

# Persona-driven journalism at Radio24syv

## Ditte Okman's affective labor of performing an unashamed persona

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### Abstract

The article proposes an analytical approach to the study of persona-driven journalism. Drawing on concepts from performance studies, the article builds an analytical framework for engaging with empirical material where the performance of the journalist's persona becomes a central part of the journalistic product. The analysis of journalist and radio host Ditte Okman identifies a journalism practice that draws on bodily expressivity, outspoken attitudes and the creation of a socializing media space. This practice is interpreted as affective labor of authenticity and sincerity which leads to the performance of an unashamed persona. The main contribution of the article is to conceptualize a methodological approach to the study of persona-driven journalism practices by drawing on ideas and concepts from performance studies, thus adding methodologically to journalism studies.

### KEYWORDS

Persona-driven journalism, Radio24syv, Ditte Okman, affective labor, performance analysis, performativity, radio

## Introduction

The journalist sneezes into the microphone on a radio show aired live. The journalist makes snoring sounds when the guest in the radio studio bores her. The journalist openly shares private life details, creating a confessional radio space. What's going on? When the journalist becomes a central part of the story, it makes sense to analyze such journalism as an example of persona-driven journalism (Moestrup, 2019) In this article, an analytical approach to the study of persona-driven journalism will be proposed, and it will be demonstrated how the approach can enrich our understanding of an important aspect of contemporary journalism, namely the function of the journalist inside the story and inside the mediated product.

In what follows, the radio station Radio24syv and the individual case, Ditte Okman, will be introduced, followed by a section on the theoretical foundations of the study. This section will draw on the work of scholars from performance studies and persona studies. The methodological section that follows will introduce the general approach of performance analysis as well as propose an analytical model that can be used to study journalistic practices rooted in the performance of a journalist's personality. In the analytical section, an analysis of Ditte Okman's practice will be conducted, after which a conclusion will sum up the findings and point to the general usefulness of applying performance analysis when studying persona-driven journalism.

## Introduction to the case

The Danish radio station Radio24syv began as a political project and was shut down again by the politicians in 2019. Prior to its launch in November 2011, talk radio in Denmark was mainly dominated by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail the background and political negotiations that lay the groundwork for the birth of Radio24syv. However, briefly put, the station was part of the media bill of 2011-2014, where politicians agreed to make a call for applicants who were willing to establish a public service radio station that lived up to a number of specifications articulated in the media bill. An example of the specifications was this characterization of the upcoming radio station:

With the intention of creating a broadly appealing and innovative news and talk radio station (...) and a particular requirement of having distinctive radio hosts.

(The Ministry of Culture, 2010b, own translation from Danish)

In the end, only one applicant applied for the radio frequency, and this was a consortium consisting of the media house Berlingske and the company PeopleGroup. Radio24syv began airing on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2011. Their strategy was in line with the mandate in the media bill and was expressed in three overall keywords: the management wanted to apply an *experimental* approach to radio, create radio programs that gave listeners an *experience*, and allow *new kinds of voices* to enter the radio frequencies. Hiring several hosts with no prior radio experience was an attempt to carry out the latter ambition. These people instead had cultural capital from other spheres of the Danish media and culture landscape and included satirist and actor Frederik Cilius Jørgensen (who performed on-air as the fictional character Kirsten Birgit Schiøtz Kretz Hørsholm), the convicted financier Klaus Riskær, novelist Martin Kongstad (Moestrup, 2022) and Ditte Okman, whose practice will be analysed in more detail in this paper. The station also hired a number of high-profile journalists as freelancers from other media institutions such as Poul Pilgaard Johnsen from Weekendavisen, a national weekly newspaper. Pilgaard Johnsen used the radio station as a place to engage in more personal, emotional, and subjectivity-driven journalism (Moestrup, 2021).

