* [Journalists and news sources], 210.
- ¹⁷ Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm, "Cultural Journalism," 2 (emphasis in original).
- ¹⁸ Hanitzsch and Vos, "Journalism beyond Democracy," 156.
- ¹⁹ Hanitzsch and Vos, 157.
- ²⁰ Patterson, "Doing Well and Doing Good," 3–5.
- ²¹ Eide and Knight, "Public/Private Service: Service Journalism and the Problems of Everyday Life," 526–47.
- ²² Bro, "Constructive Journalism," 504.
- ²³ Steensen, "The Featurization of Journalism," 59.
- ²⁴ Hanitzsch and Vos, "Journalism beyond Democracy," 157; Hanusch and Hanitzsch, "Mediating Orientation and Self-Expression in the World of Consumption," 943–59.
- ²⁵ Keeble, "Literary Journalism," 2; Kramer, "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists," 27–28; Sims, "The Art of Literary Journalism," 3.

- ²⁶ Collins, "From Magazines to Newsprint," 209.
- ²⁷ Sims, "The Literary Journalists," 5.
- ²⁸ Hovden and Kristensen, "The Cultural Journalist around the Globe," 701. A study of multiculturalism, immigration, and integration in Nordic news media shows, for example, that cultural coverage more often offers "resources for identification, empathy and arguments for specific points of view" compared to coverage by other beats. Riegert and Hovden, "Identity, Empathy and Argument," 158.
- ²⁹ Zelizer, "Journalists as Interpretive Communities, Revisited," 181–90.
- ³⁰ Barnhurst, "The Interpretive Turn in News," 111–41.
- ³¹ Salgado and Strömbäck, "Interpretive Journalism," 154.
- ³² Barnhurst, "The Interpretive Turn in News," 111–41.
- ³³ Soontjens, "The Rise of Interpretive Journalism," 963.
- ³⁴ Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, "From Public Educator to Interpreting Ombudsman," 195.
- ³⁵ Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*, 3.
- ³⁶ Pauly, "The New Journalism and the Struggle for Interpretation," 590; Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*.
- ³⁷ Hellman and Jaakkola, "From Aesthetes to Reporters," 783–801.
- ³⁸ Pauly, "The New Journalism and the Struggle for Interpretation," 590.
- ³⁹ Kristensen, "Cultural Journalism—Journalism about Culture," 6.
- ⁴⁰ Stenvall, "On Emotions and the Journalistic Ideals of Factuality and Objectivity," 1751.
- ⁴¹ Wahl-Jorgensen, "An Emotional Turn in Journalism Studies?," 175–94.
- ⁴² Coward, "Confessional Journalism," 91–112.
- ⁴³ Peters, "Emotion Aside or Emotional Side?," 310.
- ⁴⁴ Wahl-Jorgensen, "The Strategic Ritual of Emotionality," 129–45.
- ⁴⁵ Maguire, "Literary Journalism at the Center," 213.
- ⁴⁶ Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual," 660–79; Wahl-Jorgensen, "The Strategic Ritual of Emotionality," 129–45.
- ⁴⁷ Sims, "The Literary Journalists," 4.
- ⁴⁸ Kramer, "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists," 29.
- ⁴⁹ Keeble, "Literary Journalism," 2.
- ⁵⁰ Collins, "From Magazines to Newsprint," 200.
- ⁵¹ Chong, "Valuing Subjectivity in Journalism," 427–43; Kristensen, "Critical Emotions," 1590–1607; Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm, "Cultural Journalism," 9.
- ⁵² Kotisova, "An Elixir of Life?," 12, 13.
- ⁵³ Purhonen et al., *Enter Culture, Exit Arts?*, 186.
- ⁵⁴ Wahl-Jorgensen and Schmidt, "News and Storytelling," 266.
- ⁵⁵ Keeble, "Literary Journalism," 12; Kristensen and Riegert, "Why Cultural Journalism in the Nordic Countries?," 9–23.
- ⁵⁶ Keeble, "Literary Journalism," 12.
- ⁵⁷ Harding, "Cultural Policy Research in the Nordic Countries," 9.
- ⁵⁸ Ministry of Culture Denmark, "Public Support to the Arts and Culture," para. 1.

⁵⁹ Eurostat, “Government Expenditure on Recreation, Culture and Religion.”

⁶⁰ Ministry of Culture Denmark, “Medieaftale 2019–2023” [Media Agreement 2019–2023].

⁶¹ Ministry of Culture Denmark, *Danskernes Kulturvaner* [Danes’ cultural habits 2012], 13.

⁶² According to DR’s public service contract 2019–2023, “DR should focus on Danish arts and culture all over the country and on communication about Danish culture, history, nature and climate, and cultural heritage, including the Christian cultural heritage. DR should collaborate with cultural agents all over the country about the communication of Danish culture.” Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), “DR’s Public Service-Kontrakt for 2019–2023” [“DR’s Public Service-Contract 2019–2023”], 2 (translations from the original are the author’s).

⁶³ DR’s news reaches 59 percent of all Danes every week, and 78 percent of all Danes trust this news institution. Newman et al., “3.07 Denmark,” 68.

⁶⁴ *Lov om mediestøtte* [Danish law of media subsidies], 1604 §3.7.

⁶⁵ Kristensen and Riegert, “Why Cultural Journalism in the Nordic Countries?,” 9–23.

⁶⁶ Moestrup, “Performing the Persona,” 7 (emphasis in original), referencing Knudsen and Ramskov, *Radio24syv Public Service Redegørelse 2011*.

⁶⁷ Moestrup, “Performing the Persona,” 111–43.

