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ABSTRACT

Addressing the question of the usefulness of the concept of New Journalism, this study also seeks to define the essential characteristics of New Journalism and to determine whether, in fact, there is such a thing. The first chapter reviews the critical literature of New Journalism, sorting out some of the many uses of the term, then narrowing the focus to look at what some writers who call themselves (or are called) New Journalists say they do and at what others say they do. The second chapter proposes a definition of New Journalism, states it conceptually, and exemplifies it operationally. The third chapter considers some journalistic aspects of New Journalism and discusses the techniques--once the domain of fiction writers--which New Journalists have applied to news reporting. The fourth and final chapter presents some conclusions. (RB)

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JAMES E. MURPHY

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JAMES E. MURPHY

The New Journalism: A Critical Perspective

JAMES E. MURPHY is currently on an extended internship program with The Milwaukee Journal. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa this spring. Publication of this study, based on part of his doctoral dissertation, was supported by the University of Iowa School of Journalism.

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(Prior Publication)

Dedication

IN MEMORY of Malcolm S. MacLean, Jr. (1920-1974), teacher, colleague, friend and inspiration. Mal believed journlism a noble calling and strove constantly to bring fresh ideas to bear on the education of responsible newsmen. May journalism education someday catch up with him.

That would be the greatest tribute.

Introduction

Although discussion of phenomena labelled New Journalism abounds today in American literary and journalistic criticism, little clear-cut definition is in evidence. As one editor-critic has stated, "I find the term 'new journalism' more obscurant than 'new politics' and 'new morality.' "[1] Another wrote, "By 1970 few terms had wider currency and less uniformity of meaning than new journalism."[2]

The question thus arises whether New Journalism constitutes a useful concept at all. This study addresses itself to that question. It seeks the essential characteristics of New Journalism, if such there be, and whether, in fact, there *is* a New Journalism.

The first chapter reviews the critical literature of New Journalism, sorting out some of the many uses of the term, then narrowing the focus to look at what some writers who call themselves (or are called) New Journalists say they do and at what others say they do. The second chapter proposes a definition of New Journalism, states it conceptually and exemplifies it operationally. The third chapter considers some journalistic aspects of New Journalism. The fourth and final chapter presents some conclusions.

This study is distilled from the author's 1973 Iowa dissertation. A major section of the dissertation which applies principles developed here to the work of journalist writers from the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries will be presented elsewhere.

[1] John Siegenthaler, "A Crisis of Credibility," Kappa Tau Alpha speech—the Association for Education in Journalism Convention, Carbondale, Illinois, August, 1972.

[2] Everette E. Dennis, *The Magic Writing Machine—Student Probes of the New Journalism* (Eugene: University of Oregon Press, 1971), p. 1.

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The Critical Literature

VARIOUS TRENDS and tendencies throughout the history of American journalism have been labeled "new journalism." Park, for instance, in his "Natural History of the Newspaper," referred to the advent of the penny press in the 1830s as a "new journalism."[1] Likewise, the appearance of the "yellow press," papers such as Pulitzer's New York *World* in the 1880s, led journalists and historians to proclaim that a "New Journalism" had been created. Ault and Emery, for instance, said "Industrialization and urbanization changed the face of America during the latter half of the Nineteenth century, and its newspapers entered an era known as that of the 'New Journalism.' "[2] And more recently Hohenberg has called the interpretive reporting which developed after World War II a "new journalism which not only seeks to explain as well as to inform; it even dares to teach, to measure to evaluate."[3]

The term has enjoyed widespread popularity in very recent years, often with meanings bearing manifestly little or no connection with one another. Thus, a 1967 article by Heintz entitled "The New Journalism"[4] addressed itself exclusively to new approaches to journalism education in the high school. In 1972 a CBS executive expressed disapproval of the new journalism but later questioning revealed that for him new journalism was slipshod, poorly-researched, often opinion-laden work by some young broadcast reporters.[5]

[1] Robert Park, "The Natural History of the Newspaper," reprinted in Wilbur Schramm (ed.), *Mass Communications* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), p. 19.