The station was subdivided into two overall segments: the news division and the programme division. In charge of programmes, two well-known and experienced Danish media personalities were hired, namely Mikael Bertelsen and Mads Brügger. Both were known for their experimental approaches to journalism (see for instance Reestorff, 2013; Isager, 2008; Bruun, 2012). Bertelsen was mainly known for his work in television shows such as “De Uaktuelle Nyheder” (“The Out-of-Date News”, 2002) and “Den 11. time” (“The Eleventh Hour”, 2007-2008), while Brügger, at the time of the launch, was mainly known for his work in print journalism, where he often adopted a gonzo-style approach in magazines including *Virus* and *Euroman* – a style he also used in experimental documentary film such as “The Ambassador” (2011) and “Cold Case Hammarskjöld” (2019). The radio station has been chosen as a case because it functioned as a disruption to the existing radio/media landscape. Firstly, it was a political project aimed at doing things differently and, secondly, the journalism practices carried out at the station ended up being somewhat different than the existing norms of radio journalism.

Ditte Okman is selected as a case because she is one of the norm-breaking journalists that personify the radio station’s strategy, and because she hosted one of the most popular and most discussed

shows on the station, namely the weekly gossip show “Det vi taler om” (“What we talk about”). In the show, the host and 3-4 different panelists share the latest gossip and rumors about the rich and famous but also include gossip from less exposed industries, such as the business and financial world.

The case sampling done for the research presented in the article is composed of 32 episodes of the show “What we talk about”<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of the present article is not to carry out a comprehensive analysis of Okman’s career but rather to investigate the journalistic products where Okman’s persona performance seems most distinct and explicit. This has guided the sampling of the empirical material. The choice of using Radio24 as the source of empirical material with Okman is due to the strategic nature of the radio station as well as a way of demarcating the range of the empirical material to fit the current article. It would be possible to extend the analysis to Okman’s other media platforms, including social media, and this would likely expand the insights into Okman’s persona performances but would also be too extensive for the scope of the present article. For a more extensive analysis of Okman’s media persona, I suggest consulting Moestrup (2019).

Before turning to the theoretical framework, it makes sense to briefly clarify how the work of Okman can be read as journalism. In the present research, I adopt the approach developed by scholars engaged in the blurring boundaries discussion on what journalism is and could be. The overall assumption is that there is no static definition of journalism but rather underline the ongoing fluidity and renegotiation of what counts as journalism:

Journalism is not a solid, stable thing to point to, but a constantly shifting denotation applied differently depending on context. Whatever is distinct about journalism must be continuously constructed.

(Carlson and Lewis, 2015: 2)

The quote points to the necessity of continuously researching how journalism is performed and unpack the ongoing definitional struggle which has modernists on one side and postmodernist on the other. The modernists emphasize the democratic functions of journalism (Peters & Broersma, 2017) and label journalists a watchdogs, gatekeepers and the fourth estate (Street, 2001; Deuze, 2005) while the postmodernists criticize the modernist position and especially the insistence on the special relationship between journalism and democracy (Nerone, 2013; Josephi, 2013). In the postmodern camp, we find for instance Barbie Zelizer who insist on journalism also being a ritual, a performance, a narrative and an interpretive community (Zelizer, 2004, 2017).

In the case of Okman's show, I adopt the postmodernist view to understand the show as part of the journalistic landscape. It is aired on a radio channel among other more traditional journalistic formats, and it includes journalistic approaches such as interviews with people related to publicly important events. Furthermore, the activity of gossiping, which can be claimed to be the fundamental activity of the show, aligns the show with the category of talk radio, which means it is based almost exclusively on human talk and often rooted in opinionated talk verbalized by strong personalities (Faine, 2005; Wolfenden, 2012).

### **Theoretical foundation**

The two overall guiding theoretical concepts in the analysis below, *persona* and *performance*, will now be introduced and discussed.

The use of the term "persona" to describe a certain type of journalism is inspired by the works of David Marshall. Marshall, who pioneered the field of "persona studies", differentiates *persona* from the notion of *person* in a communicative setting. *Person* implies internal dimensions of the self, whereas *persona* is the expression of these dimensions as "the external representations and manifestations of the self" (Marshall, 2016, p. 1427). As such, *persona* is a kind of show casing, a display or performance of sorts.

Marshall claims that one of the most significant cultural traits of contemporary society is the predominance and use of *personas*, or in Marshall's words, an increase in the "publicisation of the self" (Marshall 2013, p. 154). Marshall argues that *persona* studies should be seen as a "wider study of how self and public intersect" (Marshall 2013, p. 153). Engaging with the term as a variation of strategic communication underlines the close correspondence between *persona* and *performance*. Marshall argues that the manifestations of *personas* take place in a performative space as "a resignification of identity that relies on what is playable and performable in a public world" (Marshall and Barbour 2015, p. 5).