⁶⁸ Moestrup, “Theatricality, Body, Voice, Spatiality,” 52–73.

⁶⁹ Isager, “The Passive-Responsive Journalist,” 32–51; Fredensborg, *Hønseshunde* [Bird Dogs: Novel]; Fredensborg, *Sjuff* [Douchebag].

⁷⁰ Isager, “Literary Journalism in Denmark,” 12.

⁷¹ Zetland, “About Zetland.”

⁷² Zetland, “Integritet og etik på Zetland” [Integrity and ethics at Zetland].

⁷³ A recent example is DR’s program *ArtyFarty* (aired in 2020), which presented itself as the “self-smart cultural cousin, who you did not know existed, but who turns out to be both fascinating, funny, and bordering on the maniacally geeky in his approach to arts, theater, literature, etc. Each program goes into depth with a well-known cultural topic or phenomenon and advances with surprising angles and gestures” (author’s translation). DR, *ArtyFarty*. Several former Radio24syv hosts were part of the program, among them René Fredensborg in some episodes.

⁷⁴ Hellman and Jaakkola, “From Aesthetes to Reporters,” 788; Keeble, “Literary Journalism,” 2; Kristensen, “Cultural Journalism—Journalism about Culture,” 1–13; Pauly, “The New Journalism and the Struggle for Interpretation,” 590.

⁷⁵ Keeble, “Literary Journalism,” 6–7; Riegert, Roosvall, and Widholm, “Cultural Journalism,” 5.

⁷⁶ Kramer, “Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists,” 21.

⁷⁷ Hovden and Kristensen, “The Cultural Journalist around the Globe,” 689–708.

⁷⁸ Hellman and Jaakkola, “From Aesthetes to Reporters,” 786–88; Hovden and Knapskog, “Doubly Dominated,” 791–92.

⁷⁹ Hovden and Knapskog, 791–92.

⁸⁰ Harries and Wahl-Jorgensen, “The Culture of Arts Journalists,” 624; Hellman and Jaakkola, “From Aesthetes to Reporters,” 787.

⁸¹ Maguire, “Literary Journalism at the Center,” 220.

⁸² Rosen, “The People Formerly Known as the Audience,” 13.

⁸³ Collins, “From Magazines to Newsprint,” 209.

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Image of René Fredensborg by Robin Skjoldborg

The Passive-Responsive Journalist: An Offensive Case of Immersion in the Danish Film Industry

Christine Isager
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract: This study examines a controversial piece of magazine journalism on cliquish culture in the Danish film industry, “Frygt og lede i Avedøre og omegn” [Fear and loathing in and around Avedøre] by René Fredensborg, which was featured in the Danish film magazine *Ekko* in 2011. The study identifies stylistic features that emerge as the reporter mixes playful Gonzo poses with injured personal testimony, ultimately blaming social forces or immersion as such for the consequences of his coverage. A personal narrative based on immersion would seem a promising way of exploring social dynamics in a small, Nordic, high-trust society such as Denmark’s, especially in the domain of arts and culture, in which the roles and interests of journalists and cultural actors tend to overlap. Fredensborg’s approach on this occasion, however, displays several pitfalls in the enactment of the dedicated, responsive style of engagement associated with literary journalism. Drawing on the trope of getting carried away, Fredensborg’s story showcases a peculiar, passive form of responsiveness that serves to renounce professional and personal responsibility.

Keywords: immersion – trust – rhetorical style – Gonzo journalism – cultural journalism – Denmark

Along with the other Nordic countries, Denmark is categorized as a high-trust society in which corruption is rare, and citizens generally have a high level of confidence in each other and in public institutions.¹ While the benefits of such a culture of trust are in many respects invaluable, that culture poses its own challenges to journalists at work, including journalists who cover arts and culture. In her extensive work on the nature of this beat, Kristensen offers the following characterization:

[A]rtists, cultural producers and journalists . . . often mingle in the same circles through friendship-like relations or close collegial collaborations, and cultural journalists often share their sources' aims, interests and passions for art and culture rather than playing the traditional adversary role . . . Such a situation is especially pronounced in a geographical context like the Danish with a small-scale cultural scene and press . . .²

While a culture of trust—and even of bonding—might be seen as a spontaneous or generalized form of immersion beneficial to literary journalism practice in the area, it clearly constrains and potentially compromises journalistic credibility and agency.

To investigate dilemmas that invariably arise when reporting is based on close interaction with sources, the present case study looks to a controversial magazine story about the Danish film industry that provides an interesting terrain to reflect on the ethos or perceived credibility of the immersed and invested literary journalist. Giving special attention to rhetorical style and presentation of self at the textual level helps answer questions such as: How are *readers* invited to make sense of a reporter's ambivalent role of both insider and outsider? What specific stylistic features are at work to make them like and trust (or not) the journalist who mingles and reports?

The study focuses on the reporter and writer René Fredensborg (b. 1972), who in 2011 challenged the abovementioned friendly context as well as his readers' ethical sensibilities by moving through the social and professional circles of the Danish film industry in the role of aspiring film producer and later deciding to report on the experience as a literary journalist. Fredensborg's case is somewhat extreme but an all the more illustrative enactment of the generalized ethos of literary journalists that, as Kristensen argues, is not only shared with cultural journalists in important ways but is also currently gaining momentum and mainstream status.³ While this ethos tends to be romanticized as that of journalists working with passion and integrity,⁴ Fredensborg's approach draws attention to particular ways of evoking and subverting such expectations, turning virtues into pretensions and, for better or worse, offending because of them.