[2] Phillip J. Ault and Edwin Emery, *Reporting the News* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1963), p. 11.

[3] John Hohenberg, *The Professional Journalist* (New York: Holt and Company, 1960), p. 322.

[4] Ann Christine Heintz, "The New Journalism," *Communication: Journalism Education Today*, Fall, 1967, pp. 2-4.

[5] Theodore Koop, retired CBS-TV executive, in a classroom discussion at the University of Iowa School of Journalism, October, 1972.

Most users of the term seem to refer to something more specific than vague new directions in journalism. MacDougall devoted the Preface of the Sixth Edition of his *Interpretative Reporting* to "The New Journalism" and cataloged many of the contemporary definitions: "Activist, advocacy, participatory, tell-it-as-you-see-it, sensitivity, investigative, saturation, humanistic, reformist and a few more."[6]

The Magic Writing Machine—Student Probes of the New Journalism, a collection edited and introduced by Dennis, came up with six categories, labelled new nonfiction (reportage), alternative journalism ("modern muckraking"), advocacy journalism, underground journalism and precision journalism.[7]

Johnson's *The New Journalism*[8] addressed itself to three phenomena: the underground press, the artists of nonfiction and changes in the established media.

New Journalism as Subjective Journalism

Pervading many of the specific interpretations of New Journalism is a posture of subjectivity. Subjectivism is thus a common element among many (though not all) of its definitions. In contrast to a conventional journalistic striving for an "objectivity" which has grown over the past century, subjective journalism allows for the writer's opinion, ideas or involvement to creep into his story.

Much of the critical literature concerns itself with a strain of subjectivism which may be called activism in news reporting. In 1970 Grant wrote disparagingly in *Columbia Journalism Review* of a "New Journalism of passion and advocacy"[9] and Hohenberg discussed "The Journalist As Missionary."[10] For Masterson in 1971, "The New Journalism"[11] provided a forum for discussion

[6] Curtis D. MacDougall, *Interpretative Reporting*, Sixth Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. v.

[7] Dennis, *op. cit.*, 1 ff. See also Everette E. Dennis and William L. Rivers, *The New Journalism in America* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1974).

[8] Michael Johnson, *The New Journalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1971).

[9] Gerald Grant, "The 'new journalism' we need," *Columbia Journalism Review*, Spring, 1970, pp. 12-17.

[10] Hohenberg, "The Journalist As Missionary," *Saturday Review*, February 14, 1970, pp. 76-7.

[11] Mark Masterson, "The New Journalism," *Quill*, February, 1971, pp. 15-17.

of journalistic and social activism. In another 1971 article under the same title Ridgeway[12] called the "counter-culture" magazines such as *The New Republic* and *Ramparts* and the American underground press New Journalism.

Another version of subjectivism in reporting is what is sometimes called participatory reporting. Stein, in *Media Power*, defines New Journalism as "A form of participatory reporting that evolved in parallel with participatory politics. . . ."[13]

New Journalism As Form and Technique

These interpretations of New Journalism view it as an attitude toward the practice of journalism. But a significant portion of the critical literature deals with form and technique. Critical comment dealing with New Journalism as a literary-journalistic genre (a distinct type or category of literary work grouped according to similar formal and technical characteristics[14]) treats it as the "new nonfiction," and it is this New Journalism that our study deals with directly. Its traits are extracted from the criticism written by those who claim to practice it and by others. Admittedly it is hard to isolate from a number of the more generic meanings.

The new nonfiction is sometimes taken for advocacy or subjective journalism. A 1972 article by Chase[15] defines New Journalism as a subjective journalism emphasizing "truth" over "facts" but uses major nonfiction stylists as its examples.

Early Development

How and when the term New Journalism began to refer to a new genre has not been clear. Tom Wolfe, a practitioner and principal advocate of the form, has said in at least two articles[16]

[12] James Ridgeway, "The New Journalism," *American Libraries*, June, 1971, pp. 585-92.