Developing the idea of *persona* as an analytical concept, the article subscribes to the work done by Philip Auslander. According to Auslander, the *persona* can be viewed as a contextualized self-construct made suitable for the specific performance situation and not necessarily similar to the person's self-presentation in other contexts. This last point is important in order to understand the distinction between the *persona* concept and the many instances of self-presentation. The *persona* is an actual tool that is used to "serve the needs of the performance" (Auslander, 2015). This context-based

reading of persona is fruitful when it comes to persona-driven journalism because journalism is always contextualized and framed by the institutions, genres and media platforms in which the journalist persona operates.

By reading personas through the lens of performance, Marshall underlines how agency is articulated in an ongoing negotiation of – or even power struggle over – what a journalist can be as also noted by the blurring boundaries discussions outlined above. This is highly inspired by the work done by Judith Butler. Drawing on notions concerning performative capabilities in language, Butler (1988, 1990, 1993) developed a theory of gender performativity, interpreting gender as something constructed, activated and maintained through reproduced linguistic and social practices and performances. Paraphrasing the famous words of Simone de Beauvoir, “one is not born, but rather, *becomes* a woman” (de Beauvoir, 1949, 2009), Butler suggests that there is no natural definition of gender. Gender is performed by ways of dressing, standing, walking, talking, acting, and learning, which in turn implies that a term such as gender can always be countered, altered, opposed, resisted or verified, acknowledged and consented. By labeling one of her most important books *Gender Trouble*, Butler underlines her intent to question the assumption that gender is somehow fixed or ‘natural’. Her aim is to conceptualize gender as an ongoing definitional struggle.

This understanding of performatives can be fruitfully applied to the continuous negotiation of what journalism is. This can be done by drawing on the notion of performative acts, understood as “the stylized repetition of acts through time” (Butler, 1988, p. 520), and acknowledging these acts as important elements in any kind of definitional struggle or negotiation about the characteristics of a field. The staging, manifestation and continuous use of the journalist persona can essentially be seen as an ongoing acting out of stylized repetition of acts across time and media.

The conceptualization of the term performance used in this article can be understood as ‘restored behaviour’ (Schechner, 2013). Schechner argues that “restored behaviour is living behaviour treated as a film director treats strips of film”, and it is “me behaving as if I am someone else” (Schechner, 1985, p. 36). This is not to be understood as a personality someone takes on, but rather as if there were “multiple me’s in each person” (Ibid: p. 36), which makes this approach suitable for a study looking at the idea of a persona created from a multitude of doings. Furthermore, Schechner points to an important notion that will form a guiding principle in the analytical parts of this article: “focus is on the ‘repertory’, namely what people do in the activity of their doing it” (Schechner, 2013, p. 1). In

other words, the analysis is interested in the doing of creating and using a persona and examines the practices where this happens.

The notion of repertoire comes from the work of performance studies scholar Diana Taylor, whose differentiation between *repertoire* and *archive* is useful when unpacking the persona performances. 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)” (Taylor, 2003, p. 19). The repertoire is whatever is being done to outline, establish, manifest and use a persona, for instance, a particular way of interviewing, a certain writing style, personal appearances, disclosing details from one’s private life, certain bodily behavior etc., while the archive is the container in which these repertoires are collected and gathered into a somewhat solid shape. In the context of journalism, this would translate into a mediated product such as an article in a printed newspaper, a radio show or a social media update. In the persona context, the archive will consist of a repertoire of doings that underlines the persona of the doer.

Drawing on the idea of performance in the analysis of the persona is undertaken for three reasons. First of all, performance studies is interested in elements that are in a state of flux, connecting well to Marshall’s notion that analyzing persona requires a broad spectrum of possible doings (Marshall, 2013). Secondly, the explorative nature of performance studies demands attending “to all modalities in play” (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1999, p. 12). Thirdly, by framing the analytical focus on performance, it becomes central not only to investigate the material but the actual doing of the material, how the material is performed.

While investigating the doing of the material, it becomes clear that the doing itself can be treated as a way to understand what has been labelled as affective labor (Hardt, 1999: 96). The term has been used to critically engage with modes of production (Hardt & Negri, 2004) as well as digital capitalism (Betancourt, 2010). In the present context, the term will however be applied to encapsulate and discuss the ways Okman performs her persona as an example of affective labor.