Fredensborg foregrounds what Wilson refers to as the second order nar-

rative in immersion journalism, “that is, a coexisting literary story about *how* the text we’re reading ostensibly came to be researched and written,” at the expense of first order, ethnographic coverage. In this respect, the story fits Wilson’s notion of contemporary “*postethnographic*” immersion journalism if partly despite itself.⁵ Fredensborg’s failure to blend in as part of the film community explicitly becomes the main point of the story while, however, his ensuing claim to an outsider status never becomes persuasive either.

Peculiar to Fredensborg’s immersion narrative is what will be presented here as a “passive-responsive” stance that frames the journalist as a victim of circumstance and serves to relieve him of professional and personal responsibility for the story of which he is part. To this end, the reading of Fredensborg’s work herein will draw specifically on a rhetorical notion of *responsiveness* to capture what is arguably a cardinal virtue of literary journalists that invites emulation as well as more dubious distortions. That is to say, literary journalism is conceived as a *situated art of response*, associated with its practitioners’ openness to learn from and be affected by social experience, as well as a more questionable inclination to become caught up in, or even carried away by, social experience. Literary journalists ultimately perform this balancing act at the textual level to win the goodwill of a specific readership, so this is where the ethos of literary journalism in specific settings—such as the arts and culture sector in contemporary Denmark—takes form and can be scrutinized more closely.

Fredensborg’s Persona in a Danish Context

René Fredensborg is an exponent of what Moestrup refers to as *personadriven* cultural journalism.⁶ Since graduating from the Danish School of Journalism in 2001, Fredensborg has covered mainly arts and culture as a newspaper reporter, a television satire host, a longform magazine writer, a music and film reviewer, and a columnist/blogger in national print media.⁷ Quite consistently, Fredensborg has transgressed the formats he has worked with, establishing an image of being invested and (sometimes overly) passionate, or putting himself on the line, as the popular phrase has it.

For example, Fredensborg was temporarily suspended from his job at the free national newspaper *Nyhedsavisen* after covering riots in the streets of Copenhagen in 2007. Under the title “Mit (sølle) liv som activist” (My [miserable] life as an activist), he reported as a participant observer on the side of rioters in violent confrontations with the police over the clearance and condemnation of Ungdomshuset (The Youth House), that had served for decades as an autonomous countercultural community space.⁸ The article prefigures many of the features of the present study’s key subject, “Frygt og lede

i Avedøre og omegn” (Fear and loathing in and around Avedøre), published in the quarterly *Ekko* film magazine in 2011.⁹ In both pieces, Fredensborg appears determined to prove his readiness to be part of a group of people he is immersed in and goes far in terms of letting social pressure determine his actions. In his 2007 activist story, he states this quite explicitly: “I am simply getting carried away by the atmosphere. Especially when somebody [a rioter] places a cobblestone in my hand and asks me to throw it [at the police].”¹⁰ Not surprisingly, this passage offended readers and colleagues, who criticized Fredensborg’s participant observation as unprofessional, militant, and illegal.¹¹

What might be more surprising, considering the formal suspension of Fredensborg, is the way a chief editor at *Nyhedsavisen*, Simon Andersen, defended Fredensborg’s coverage of the riots. In a long blog post that amounts to an inventory of the classic distinguishing features of literary journalism, Andersen characterized Fredensborg’s reporting as “norm breaking, trendsetting, and unique,” “stylish,” “empathic,” “unforgettable,” and “in a class by itself.”¹² He expresses hope that Fredensborg’s methods inspire colleagues and recognizes Fredensborg as engaged and able to “get inside the minds of the activists.”¹³ Moreover, Andersen’s response celebrates Fredensborg’s work at the explicit expense of mainstream journalism as practiced at the largest national daily, the center-right-leaning *Jyllands-Posten*. Its work Andersen describes as comparatively “neat” and squeamish (with reporters in cover behind police lines), “tedious,” “ridden with banalities and clichés,” prejudiced, and uncovering nothing.¹⁴ Apart from the polemical tone in the latter quoted passages, it is fair to say that the earlier portrayal sketches a professional ethos that literary journalists would generally identify with or aspire to. On this occasion, it is evoked not just to pave the way for Fredensborg’s return to his job but also serves to brand and promote *Nyhedsavisen*, which had been launched just a year earlier. The newspaper was delivered to households in the largest Danish cities and made available at train stations and other public spaces, including upper secondary schools, deliberately counting and targeting a young audience as part of its wide national readership. The relatively large and young staff worked independently of news agencies with the declared intention to challenge conventional notions of news content by giving equal priority to lifestyle/human interest, science, and political stories.¹⁵

In terms of shaping Fredensborg’s own professional persona and later career, the peculiar combination of being celebrated while suspended transgresses the paradigm of literary journalism and points to the ethos of Gonzo journalism and the “first person major showman” style of Hunter S. Thompson (1937–2005).¹⁶ In Thompson’s case, Mosser writes, the radically objec-

tive, participatory, and flamboyant style became a way for him to “differentiate himself from other New Journalists of the same era—Wolfe, Mailer, Didion.”¹⁷ To this day, differentiation remains important to the Gonzo ethos, even if its components have turned into a paradigm that also tempts clichés.¹⁸ The writer and immersive reporter Matthew Thompson has been called “Australia’s answer to Hunter S. Thompson” for reasons that apply to Fredensborg in Denmark—if Thompson’s political orientation is exchanged with cultural orientation in the following list of shared features presented by Kremmer:

[O]bserved commonalities [between Thompson and Thompson] include literary techniques such as immersion, quests, an outsider perspective, satire, idealism, literary-political stunts, humor, drug tropes, and critiques of journalistic practice and political leaders.¹⁹

The most obvious example of such work on Fredensborg’s part is his debut novel *Høsehunde* [Bird Dogs: Novel] (in 2011, i.e., the same year as the *Ekko* story that sported the signature Thompson title prefix “Fear and Loathing . . .”). *Høsehunde* is a satirical first-person narrative and road trip of a reporter looking for an interview with Bon Jovi during the band’s (actual) visit to Denmark in 2008.²⁰ A pastiche of Hunter Thompson’s 1971 Gonzo classic *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*,²¹ Fredensborg’s novel was recognized as a roman à clef about the Danish music industry, music journalism included.