[13] Robert Stein, *Media Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), p. 165.

[14] The definition is based on that of William F. Thrall, *et al.*, *A Handbook to Literature* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 211.

[15] Dennis Chase, "From Lippmann to Irving to New Journalism," *Quill*, August, 1972, pp. 19-21.

[16] Tom Wolfe, "The Birth of 'The New Journalism'; Eyewitness Report by Tom Wolfe," *New York*, February 14, 1972, p. 45; and "Why They Aren't Writing the Great American Novel Anymore," *Esquire*, December, 1972, p. 152.

that he has no idea of where it began. Literary critic Seymour Krim recently shed light on the matter, however.

> I'm certain that [Pete] Hamill first used the expression. In about April of 1965 he called me at *Nugget* Magazine, where I was editorial director, and told me he wanted to write an article about the New Journalism. It was to be about the exciting things being done in the old reporting genre by Talese, Wolfe, and Breslin. He never wrote the piece, so far as I know, but I began using the expression in conversation and writing. It was picked up and stuck.[17]

But wherever and whenever the term arose, there is evidence of some literary experimentation in the early 1960s, as when Norman Mailer broke away from fiction to write "Superman Comes to the Supermarket."[18] A report of John F. Kennedy's nomination that year, the piece established a precedent which Mailer would later build on in his 1968 convention coverage *(Miami and the Siege of Chicago)* and in other nonfiction as well.

Wolfe wrote that his first acquaintance with a new style of reporting came in a 1962 *Esquire* article about Joe Louis by Gay Talese. " 'Joe Louis at Fifty' wasn't like a magazine article at all. It was like a short story. It began with a scene, an intimate confrontation between Louis and his third wife. . . ."[19] Wolfe said Talese was the first to apply fiction techniques to reporting.

Esquire claimed credit as the seedbed for these new techniques. *Esquire* editor Harold Hayes later wrote that "in the Sixties, events seemed to move too swiftly to allow the osmotic process of art to keep abreast, and when we found a good novelist we immediately sought to seduce him with the sweet mysteries of current events."[20] Soon others, notably *New York*, followed *Esquire's* lead, and the style eventually infected other magazines and then books.

Not surprisingly, much of the criticism favorable to this New

[17] The information was contained in a personal letter to the author, dated February 6, 1973.

[18] *Esquire*, November, 1960.

[19] Wolfe, "The New Journalism," *Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, September, 1970, p. 1. The article Wolfe referred to was actually titled "Joe Louis—the King As a Middle-Aged Man," *Esquire*, June, 1962.

[20] Harold Hayes (ed.), *Smiling Through the Apocalypse—Esquire's History of the Sixties* (New York: McCall, 1970), p. xxi.

Journalism has come from the writers themselves. Talese and Wolfe, in a panel discussion reported in *Writer's Digest* in early 1970, asserted that, although what they write may look like fiction, it is indeed reporting: "Fact reporting, leg work," Talese called it.[21]

Wolfe, in *Esquire* for December, 1972, hailed the replacement of the novel by the New Journalism as literature's "main event"[22] and detailed the points of similarity and contrast between the New Journalism and the novel. The four techniques of realism that he and the other New Journalists employ, he wrote, had been the sole province of novelists and other *literati*. They are scene-by-scene construction, full record of dialogue, third-person point of view and the manifold incidental details to round out a character (i.e., descriptive incidentals).[23] The result

> . . . is a form that is not merely *like a novel*. It consumes devices that happen to have originated with the novel and mixes them with every other device known to prose. And all the while, quite beyond matters of technique, it enjoys an advantage so obvious, so built-in, one almost forgets what a power it has: the simple fact that the reader knows *all this actually happened*. The disclaimers have been erased. The screen is gone. The writer is one step closer to the absolute involvement of the reader that Henry James and James Joyce dreamed of but never achieved.[24]

The essential difference between the new nonfiction and conventional reporting is, he said, that the basic unit of reporting was no longer the datum or piece of information but the scene. *Scene* is what underies "the sophisticated strategies of prose."[25]

Wolfe compared the rise of New Journalism in the 1960s to that of the Age of Realism in English and American fiction in the 1840s. Just as the realistic novel unseated the poet and man of letters as reigning literary figure in the Nineteenth century, so, he said, did the New Journalism usurp the novel.[26]

The first of this new breed of nonfiction writers to receive wide

[21] Hayes, Gay Talese and Wolfe, with Leonard W. Robinson, "The New Journalism." *Writer's Digest*, January, 1970, p. 34.