### **Methodological proposal: four useful concepts**

In order to engage with the doings of our case, Ditte Okman, a performance analysis will be undertaken by activating four different concepts, each of which will shed light on the different aspects of persona manifestation. Performance analysis is known as an

interpretive, eclectic approach rooted entirely in the spectator's point of view, meaning that engaging with the material in an explorative and abductive manner creates the conceptualization of the analytical approach (Counsel and Wolf, 2001). The abductive exploration of the material leads to an analytical conceptualization consisting of four concepts. All four concepts have been chosen because they enable us to grasp the multitude of doings that are in use in the material. The concepts will be introduced briefly below. For a more extensive discussion of the concepts and a further developed analytical model, see Moestrup (2019).

The first concept is *theatricality*. Theatricality addresses a quality that relates to the world of theatre (Davis & Postlewait, 2003, p. 2). According to Davis and Postlewait, theatricality is what happens when material rooted in the material reality enters a relationship with the imaginary. Theatricalization often calls attention to whatever is being theatricalized (Kirby, 1965). As Féral points out, theatricality is by no means limited to theatre but should rather be understood as a possible manifestation that can come from both the doer and the spectator. Féral does not locate theatricality inside an object, a space or an agent but rather sees theatricality as "the result of a perceptual dynamics linking the onlooker with someone or something that is looked at" (Féral, 2002, p. 105). Theatricality is a useful concept when dealing with elements that are by nature or norm not theatrical, but which can be allocated the attribute of theatricality by the doer.

When looking for theatricality in the material, it is useful to ask questions such as: How does this seem dramatic to us? What has been done to make it look and feel like theatre?

The second concept can be labeled *body*. The performance analysis of persona aims to comprehend a multitude of doings including bodily doings. Here, a distinction between bodily exteriority and bodily interiority based on the work of David Graver is useful (Graver, 1997). The notion of bodily exteriority covers elements such as appearance, ways of dressing, gesture, manner, body language, posture and verbal utterances, while bodily interiority should include factors such as emotion, attitude, opinion, thought, belief and life approach. A bodily interior element such as an emotion can find an exterior expression in a gesture or verbal utterance. Showcasing a public self by, for instance, dressing up in the same kind of attire again and again can underline a certain life approach. The word interiority should not be understood as a kind of core essence or natural fervor. Similarly, exteriority should not be understood as necessarily more 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 the empirical material, it is useful to ask questions such as: How is the body used in the material? Which elements and practices make the body of the agent appear to us?

Thirdly, the concept of *voice* should not be understood literally as the human voice of the agent, since this way of addressing voice is part of the body concept as outlined above. Voice addresses what could be called the position and the point of view of the agent. Drawing on the work done by Auslander (2015) and Graver's outline of the actor's seven kinds of presence (Graver, 1997), the concept of voice addresses the multitude of possible first-person gestalts. This could for instance be a confessional "I" sharing details from her private life or a character-like mobilization that functions within a given framework and gestalts itself in specific ways to drive forward a narrative. It could also be a conversational voice manifesting itself through verbal interaction with other voices, even if these are fictional. By applying this concept of voice, it is possible to unpack the different ways in which personas can take on various appearances/ways of being present according to factors such as theme, genre, platform and media. This way of approaching voice also equips the analyst to better comprehend the use of alter ego and the general playful adaptation of identity that some personas seem to use.

When looking for voice in the empirical material, it is useful to ask questions such as: What kind of voice is being used? From which position does the agent speak? What is the function of this voice in the performance?

Finally, the concept of *spatiality* is useful in order to examine how personas use space and how spaces are part of persona manifestation. In his pivotal work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau outlines his theory of space and the distinction between place and space (de Certeau, 1984). Place is often a physical location understood as an ordered structure, while space is created by the practices of living; in other words, space is practiced place. Drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau, it makes sense to differentiate between what could be labeled 'the media space' and 'the life space' and investigate the relations between space and place. The two spheres overlap and intertwine, as the life space, a geographic location such as a specific house or a street, is both a space that the persona's body can use as a performative scene/stage, as well as a space located inside a media space, such as the frame of a print article or the media space of a radio show. It can be argued that what is termed 'the life space' above is similar to de Certeau's notion of place. At the same time, it is important to remember that the life space of the journalist persona is not just the physical location but a used location that allows for the repertoire (Taylor) to occur, and later (or

simultaneously, if it is a live broadcast) these life space doings form a media space, which seems 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 material? How does the agent use this space? What is the relationship between life space and media space like?