While performative and playful in the style of Thompson, Fredensborg’s work has followed a more general, international turn toward confessional and emotionalist journalism too.²² In a 2008 study, Isager argues that Danish Gonzo journalism has taken on a peculiar confessional and autobiographical flavor,²³ and the transformed genre’s ambivalent toggling between irony and sincerity seems to have been reinforced in Fredensborg’s work as an arts and culture beat reporter. Notably, 2011 was also the year when a new national radio station, Radio24syv, added Fredensborg to its list of high-profile hosts. Famously, the station attracted, promoted, and made the most of various profiles that had been prominent voices in other cultural, political, and media contexts.²⁴ Indeed, much criticism was directed at the station during its existence from 2011 to 2019 for being a notorious hotbed for a cliquish cultural elite, as portrayed by Kristensen.²⁵ This popular image of 24syv put Fredensborg’s dual role of cultural-elite insider and autonomous Gonzo-like outsider to the test in his presentation of self. The test continues,²⁶ but it was prefigured spectacularly in the *Ekko* story that made one trait obvious: in terms of the insider/outsider balancing act, Fredensborg shares Thompson’s philosophy that, despite bonding—or getting drunk or high—with sources, everything that happens to him may potentially be reported. Thompson writes:

As far as I was concerned [when covering the U.S. presidential campaign in 1972], there was no such thing as “off the record.” The most consistent and ultimately damaging failure of political journalism in America has its roots in the clubby/cocktail personal relationships that inevitably develop between politicians and journalists—in Washington or anywhere else where they meet on a day-to-day basis. When professional antagonists become after-hours drinking buddies, they are not likely to turn each other in . . . especially not for “minor infractions” of rules that neither side takes seriously; and on the rare occasions when minor infractions suddenly become major, there is panic on both ends.²⁷

In “Frygt og lede i Avedøre og omegn” [Fear and loathing in and around Avedøre], René Fredensborg decides to betray exactly such an “after-hours drinking buddy” from the film community. Technically, the story is a third-order narrative, as it covers Fredensborg’s experiences behind the scenes when producing a documentary that covers, in turn, Fredensborg’s experiences behind the scenes of the Danish employment system as a job seeker. Offended by what he experienced firsthand as unhealthy camaraderie in the film and TV business, he eventually decided to write about the process of planning and applying for public funding for his documentary. In the wake of the story’s publication, a public film consultant lost his job, and Fredensborg received strong reactions from prominent cultural actors in the film industry, who called him “en klam lille lort” (a disgusting little nobody [shit]) who “betrays people’s trust by drawing a Gonzo-like caricature to get his 15 minutes of fame.”²⁸ Fredensborg is referred to as hypocritical, “miffed like a schoolgirl,” an attention-seeking, deficient version of German social documentarist and activist Günter Wallraff or the U.S. documentarist Michael Moore, who adopts a transparent “contrived naïveté.”²⁹ This reception reflects the aforementioned and unresolved tension between sincerity and irony, with its references to the serious, indignant pose of a miffed schoolgirl and Wallraff on the one hand, and the more playful “contrived naïveté” associated with a documentarist of a more satirical bent—Moore—on the other.

Roughly a decade later, when the story briefly reappeared in the Danish news, Fredensborg responded to this criticism, calling it unfairly personal. Notably, he highlighted the exposé component of his own story as if style and performance of professional ethos were irrelevant:

My article was an attempt to open a debate about cliquishness in the film industry, after which [Frank Piasecki Poulsen] as a friend of the fired film consultant threatened me with what I could only interpret as a beating . . . It was the messenger, I, who seemed to be the problem—not the way the duties of the office [of film consultant] were performed.³⁰

Surely, however, matters of ethos and style are all-important. The serious and injured tone of this comment is also apparent in the magazine story itself, where it coexists with Gonzo features that pull in an opposite, playful direction. The ambivalence is worth investigating to uncover the ethical compromises that are made and displayed at the textual level.

Ethos and Style of Engagement

The term style is used here in an extended sense inspired by Nicotra's practice-oriented use of the phrase "style of engagement."³¹ Nicotra refers not to literary journalism practices but to rhetorical critics' reading practices when introducing responsiveness as a form of agency: a practice driven by fascination and characterized by a readiness to be affected and transformed by a given textual encounter. This way of approaching a text resembles an immersive approach to reporting. As a responsive reader, Nicotra says, one spends a prolonged time with the text, approaching it "not entirely innocently but also not yet knowing what such an encounter might produce."³² She develops her argument by comparing such responsiveness with a readiness to be seduced, an approach that makes it necessary to "actively . . . open the self to alterity, whether that alterity be a text, a communication situation, or something else."³³ In this perspective, literary journalism may be viewed as a rhetorical discipline defined as ready exposure and response to the particulars of a given situation.