[22] *Esquire*, pp. 152-9; 272-80.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 272.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 278.

[26] *Ibid.*

notoriety was Truman Capote, whose 1965 best-seller, *In Cold Blood*, was a detailed narrative of the murder of a Kansas farm family. Capote culled material from some 6,000 pages of notes. The book brought its author instant celebrity.[27] Capote announced that he had created a new art form which he labelled the "nonfiction novel."

> I've always had the theory that reportage is the great unexplored art form. . . . I've had this theory that a factual piece of work could explore whole new dimensions in writing that would have a double effect fiction does not have—the very fact of its being true, every word of it true, would add a double contribution of strength and impact.[28]

Capote continued to stress that he was a literary artist, not a journalist, but critics hailed the book as a classic example of New Journalism.

Wolfe's *Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, whose introduction and title story have since emerged as a manifesto of sorts for the nonfiction genre, was published the same year. In his introduction[29] Wolfe wrote that he encountered trouble fashioning an *Esquire* article out of material on a custom car extravaganza in Los Angeles. Finding he could not do justice to the subject in magazine article format, he wrote a letter to his editor, Byron Dobell, which grew into a 49-page report detailing the custom car world, complete with scene construction, dialogue and flamboyant description. *Esquire* ran the letter, striking out "Dear Byron," and it became Wolfe's maiden effort as a New Journalist.

In "The Personal Voice and the Impersonal Eye," Dan Wakefield acclaimed the nonfiction of Capote and Wolfe as elevating reporting to the level of literature, terming that work and some

[27] See, for example, J. Howard, "Six Year Literary Vigil," *Life*, January 7, 1966; George Plimpton, "Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel," *New York Times Book Review*, January 16, 1966; G. Hicks, "Story of an American Tragedy," *Saturday Review*, January 22, 1966; Neil Compton, "Hyjinks' Journalism," *Commentary*, February, 1966.

[28] Truman Capote, as quoted by Roy Newquist, *Counterpoint* (New York: Rand McNally, 1964), p. 78.

[29] Wolfe, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), pp. ix-xii.

of Norman Mailer's nonfiction a journalistic breakthrough: reporting "charged with the energy of art."[30]

A review by Jack Newfield of Dick Schaap's *Turned On* saw the book as a good example of a budding tradition in American journalism which rejected many of the constraints of conventional reporting:

> This new genre defines itself by claiming many of the techniques that were once the unchallenged terrain of the novelist: tension, symbol, cadence, irony, prosody, imagination.[31]

A 1968 review of Wolfe's *The Pump House Gang* and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* said Wolfe and Mailer were applying "the imaginative resources of fiction"[32] to the world around them and termed such creative journalism "hystory" to connote their involvement in what they reported. Talese in 1970, in his Author's Note to *Fame and Obscurity*, a collection of his magazine pieces from the 1960s, wrote:

> The new journalism, though often reading like fiction, is not fiction. It is, or should be, as reliable as the most reliable reportage although it seeks a larger truth than is possible through the mere compilation of verifiable facts, the use of direct quotations, and adherence to the rigid organizational style of the older form.[33]

Seymour Krim's *Shake It For the World, Smartass*, which appeared in 1970, contained "An Open Letter to Norman Mailer" which defined New Journalism as "a free nonfictional prose that uses every resource of the best fiction."[34] And in "The Newspaper As Literature/Literature As Leadership" he called journalism the *de facto* literature of the majority,[35] a synthesis of journalism and

[30] Dan Wakefield, "The Personal Voice and the Impersonal Eye," *Atlantic*, June, 1966, p. 86.