As will be demonstrated in the analysis, the four concepts overlap somewhat and work best analytically when applied together. In the following analysis, the four concepts will be used to examine how the persona of Ditte Okman becomes manifested and activated across her work.

## **Analysis of Ditte Okman and her journalistic practice**

The case to be analyzed is the practice of journalist Ditte Okman. At Radio24syv, Okman hosted the weekly gossip show "Det, vi taler om" ("What we talk about"). In the show, Okman discusses some of the week's biggest gossip stories with a panel of more or less regular participants, mostly other gossip reporters as well. The show was among the most popular shows at Radio24syv, and after the station shut down in 2019, the show continued its existence on the website of the tabloid newspaper BT. Below, it will be demonstrated how Okman's journalism practice takes on a transgressive nature in its performance of bodily expressivity and affect, and how her performance can be read as a persona-driven approach to doing journalism.

### **Bodily expressivity**

Radio is an invisible media (Crisell, 1994, p. 3). We do not see the bodies in a radio show; we only hear them. But despite this media materiality, Okman's practice is still bodily expressive and becomes a fundamental component in creating the media space of the radio show. For instance, Okman often makes snoring noises if the panelists start to bore her. This happens especially if they speak for too long or say something too commonsense or politically correct. Okman wants the panelists to be honest, direct, devoid of filter and also, it seems, provocative. The snoring sounds are a way of cutting off a panelist and clearly signal for them to either stop talking or change the way they talk and/or what they are talking about. The snoring helps to move the show along and secure a steady pace in the discussions. It filters out information and descriptions in favor of opinions and emotions. Hence, Okman uses snoring sounds as a

way of guiding the voices of the other panelists, and points to her own voice and the position from which it is speaking. The snoring also works as a signal to the audience. It is a way for Okman not only to display her persona (being a no-bullshit kind of character) but also to signal that she is in control and considers the audience's expectations.

Furthermore, Okman is very explicit when it comes to other bodily sounds as well. She sneezes, laughs and coughs without any attempt to tone down these bodily (re-)actions. On the contrary, she almost exaggerates them in a theatrical manner, thus performing an act of 'the showing of the doing' (Schechner, 2013, p. 28). When a 'showing of the doing' is carried out, whatever is being done is pointed out and gets special attention in the context. By exaggerating bodily sounds, Okman emphasizes them and makes them stand out. This is furthermore reiterated because 'the showing of the doing' is a recurring element in the show. This way of behaving on-air elucidates Okman's persona and makes it assume a direct and straightforward form, communicating honesty and authenticity, as well as a provocative and rather reckless attitude. A radio host would normally avoid these bodily sounds, but this is certainly not the case in Okman's practice, which more or less adopts the opposite approach.

### **Voice and language use**

Bodily behavior is accompanied by Okman's distinctive voice and way of using language which is interpreted as part of the body concept introduced above. According to Lawaetz (2014), it makes sense to differentiate between a semantic and a performative level when it comes to the study of the human voice. The semantic level deals with what is being said, while the performative level deals with how something is being said, including tonality, tempo, modulation and voice characteristics (Lawaetz, 2014, p. 9-10 and p. 177-192). Okman's voice is characterized by its rather hoarse quality. This can give the impression that Okman has more or less just woken up and gone from bed to radio studio, thus underlining the somewhat intimate elements in her persona elucidation. Sometimes the voice seems affectionate while at other times it is drawling, adding an additional layer of intimate and personal connotations (Van Leeuwen, 1999). The tone of the voice is accentuated by the way Okman uses language on the radio show. Often, she uses everyday language that seems direct, to the point and unscripted. The phrases seem to "come from the heart" and the mundane language use is accentuated by profound use of swearing and obscene language. Okman can be confrontational in her language use, both towards the