Indeed, with immersion as an established key component of literary journalism, such readiness for long-term, potentially transformative exposure to particulars seems integral to its ethos.³⁴ When Hermann describes "ethnographically informed accounts from the margins," she highlights the recognizable "time-consuming research and carefully crafted narratives" of "not the urgent and immediate but the quotidian."³⁵ Moreover, interestingly, she points to a temporal tipping point or reorientation in these stories, "a changed set of attitudes and beliefs borne out of prolonged immersive experiences."³⁶ The "prolonged reporting time," says Hermann, "helps journalists reevaluate and abandon their expectations in favor of locally situated perspectives."³⁷ It is this capacity for reorientation (Hermann) or subjective transformation (Nicotra) that arguably counts as a hallmark of literary journalism ethos and which René Fredensborg tentatively invokes.

As noted earlier, Kristensen's work shows how cultural journalists distinguish themselves by being immersed or otherwise closely intertwined with sources by default,³⁸ which requires extra caution when they venture—as Fredensborg did—to share their personal experiences and expose certain groups. In a sidebar titled "Undercover, or Just Drawing on Past Experience?" in

his handbook *Immersion*, Conover has a pragmatic take on such situations. When his students decide to write a story based on their immersion somewhere, basically turning their memoirs into a kind of undercover reporting, Conover advises that they explicitly anonymize sources who might unwittingly find themselves included in a story, so they “won’t feel ambushed.”³⁹ Next, he advises the students to return to those sources to reveal their professional intention and do additional reporting.⁴⁰ Fredensborg did neither, so his sources probably would have felt ambushed, his readers might have turned against him because of that, and that could have been the end of the analysis. One could simply tell Fredensborg to follow Conover’s advice next time:

Remember that the reader of your work . . . becomes complicit in your deception. So in advance, if possible, pause now and then to consider: How will this make me look? Like an empath? Or like an asshole?⁴¹

Still, Fredensborg’s decision to write his story against what would generally be considered sound professional advice generated useful material in terms of studying how a literary journalist works in practice to legitimize his approach. How does Fredensborg work in his writing to gain the attention and trust of first, publishers and editors, and second, readers?

Of Kramer’s oft-quoted eight “breakable rules for literary journalists,” the fourth relates style to the reporter’s presentation of self through the notion of voice: “*Literary journalists write in ‘intimate voice,’ informal, frank, human, and ironic.*”⁴² The qualities of “frank, human, and ironic” seem to anticipate the ambiguity at play in Fredensborg’s writing. On one hand, the literary journalist is perceived as a straightforward and honest person who strives, in Jim Boylan’s words, for “fidelity to the truth as the writer [him- or herself] sees it.”⁴³ On the other hand, the literary journalist is perceived as ironic, that is to say, playful, and somewhat guarded, disclaiming or relativizing the aforementioned subjective truth.

These two conflicting qualities of style sometimes present themselves in sequence according to a narrative logic—a particular version of Hermann’s reorientation principle—where irony gradually gives way to gravity. The reporter pursues an idea for a story and is initially excited and amused by it, but then faces challenges along the way that complicate the engagement. On a large scale, such a dynamic may be recognized in Norah Vincent’s book-length story of the year she disguised herself as a man, immersing herself in male communities with an excitement that ethical concerns gradually cancel. Her actions eventually damage her mental health, which invites a follow-up story of immersion in mental institutions.⁴⁴ Rather than being responsive to their sources, journalists become vulnerable in a literal, hurting sense, and

while dedication is difficult not to respect, the peculiar logic of literary journalists being too dedicated for their own good offers more of a paradox in terms of ethical appeal. An admirable professional trait becomes a human weakness and might still be appreciated as such, but when and to what extent does it serve as an excuse for unprofessional behavior?

Fredensborg's style of engagement evokes the image of an excited reporter under the influence of cultural and social forces and—sometimes—drugs.⁴⁵ He portrays himself as ready to play along, exposing himself unconditionally to input and impulses from the film community. Rather than deploying more value-laden terms such as excitement, passion, commitment, or dedication, the focus herein is on the notion and textual enactment of *responsiveness*. The term is meant to echo the previously mentioned rhetorical conception of literary journalism as a situated art of response that harbors the admirable quality of openness to learning and being affected on the one hand, as well as more questionable degrees of getting caught up or carried away on the other.

Fredensborg's Responsive Style: Actively Passive

Genre clues in the editorial framing of Fredensborg's article in *Ekko* immediately point in different directions. It is described as an "essay" in the online version, an "account" in the print magazine, and a personal story in both online and offline editorial leads. The latter is the most accurate, promising a first-person testimony of events presented in chronological order. What justifies the account and essay descriptions, however, with their promise of slightly more rigor and reflection, are the subtler, injured, or indignant stylistic aspects that appear on closer reading.

First and foremost, however, the article presents itself as a high-powered, satirical piece of Gonzo journalism with clear references (see Figure 1) to Thompson's work by way of the "Fear and Loathing . . ." title as well as the cartoon illustrations and the enumerating, associative style of the article summary.

Occasional cues in the text evoke Fredensborg's Gonzo persona, too, signaling that he takes joy in the adventure as well as in the writing itself. First, informal English phrases are thrown into Danish sentences, such as "*Off we go!*" and "He spots me as a new, hopeful film director *dude*."⁴⁶ Second, there are original, field-specific plays on words and images, such as "I'll be getting great greasy feedback by the liver pâté buffet." Third, idiosyncratic, disproportionate references are evoked in Fredensborg's mind, for instance, during a staff meeting at the film company:

"We shall have to select among all the producers out here," [said one of the top-notch directors]. Select. As in selection? As in the classic handbook *Doctors from Hell: The Horrific Account of Nazi Experiments on Humans*?⁴⁷

14. JUNI 2011 | 08:00

Frygt og lede i Avedøre og omegn

Illustration | Jenz Koudahl



En personlig beretning fra en håbefuld instruktørdebutant om hans møde med tv- og filmbranchens hierarki, hykleri og falske forhåbninger. Med velmenende skåltaler, en gevaldig koger og dansk films evige problem: indspistheden.