[31] Jack Newfield, "Hooked and Dead," *New York Times Book Review*, May 7, 1967, p. 20.

[32] Robert Scholes, "Double Persepective on Hysteria," *Saturday Review*, August 24, 1968, p. 37.

[33] Talese, *Fame and Obscurity* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1970), p. vii.

[34] Seymour Krim, *Shake It for the World, Smartass* (New York: Delta, 1970), p. 115.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 359. "Let once-mighty literature swallow its whitefaced pride and give its mythic propensity to journalism—the *de facto* literature of our time."

literature that the book's postscript called "journalit."[36] In 1972, in "An Enemy of the Novel" Krim identified his own fictional roots and declared that the needs of the time compelled him to move beyond fiction to a more "direct" communication to which he promised to bring all of fiction's resources.[37]

McHam, in "The Authentic New Journalists," distinguishes the nonfiction reportage of Capote, Wolfe and others from other, more generic interpretations of New Journalism.[38] Also in 1971, Rivers took a similar tack in "The New Confusion," in which he identified a variety of new journalistic forms but concentrated on two: advocacy journalism and the new nonfiction. Rivers disparaged the former and embraced the latter, concluding, "In some hands, they add a flavor and a humanity to journalistic writing that push it into the realm of art."[39]

Brown in 1972 reviewed much that had been written *as* New Journalism and *about* New Journalism by Capote, Wolfe, Mailer and others and labelled the genre "New Art Journalism," which allowed him to test it both as art and as journalism. He concluded that the new literary form was useful only in the hands of literary artists of great talent.[40]

In the first of two pieces by Wolfe in *New York* detailing the growth of the new nonfiction and its techniques, Wolfe returned to the fortuitous circumstances surrounding the construction of "Kandy-Kolored" and added:

> Its virtue was precisely in showing me the possibility of there being something "new" in journalism. What interested me was not simply the discovery that it was possible to write accurate nonfiction with techniques usually associated with novels and short stories. It was that--plus. It was the discovery that it was possible in nonfiction, in journalism, to use any literary device, from the traditional dialogisms of the essay to stream-of-consciousness. . . .[41]

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 365.

[37] Krim, "An Enemy of the Novel," *Iowa Review*, Winter 1972, pp. 60-2.

[38] David McHam, "The Authentic New Journalists," *Quill*, September, 1971, pp. 9-14.

[39] William L. Rivers, "The New Confusion," *The Progressive*, December, 1971, p. 28.

[40] Charles Brown, "New Art Journalism Revisited," *Quill*, March, 1972, pp. 18-23.

[41] Wolfe, *New York*, February 14, 1972, p. 37.

New Journalism As Intensive Reportage

Although much of the critical literature discusses the use of literary or fictional techniques as the basis for a New Journalism, these and other critics also refer to the form as stemming from intensive reporting.[42] Stein, for instance, found the key to New Journalism not its fictionlike form but the "saturation reporting" which precedes it, the result of the writer's immersion in his subject. Consequently, Stein concluded, the writer is as much a part of his story as is the subject[43] and he thus linked saturation reporting with subjectivity. For him New Journalism is inconsistent with "objectivity" or accuracy.

But others have argued that total immersion enhances accuracy. As Wolfe put the case:

> I am the first to agree that the New Journalism should be as accurate as traditional journalism. In fact, my claims for the New Journalism, and my demands upon it, go far beyond that. I contend that it has already proven itself *more* accurate than traditional journalism—which unfortunately is saying but so much. . . .[44]

Wolfe coined "saturation reporting" in his 1970 *ASNE Bulletin* article. After citing the opening paragraphs of Talese's Joe Louis piece, he confessed believing that Talese had "piped" or faked the story, only later to be convinced, after learning that Talese so deeply delved into the subject, that he could report entire scenes and dialogues.