panelists and towards those who are part of the gossip stories she covers. However, the confrontational element is almost always supplemented with a somewhat affectionate and/or humorous element. An example of this can be found in the episode aired on August 31, 2018. Okman introduces the contents of the show and reveals that a specific story will be outlined by one of panelists. Instead of saying “outline”, Okman uses the anglicism “fill us in” (in Danish “fylde os ind”, but it came out as “fill us out” (in Danish “fyldte os ud”), which can be perceived as sexually connotative in Danish. Everyone in the studio starts cheering and laughing, prompting Okman to exclaim, “Oh, my, you people are all so horny!”. A few sentences later, Okman once again alludes to sexuality and body by introducing the only male panelist in the episode with the words: “it is nice to have a little penis on the show”. He interrupts her and says, “a little?” to which Okman replies, “I mean, a huge penis, of course” (“What we talk about”, episode aired August 31, 2018, timecode 00:00 - 02:20).

The semantic level is characterized by a preoccupation with bodily behaviors. These bodily expressivities can come from Okman herself or be related to either the panelists or the topics being discussed. Okman, for instance, introduces an episode of the show by saying, “This is going to be a great show. I need to pee. Which is a good sign” (“What We Talk About”, episode aired August 10th, 2018, 03:10). In this example, Okman points to her own body and thus her presence in the show, not just as a voice, which is naturally the most dominant sound element in talk radio, but also as a body. Okman seems to say: I am here because I have a bodily sensation, and I share this with my listeners to signal that I am here. It is a way of sharing an intimate detail, which some might find shameful, but it is also a way of leveling with the listener and producing a mood that is mundane, homely and unashamed. In the following episode, when a panelist briefly mentions that he recently had an ear operation, Okman immediately seizes the opportunity to get him to disclose as many details as possible, stressing “the grosser, the better” (“What We Talk About”, episode aired August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018, 03:28). Once again, the bodily element presents itself both as an attitude and a recurring element content-wise. In this case, it almost takes the form of a shared life experience that brings the panelists closer to each other and the audience. They dare to share, and in doing so, they materialize their personas to the audience.

Another recurring topic among the panelists is their sexuality. It is often stated (for instance, in the episode aired August 17, 2018) that several of the male panelists are gay. The focus on intimate and at times taboo-laden topics allows the listeners to become familiar with the panelists, but it is also a way of emphasizing that the voices

we hear on-air come from bodily beings. In addition to panelists alluding to their sexuality, there is also recurring mention of who the panelists and Okman would like to have sex with, as well as explicit mention of the panelists' genitals.

### **To gossip**

Referring to the panelists' genitals is a way of emphasizing the bodily focus that seems to pervade the show. This is also the case when the host and panelists discuss current gossip topics, making direct reference to the people involved, which is a common characteristic of gossip and celebrity journalism. Bergmann (1993) defines gossip as informal, private communication between two or more parties about a third, absent party's private affairs, often with a focus on embarrassing or scandalous behavior (Bergmann, 1993). This people-focused coverage allows for a preoccupation with bodily behaviors, bodily appearance and bodily mishaps of the people being covered. Sexuality, which is a recurrent theme, as already indicated, is also an archetypal gossip theme (e.g., Jerslev, 2010). Furthermore, research in celebrity journalism has demonstrated how focus is often on the private lives of celebrities (Turner, 2004, 2013), making gossip an often integrated element in the reporting on celebrities. Okman's show is to some extent an example of celebrity journalism as its primary topics relate to national or international celebrities. However, the show also gossips about topics and people who do not belong to the traditional celebrity sphere, which is mainly rooted in the entertainment industries. Thus, the show is primarily a gossip show and only secondarily a celebrity journalism show.

The media materialities of radio, and particularly talk radio, naturally prescribe that the human voice is the main component of the show. "What we talk about" also exhibits a connection between the main materiality of the show, i.e., human talk, and the topic and focus of the show, i.e., gossip and rumour. Gossiping is a particular speech genre and essentially a human way to talk. In other words, "What we talk about" is a show about gossip, but it is also a show where the host and panelists do just that: gossip. Drawing on Austin (1962), Jerslev (2010) has argued that gossip is a performative speech act because it produces what it says. It is not possible to talk about gossip without creating gossip (Jerslev, 2010, p. 25). Talk radio necessitates that the talk being done is interesting, provocative and/or resonates with the listeners (Faine, 2005). Broadcast talk always needs to be accessible to the intended audience (Scannell, 1991). In the case of Okman and "What we talk about", this is done by emphasizing the bodily expressivity of the host and the panelists, as well as providing a bodily focus when dealing with the gossiping on the

show. Bodily expressivity is used to create accessibility for the intended audience. It resonates with gossip show listeners who will likely expect a direct or confrontational approach. This could be done in a number of ways, but Okman's persistence on a bodily approach is a way of elucidating her persona and making her gossip approach stand out. This is further emphasized by her recurring focus on bodily elements in the topics being covered. The bodily becomes a trademark for Okman.