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rené fredensborg, zentropa

Af René Fredensborg / [Ekko #52](#)

Figure 1. “Fear and Loathing in and around Avedøre,” as illustrated and introduced by *Ekko*, June 24, 2011. The illustration is by Jenz Koudahl. The article summary reads: “A hopeful filmmaking debutant’s personal story of his encounter with the hierarchy, hypocrisy, and false hopes of the television and film industry. Complete with well-intended toasts, a massive high, and the notorious problem of the Danish film business: incestuous cliquishness.”⁴⁸

These playful remarks and affective interpretations reinforce Fredensborg’s outsider position and seem designed mainly to amuse his readers. Indeed, the idiosyncratic language choices become the main way for Fredensborg to take responsibility for his story because they stand out as his own.⁴⁹ This happens, however, at the expense of empathy with his co-workers (eventually his sources),⁵⁰ because he keeps his thoughts to himself quite consistently while immersed and blames this on feeling starstruck and alienated. In this way, the second-order narrative becomes dominant. Because Fredensborg loses his struggle to fit in, he never gets to share a first-order insider perspective which, of course, underscores a central point of his story. Still, one central scene indicates that at least one prominent member of the film community trusts him as an insider, evoking the plot of a conventional initiation story.⁵¹ The scene is also central in terms of reporting because it eventually serves as an exposé of misconduct on the part of a film consultant who appears in the scene:

The consultant . . . asks me if I want something for the nose. I just have to make sure that we are on the same page.

— *Something for the nose?*

“Yes, it’s some really good stuff that I inherited. Come on, let’s line up.”

We go into the men’s room. Jack is cutting and sniffing . . . Jack lines up coke on the back of his hand and offers me his little, personal vacuum cleaner tube. I put my nose down and snort [the cocaine] off his hand. A little too quickly. Jack can probably tell that I am some sort of rookie *also* when it comes to coke.

. . . Jack and I end up in my hotel room. I wake up to the view of an empty coke bag and a tape recorder with recordings of me and the consultant . . . me singing to him in falsetto . . . us having an [indecipherable] conversation . . .⁵²

In light of Fredensborg’s aforementioned bonding with his readers, it can be argued that the passage is ironic: his feigned naïveté (“I have to make sure . . .”) invites the consultant to become a victim of this irony, to expose himself and make his intentions explicit. A level of irony may also be read into Fredensborg’s weak-willed way of submitting to social pressure as he extends his role as apprentice in filmmaking and fundraising to this case of illegal drug use. By claiming an amateur persona (“some sort of rookie”) who does not know the local jargon and practices, he performs a remarkably passive responsiveness; the true insiders are featured as active agents who become responsible for his education or his socialization into their line of business on all fronts. This distribution of roles is further stressed by the piece of technical information that Fredensborg is allowed to use the consultant’s personal instrument—a metal straw for sniffing the cocaine that qualifies in the context as the gear of a comparatively skilled professional, that is, a habitual drug user.

What works against the reading of the piece as ironic, however, is the victimization of Fredensborg, which is implied throughout the text. It forms the confessional, injured, and indignant strand of his story. The following passages and sentence fragments, sampled from the article and including its opening lines, are presented to illustrate how the strand is presented textually:

It isn’t even my idea. To apply for funding for a documentary . . . I really just happen to be . . . on a hazy day . . . [Engel, producer at the production company Zentropa,] reads my [Facebook] update . . . —and pop! I have one foot in the film business.

#

[Klarlund, director at Zentropa] is the first to warn me . . . “This business is sick. It will destroy you . . . !” He turns out to be right . . . but I am busy coming to terms with my starstrucked-ness . . . Again and again I rehearse the line in my head . . . but never muster the courage to [crack my joke] . . .

#

I assume . . . I keep quiet . . . I toast along with them . . .

#

I am even asked to . . . [My producer] makes clear to me . . . a newcomer like me . . .

#

The Danish Film Institute knows this, TV2 knows this. While I myself slowly learn.

#

. . . we are sent to . . . We are asked to . . . I am wrong . . . I learn . . . I try . . . he explains to me . . . he makes clear to me . . . [We] end up . . . My producer thinks I am a good boy . . . [Judge and program director Roland] has explained to us several times . . . [Film consultant Haslund-Christensen] encourages me . . . [Film consultant Jack] encourages me . . . I am allowed to . . . all I want is . . . ”⁵³

Despite the story’s retrospective narrative mode, reflection is kept to a minimum, and despite his center-stage position, Fredensborg shows no “first-person major showmanship.”⁵⁴ His continued use of inner thoughts, passive forms, and the dative case to position himself stand out; he is consistently acted upon, nudged, and told what to do, and in the final remark, any hint of irony, bold playfulness, and excitement about his style of engagement is gone. Instead, his hurting outsider position is cemented. He ultimately claims to have become the victim of the community to which he had trustingly opened himself and is, in that sense, a victim of his own responsive style of engagement:

[When I tell people that I’m writing this article, most of them warn me about coming across as bitter, to which I usually reply:] “I’m not bitter. All I want is to tell the truth [about the Danish TV and film community] on behalf of all those who are left out.”⁵⁵

The strong, mixed reactions from Fredensborg’s readers to his article are not surprising. That he subscribes to the ethos of a literary journalist who is almost painfully sensitive to the communities and identities he is investigating is bound to become offensive in light of his simultaneous, casual demonstration of a publicist’s power to expose disruptive events. His excited and amused Gonzo poses and familiar persona indicate that he takes personal pleasure in his work and may get carried away, and when this style of engagement and its casual performance has real consequences for people around him, what might have been admirable and entertaining can easily appear careless and malicious.