> The basic units of reporting are no longer who-what-when-where-how and why but whole scenes and stretches of dialogue. The New Journalism involves a depth of reporting and an attention to the most minute facts and details that most newspapermen, even the most experienced, have never dreamed of.[45]

In his "Birth of the New Journalism" in *New York*, Wolfe

[42] See, for example, Charles Self, "The New Journalism?" *Quill and Scroll*, December-January, 1973, pp. 10-11: "The new journalism requires days, weeks or even months of research for each story. The new journalist writes from a detailed knowledge of his subject." (p. 11)

[43] *Op. cit.*, p. 167.

[44] Wolfe, "The New Journalism: A la Recherche des Whichy Thickets," *New York*, February 21, 1972, p. 46.

[45] *ASNE Bulletin*, p. 22.

returned to the subject, which he here described as a depth of information never before demanded in newspaper work. The New Journalist, he said, must stay with his subject for days and weeks at a stretch.[46] In Wolfe's *Esquire* piece saturation reporting became the "Locker Room Genre" of intensive "digging" into the lives and personalities of one's subject, in contrast to the aloof and genteel tradition of the essayists and "The Literary Gentlemen in the Grandstand."[47]

For Talese, intensive reportage took the form of interior monologue to discover from his subjects what they were thinking, not, he said in the panel discussion cited earlier, merely reporting what people did and said.[48]

New Nonfiction As Subjective Journalism

Stein believed that "In the New Journalism the eye of the beholder is all—or almost all,"[49] and a 1971 Master's Thesis by Howard based its definition of the genre on the fact the new nonfiction writers rejected objectivity in favor of a more personal, subjective reportage.[50] The definition parallels much of what Wakefield said in his 1966 *Atlantic* article.

> The important and interesting and hopeful trend to me in the new journalism is its personal nature—not in the sense of personal attacks, but in the presence of the reporter himself and the significance of his own involvement. This is sometimes felt to be egotistical, and the frank identification of the author, especially as the "I" instead of merely the impersonal "eye" is often frowned upon and taken as proof of "subjectivity," which is the opposite of the usual journalistic pretense.[51]

And in spite of the fact that Capote believed in the "objective" accuracy of *In Cold Blood* and strove to keep himself totally out of the narrative, one reviewer found in the book the "tendency among writers to resort to subjective sociology, on the one hand,

[46] *New York*, p. 45.
[47] *Esquire*, pp. 274-6.
[48] Talese, *et al.*, *Writer's Digest*, p. 34.
[49] *Op. cit.*, p. 168.
[50] Philip M. Howard, Jr., "The New Journalism: A Nonfiction Concept of Writing," unpublished master's thesis, University of Utah, August, 1971, 5 ff.
[51] *Atlantic*, p. 89.

or to super-creative reportage, on the other."[52] Self[53] termed this characteristic of New Journalism as "admitted" subjectivity, whether first-person or third-person, and acknowledged the subjectivity inherent in his account.

"Parajournalism" and The New Yorker Affair

Among the hostile critics of the New Journalism is Dwight MacDonald, whose most vocal criticism comprised a chapter in what has come to be known as "the *New Yorker* affair" of 1965. Wolfe had written a two-part semi-fictional parody in *New York*[54] of the *New Yorker* and its editor, William Shawn. Reaction, notably from *New Yorker* writers, was loud and prolonged, but the most significant reaction came from MacDonald, who counter-attacked in two articles in the *New York Review of Books*.[55] In the first, MacDonald termed Wolfe's approach "parajournalism" and applied it to all similar styles. "Parajournalism," MacDonald wrote,

> . . . seems to be journalism—"the collection and disseminattion of current news"—but the appearance is deceptive. It is a bastard form, having it both ways, exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction.[56]

The *New Yorker* parody, he added, ". . . revealed the ugly side of Parajournalism when it tries to be serious."[57]

In his second article, MacDonald addressed himself to the accuracy of Wolfe's report. He charged that Wolfe "takes a middle course, shifting gears between fact and fantasy, spoof and re-

[52] F. W. Dupre, "Truman Capote's Score," *New York Review of Books*, February 3, 1966, p. 5.