### **Creating a socialising space**

Okman's bodily expressivity, including her informal use of language, is one element in the transformation of the space in which the show takes place, but the socializing space is also partly created by Okman's way of using the panelists. The show was recorded in an ordinary radio studio at Radio24syv in Copenhagen, but by being bodily present and adopting an informal attitude when speaking and addressing the panelists, Okman transforms the ordinariness of the radio studio and creates an atmosphere and a space that resemble an informal dinner party or perhaps even a Christmas party with colleagues. This mood is further accentuated by the show being broadcast live on Friday afternoons just as people are moving from the sphere of their everyday working lives to the typically more casual weekend life.

The atmosphere in the studio is mostly friendly and joyful, but sometimes also characterized by a sarcastic or somewhat confrontational tone. The studio generally presents itself as a socializing space, though. The host and panelists seem to enjoy each other's company and do not mind addressing private issues or gossip related to themselves, as discussed above.

Okman often refers to the panelists as "my second family", thus emphasizing being in joyful and important company. The feeling of joyful company in a socializing space is also manifested by Okman inviting the same panelists again and again. Okman usually has three individuals on the panel, but she often selects between the same five-six individuals. These individuals include a theatre critic, a gossip reporter, a communications advisor and a chief-editor at a gossip magazine, which means that the panelists usually belong to the sphere of gossip and celebrity journalism.

Another socializing and community-building aspect between the host and panelists is evident when the show contacts a person outside the studio. This was done in the episode aired August 10, 2018, where one of the topics is a money-laundering scandal at Danske Bank (Denmark's largest bank). Okman chooses to focus on the whistleblower who leaked the information to the public. During the

show, Okman calls a lawyer who specializes in employment legislation and interviews him about the whistleblower's contractual obligations. This example illustrates that the show is not only about tabloid gossip and celebrity journalism but also deals with political issues, which seems a bit uncommon on a gossip show. However, when the topic is political, there is often a focus on a specific person or the relationship between different individuals, and political topics are often treated with the same straightforward attitude as other topics. The person-oriented approach is also used for the money-laundering topic, where the sole focus is on the whistleblower. The socializing aspect is palpable as the interview progresses. The panelists all participate in the interview and take turns asking questions and following up on each other's questions and comments. This collective form of interviewing often takes place when the show uses an external source. This repertoire of collective interviewing becomes a defining element in the show (the "archive" in Taylor's terminology). The panel and host almost seem to merge and act as one live organism with the same goal and approach in mind, creating both a conversational and a collective voice while maintaining the persona of Okman as the central character.

### **Conclusion: the unashamed persona as a piece of effective labor**

Based on the analysis above, we can now claim that the journalism practice of Okman can be described as using an 'unashamed persona'. According to the Oxford Dictionary, feeling shameful means being preoccupied with feelings of humiliation, especially when the humiliation is the result of foolish, inappropriate or wrong behavior. To feel un-shameful means the opposite, i.e., paying very little attention to feelings of humiliation and regret as a result of wrong behavior. By performing an un-ashamed persona, Okman presents a persona that does not care much about what other people think. Or rather, she probably wants people to think of her as an outspoken, straightforward and perhaps sincere personality who can deliver gossip journalism in an entertaining way.

By putting this label on the attitude, we emphasize that Okman is performing against a norm that could be called the shameful. Following Butler, Okman's bodily expressivity and lucid behavior, which in Butler's terminology would be Okman's "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988, p. 520), work as a way of negotiating what is deemed shameful in media and in society in general. One argument could be that Okman expands the space of what is possible as a radio host by performing her persona. However, another argument could be that Okman is merely pointing to the existence of the

shameful as a category by attempting to transgress it. Her attitude continuously produces and reactivates the shameful in her audience. Viewed this way, Okman has no intention of breaking down norms or boundaries when it comes to acceptable behavior. On the contrary, it is in her interest that her performance is continuously read as unashamed and that the category of the shameful is maintained.