Mind the Responsive Styles of Engagement

Because it has both artistic and journalistic potential, literary journalism is a professional field in which the dynamics of inspiration and emulation are at work across both generations and nations. Therefore, literary journalism

studies should pay attention to journalistic practices that emerge on a smaller scale alongside more iconic examples. Fredensborg's example makes clear that the ethos of both the broader literary and the specific Gonzo journalism traditions are actively claimed by journalists and evoked by their editors and readers in the framing of stories. That the two paradigms serve as reference points to establish, defend, and attack the aspirations and accomplishments of a piece of contemporary cultural journalism in Denmark suggests they are well established and operative.

Furthermore, as Kristensen argues, the values and practices of literary journalism and cultural journalism—which have been referred to herein as a shared ethos—are filtering into the mainstream journalism that the literary journalism paradigm has traditionally defined itself against.⁵⁶ A growing number of journalists are working to transform their style and persona from one assignment to the next and making their individual profiles consistent and relevant in their freelance careers. In the field of arts and culture in Denmark, this means positioning oneself in a tightly knit network of cultural actors, which appears to be part of the reason Fredensborg continues to invoke the Gonzo ethos. It destabilizes his tentative role of cultural-elite insider while giving some authority and artistic license to his offensive deployment and distortion of the literary journalist's responsive stance.

Fredensborg's immersion in and around Avedøre exposes cliquishness in the Danish film industry and causes a film consultant to lose his position. The latter happens as a result of behavior that is not much different from the behavior of the reporter himself, whose story, however, is nonetheless accepted and published. This raises some questions. Does immersion excuse the reporter's conduct? To what extent does the Gonzo logic and aesthetic make up for this behavior? And does it matter whether the journalist ends up looking, in Conover's terms, like an empath or an asshole?

Surely, (un)professional conduct and its justifications are important to readers who are being addressed in an "intimate voice" as they accompany a literary journalist through a story of a culture or community. When performing a responsive style of engagement, a journalist engages his or her audience-companions' sensibilities and sets an example for social interaction. Ideally, then, readers of literary journalism may open themselves to subjective transformation as Fredensborg did, allowing the story to affect or seduce them. This shared ethos of literary journalism stays credible, however, only if its particular enactments are studied and discussed continuously with attention also to less than iconic examples like Fredensborg's, whose immediate potential for seduction proves less than ideal on a closer reading.

Responsiveness as a concept enables discussions that recognize both the

strengths and weaknesses of practitioners who present themselves as dedicated or passionate literary journalists, not in terms of an intuitive, reader-based judgment of character or a question of taste, but as something identifiable at the textual level. A more elaborate formal theory of literary journalism might evolve around responsiveness as a productively ambiguous cardinal virtue that entails both an invested, seductive posture on the one hand and a passive, helpless one on the other.

One important focus point when studying the responsive style is the basic textual positioning of the first-person narrator in a passive form and in the dative case. This starting position can sustain a potentially bold and charming readiness to become immersed and to invite the company and influence of others. Such immersion may then unfold textually as the reporter plays with words and images that are drawn from a specific encounter with a given field or community, exposing a culture and its influence on the reporter. While potentially entertaining, this same style of engagement comes with a built-in disclaimer because it can act as an excuse for a reporter to be impressionable and irresponsible, which is surely worthy of critical attention. By concentrating on the ambivalence of a responsive style of engagement at the textual level, the present study has taken an important cue from Wilson and discussed immersion as a complex form of engagement rather than an in-or-out, pass-or-fail enterprise.⁵⁷ The study may also help challenge and qualify offhand characterizations of literary journalists as charming and overly dedicated, and therefore immune to criticism; or of Gonzo journalists as divisive figures who one must either love or hate—even if the specifically *passive*-responsive journalist seems to ask mainly for the latter.

Christine Isager is associate professor of Rhetoric at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, where she teaches writing and rhetorical theory, criticism, and innovation. Her work in the field of literary journalism has previously appeared in Literary Journalism Studies as well as in Persona Studies and Rhetorica Scandinavica. She is co-editor (with Robert Alexander) of the volume Fear and Loathing Worldwide: Gonzo Journalism beyond Hunter S. Thompson (Bloomsbury, 2018).