[53] *Quill and Scroll*, p. 11.

[54] Wolfe, "Tiny Mummies! The True Story of the Ruler of 43rd Street's Land of the Walking Dead," *New York*, April 11, 1965, pp. 7-9; 24-29; and "Lost in the Whichy Thicket," *New York*, April 18, 1965, 16 ff. At the time, *New York* was still the Sunday magazine for the now deceased *New York Herald Tribune*.

[55] Dwight MacDonald, "Parajournalism, or Tom Wolfe and His Magic Writing Machine," *New York Review of Books*, August 26, 1965, pp. 3-5; and "Parajournalism II; Wolfe and the *New Yorker*," *New York Review of Books*, February 3, 1966, pp. 18-24.

[56] "Parajournalism," p. 3.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

portage, until nobody knows which end is, at the moment, up."[58] *New Yorker* writers Renata Adler and Gerald Jonas joined the fray in the Winter 1966 issue of *Columbia Journalism Review*.[59]

Wolfe himself returned to the affair a full seven years later, devoting the second of his two February *New York* articles[60] (1972) to his detractors but not to dispute their attack on his factual accuracy. He argued that most of the contentions arose because for traditional *literati* nonfiction should not succeed—which his nonfiction obviously had.[61]

Other Negative Criticism

Partly because Wolfe took liberties with the facts in his *New Yorker* parody, New Journalism began to get a reputation for juggling the facts in the search for truth, fictionalizing some details to get at the larger "reality." Widely criticized was the technique of the composite character, the most notorious example of which was "Redpants," a presumed prostitute whom Gail Sheehy wrote about in *New York* in a series on that city's sexual subculture. When it later became known that the character was distilled from a number of prostitutes, there was an outcry against Sheehy's method and, by extension, to the credibility, all of New Journalism. As one wrote:

> It's all part of the New Journalism, or the Now Journalism, and it's practiced widely these days. Some editors and reporters vigorously defend it. Others just as vigorously attack it. No one has polled the reader, but whether he approves or disapproves, it's getting harder and harder for him to know what he can believe.[62]

Newsweek reported that critics felt Sheehy's energies were better suited to fiction than fact.[63]

Tebbel,[64] although treating New Journalism in its more generic

[58] "Parajournalism II," p. 18.

[59] Leonard C. Lewin, with Renata Adler and Gerald Jonas, "Is Fact Necessary?", *Columbia Journalism Review*, Winter, 1966, pp. 29-34.

[60] *New York*, February 21, 1972, pp. 39-48.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[62] W. Stewart Pinkerton, Jr., "The 'New Journalism' Is Something Less Than Meets the Eye," *Wall Street Journal*, August 13, 1971, p. 1.

[63] December 4, 1972, p. 61.

[64] John Tebbel, "The Old New Journalism," *Saturday Review*, March 13, 1971, pp. 96-7.

sense as new a trend, chided it for the fictional technique of narrative leads which the new nonfiction writers had introduced into journalism and deplored its use in newspapers.

Markel's polemic ("So What's New?") was as one-sided as MacDonald's, rejecting the claim to greater in-depth reporting and labelling the writers "factual fictionists" and "deep-see reporters."[65] He feared they were performing as sociologists and psychoanalysts rather than as journalists.