Contemporary affect theory can be used to discuss the outcomes of Okman's persona performance. According to affect theory, emotions are understood as creating relations between us rather than situated inside us. Affect theory is less interested in what emotions *are* and more interested in what they *do*. Sara Ahmed's work suggests that emotions are "the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and world" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 118). Ahmed proposes viewing emotions not as residing within the individual as psychological dispositions; instead, "we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, between the individual and the collective" (Ibid: p. 119).

Conceptualizing emotions in this way means reading emotions as relational and performative. Okman's persona practices, rooted in bodily expressivity, outspoken attitudes and the use of a collective, socializing space, support the notion that affect is a useful term when addressing how a body situates itself among other bodies. Emotions bind subjects together (Ahmed, 2004, p. 119), and this is what happens when Okman creates her socializing space in the studio. By using her affective strategies, Okman rubs off on the panelists in the studio as well as the listeners. This causes her persona to become elucidated, because the act of elucidating and using a persona is also a way of surfacing one body among other bodies by making one distinct compared to others. However, when Okman creates her socializing space, she is also creating a space that only includes some parts of the public while excluding others. This could be said to be a basic characteristic of community-building in general; however, in the case of Okman and her affective persona's performance strategies, the exclusion of some individuals is perhaps more profound. Doing persona-driven journalism brings the journalist to the front. Some members of the public will respond to this staging of self positively while others will feel negative about it. In the case of Okman, where the persona-driven practices are rooted in the performance of the unashamed and a clearly affective approach, the potential audience subscribing to this approach is likely to be smaller than the audience that prefers a more neutral approach.



By having a persona-driven approach that is rooted in the use of affect, Okman carries out what Hardt has termed “affective labor”. Hardt defines affective labor as labor that “is immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible: a feeling of ease, wellbeing, satisfaction, excitement, passion – even a sense of connectedness or community” (Hardt, 1999, p. 96). These characteristics resonate well with Okman’s affective persona performance. It is a kind of labor that produces a persona by calling for affective responses in the audience, underlining the notion of affect as relational. Okman’s unashamed persona performance, including the bodily expressive, the lucid behavior and the socializing aspect, points to the need for affective reactions. She performs these reactions herself. She expects it from the panelists. And all her media texts analyzed above are clearly constructed to trigger affective responses from her audience.

Okman’s affective strategies create a persona that will provoke and repel some people. These strategies might seem for some members of the audience to add to the psychological depth of her persona. Others might see it as merely a carnivalistic show. No matter how the outcome is interpreted, the affective strategies include Okman’s staging herself as a gossip with outspoken behavior. By using herself bodily and emotionally, she is certainly neither a passive bystander nor a neutral sender of information but rather a creator of tension, conflict, discussion, laughter and outspokenness, all of which resonate with affective labor.

The result of Okman’s affective labor and the staging of herself is a variation of journalism that is *played out* as authentic and sincere but not necessarily *is* authentic and sincere. Addressing the notion of sincerity, Scannell has pointed to the performative paradox (Scannell, 1996, p. 58). Scannell builds on Goffman’s understanding of performance, arguing that an individual must perform sincerity according to criteria that reflect specific social settings. However, a person’s appearance and behavior will not be deemed sincere if they are perceived by others as a performance, hence the paradox. In the case of Okman, it is not possible to conclude whether or not the performance of the sincere and the authentic is convincing to an audience or if it is interpreted as put-on and feigned. The ambition here is not to conclude whether or not Okman avoids Scannell’s performative paradox but merely to point to Okman’s performative practices. Additionally, in the case of Okman, perhaps Scannell’s performative paradox is not even relevant. Perhaps Okman’s audience is fully aware that the performance of sincerity and authenticity is merely put-on and feigned, and this may be the reason they follow and enjoy her work. They enjoy the performance in itself. In other words, when employing persona-driven performance as the

approach to do journalism, it is not necessarily a matter of true sincerity vs. put-on sincerity but whether or not the performance works.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The show stopped airing when Radio24syv closed down. However, after having been reborn on various platforms, the show is currently (April 2023) being aired on the website of the Danish tabloid newspaper B.T. and can be accessed here: <https://www.bt.dk/detvitalerom>

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