Notes

- ¹ Rothstein and Stolle, “Introduction: Social Capital in Scandinavia,” 1; Sønderskov and Dinesen, “Trusting the State, Trusting Each Other?,” 187.
- ² Kristensen, “Churnalism, Cultural (Inter)Mediation and Sourcing in Cultural Journalism,” 2171.
- ³ Kristensen, “The Kinship of Literary Journalism and Cultural Journalism,” 10–31; Collins, “From Magazines to Newsprint,” 209–10.
- ⁴ Tulloch and Keeble, “Introduction: Mind the Gaps,” 5.
- ⁵ Wilson, “Immersion Journalism and the Second Order Narrative,” 347 (emphases in original).
- ⁶ Moestrup, “Performing the Persona,” 7.
- ⁷ Jensen, “Ham vi ikke vil lege med” [The guy we don’t want to play with], sec. 3, 16.
- ⁸ Fredensborg, “Mit (sølle) liv som aktivist” [My (miserable) life as an activist], sec. 1, 8. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Danish are my own).
- ⁹ Fredensborg, “Frygt og lede i Avedøre og omegn” [Fear and loathing in and around Avedøre], 50–56. Avedøre, a southwestern suburb of Copenhagen, is the home of—and in this context synonymous with—the film city of Avedøre, the “Danish Hollywood” that houses several television and film companies, including Zentropa, which was founded in 1992 by Peter Aalbæk Jensen and internationally award-winning director Lars von Trier. See Filmbyen Avedøre Studios, http://www.kulturarv.dk/1001fortaellinger/en_GB/filmbyen-avedoere-studios.
- ¹⁰ Fredensborg, “Mit (sølle) liv som aktivist,” sec. 1, 8.
- ¹¹ Rasmussen, “Stop den mand,” [Stop that man], sec. 1, 35.
- ¹² Andersen, “Vi er stolte af René Fredensborg” [We Are Proud of René Fredensborg].
- ¹³ Andersen.
- ¹⁴ Andersen.
- ¹⁵ Elkjær, “Gratis.” *Nyhedsavisen* was published by 365 Media Scandinavia Ltd from 2006 through 2008.
- ¹⁶ Phillips, “From Major to Minor,” 391.
- ¹⁷ Mosser, “What’s Gonzo about Gonzo Journalism?,” 88.
- ¹⁸ See Isager, “Playful Imitation at Work,” 78–96; Alexander and Isager, *Fear and Loathing Worldwide*.
- ¹⁹ Kremmer, “Gonzo Down Under,” 13.
- ²⁰ Fredensborg, *Hønehunde* [Bird Dogs: Novel].
- ²¹ Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.
- ²² Cf., respectively, Coward, “Confessional Journalism,” 91–101; Kristensen, “The Kinship of Literary Journalism and Cultural Journalism,” 10–31.
- ²³ Isager, “Hvem vil være wannabe?,” 137–48.
- ²⁴ Moestrup, “Performing the Persona,” 107–109.
- ²⁵ Kristensen, “Churnalism, Cultural (Inter)Mediation and Sourcing in Cultural Journalism,” 2171.
- ²⁶ In October 2020, Fredensborg aired a podcast series, “En Gonzo siger good-

bye” [A Gonzo says goodbye], <https://podcasts.apple.com/dk/podcast/en-gonzosiger-goodbye/id1534736890>. Working in collaboration with a journalist colleague, Anders Christiansen, they discussed Fredensborg’s peculiar media profile and history, allegedly in preparation for a farewell performance at a Copenhagen theater.

²⁷ Thompson, *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*, 18.

²⁸ Larsen, “–Du er en klam lille lort.”

²⁹ Steen, “Afløver pengene tilbage, Fredensborg!” [Give back the money, Fredensborg!].

³⁰ Hoff and Christensen, “Filminstituttet ansætter kontroversiel instruktør.”

³¹ Nicotra, “The Seduction of Samuel Butler,” 49–52.

³² Nicotra, 39.

³³ Nicotra, 45.

³⁴ Wilson, “Immersion Journalism and the Second-Order Narrative,” 345.

³⁵ Hermann, “The Temporal Tipping Point,” 493. See Kristensen, “The Kinship of Literary Journalism and Cultural Journalism,” 10–31.

³⁶ Hermann, “The Temporal Tipping Point,” 493.

³⁷ Hermann, 500.

³⁸ Kristensen, “Churnalism, Cultural (Inter)Mediation and Sourcing in Cultural Journalism,” 2168–86.

³⁹ Conover, *Immersion: A Writer’s Guide*, 109–110.

⁴⁰ Conover, 110.

⁴¹ Conover, 108.

⁴² Kramer, “Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists,” 28 (emphasis in original).

⁴³ Boylan, quoted in Sims, preface to *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ix.

⁴⁴ Vincent, *Self-Made Man: My Year Disguised as a Man*; Vincent, *Voluntary Madness: My Year Lost and Found in the Loony Bin*.

⁴⁵ Hunter S. Thompson and other journalists in the Gonzo tradition have specifically developed responses to drugs both stylistically and as component of immersion. See, for instance, Alexander, “‘The Right Kind of Eyes,’ ” 19–36; van Belle, “‘Among Madmen and Crooks,’ ” 123–42.

⁴⁶ Fredensborg, “Frygt og lede i Avedøre og omegn,” 51. Italics added here to indicate the English phrases that appeared in the original Danish text.

⁴⁷ Fredensborg, 51, referring to Vivien Spitz’s 2005 *Doctors from Hell: The Horrific Account of Nazi Experiments on Humans* (Boulder, CO: Sentient Publications).

⁴⁸ Fredensborg, “Frygt og lede i Avedøre og omegn” [Fear and loathing in and around Avedøre].

⁴⁹ For a development of this argument in a different case study, see Isager, “Loathing in Southern Denmark,” 111–22.

⁵⁰ Phillips, “From Major to Minor,” 389–91.

⁵¹ Wilson, “Immersion Journalism and the Second-Order Narrative,” 349.

⁵² Fredensborg, “Frygt og lede i Avedøre og omegn” [Fear and loathing in and around Avedøre], 54 (emphasis in the original).

⁵³ Fredensborg, 51–56.

⁵⁴ Phillips, “From Major to Minor,” 389–91.

⁵⁵ Fredensborg, “Frygt og lede i Avedøre og omegn” [Fear and loathing in and around Avedøre], 56.

⁵⁶ Kristensen, “The Kinship of Literary Journalism and Cultural Journalism,” 10–31.

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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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