More reasoned, though still essentially negative, Arlen in his 1972 "Notes On the New Journalism," put the New Journalism into a larger socio-historical perspective by tracing the techniques from earlier writers and from the constraints and opportunities of the current age. But much of the more routine New Journalism "consists in exercises by writers . . . in gripping and controlling and confining a subject within the journalist's own temperament. Presumably," he wrote, "this is the 'novelistic technique.' "[66] But he conceded that the best of this work had "considerably expanded the possibilities of journalism."[67]

Much negative criticism of New Journalism is directed at individual writers. Ozick has asserted that Capote in *In Cold Blood* was doing little more than trying to devise a form: "One more esthetic manipulation."[68] Sheed offered, in "A Fun-House Mirror," a witty refutation of Wolfe's claim that he takes on the expression and the guise of whomever he is writing about. "The Truman Capotes may hold up a tolerably clear glass to nature," he wrote, "but Wolfe holds up a fun-house mirror, and I for one don't give a hoot whether he calls the reflection fact or fiction."[69]

Newfield ("Is there a 'new journalism'?")[70] changed his attitude since his earlier (1967) review of Wolfe. "New Journalism does not exist," the later article says. "It is a false category. There is only good writing and bad writing, smart ideas and dumb ideas,

[65] Lester Markel, "So What's New?" *ASNE Bulletin*, January, 1972, p. 8.

[66] Michael J. Arlen, "Notes on the New Journalism," *Atlantic*, May, 1972, p. 47.

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[68] Cynthia Ozick, "Reconsideration: Truman Capote," *The New Republic* January 27, 1973, p. 34.

[69] Wilfrid Sheed, "A Fun-House Mirror," *New York Times Book Review*, December 3, 1972, p. 2.

[70] Jack Newfield, *Columbia Journalism Review*, July-August, 1972, pp. 45-7.

hard work and laziness."[71] While the practice of journalism had improved during the past 15 years, he argued, it was because of an influx of good writers notable for unique styles, not because they belonged to any school or movement.[72]

Jimmy Breslin, who is often labelled a New Journalist, took the same view: "Believe me, there is no new journalism. Is it a gimmick to say there is. . . . Story telling is older than the alphabet and that is what it is all about."[73]

Thus two different charges are leveled: against New Journalism as a *distinct genre* ("What is called the New Journalism is really a dozen different styles of writing"[74]) and against it as a *new* form.

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] In Philip Howard, *op. cit.*, in a personal letter to that author, quoted on Howard's p. 9.

[74] Newfield, *Columbia Journalism Review*, p. 45.

Towards Definition

In the review of the literature a host of often unrelated meanings were assigned to New Journalism but there emerged a preliminary distinction between the generic uses of the term as new directions in journalism and a more specific meaning as literary genre. In the generic sense, New Journalism refers to such trends as subjective journalism, precision journalism and the underground press. Most of the critical literature takes few pains to differentiate new journalism as trends from what is of direct concern here, New Journalism as a specific school or movement, a nonfiction genre.

Under consideration, then, is the New Journalism identified by Dennis, Johnson and others as "reportage" or "new nonfiction." Both terms are unfortunate, however, because "reportage" connotes a less specific literary journalism while "new nonfiction" implies a negative existence, as if fiction were the norm and all else is some form of derivation from it.

As a literary genre, New Journalism has certain technical characteristics. It is an artistic, creative, literary reporting form with three basic traits: dramatic literary techniques; intensive reporting: and reporting of generally acknowledged subjectivity. In addition it involves a more or less well defined group of writers who employ the techniques. Each is stylistically unique, but all sharing common formal elements. Wolfe, Talese, Capote and Mailer appear the most prominently but other names are frequently mentioned: Breslin, Dick Schaap, Terry Southern, Larry King. Dan Wakefield, Joan Didion, Mike Royko, Gail Sheehy, Joe McGinniss. Hunter Thompson, Rex Reed, David Halberstam, Pete Hamill and John Sack. The list could be longer,[1] but these writers, most of them with their roots in "conventional" journal-

[1] Wolfe, for instance, in his *Esquire* treatise, includes George Plimpton for his *Paper Lion*, *Life* writer James Mills, and a few others. Hamill and Newfield (the latter himself sometimes included on lists of New Journalists) both cite Jimmy Cannon and Murray Kempton as important influences on later New Journalists.

ism, have been tagged New Journalists on the rather loose assumption that their work exemplifies a set of traits such as those listed above. Some seem to be included because critics judge them to be good journalists or good writers. Halberstam is a case in point. This study primarily concerns the reportorial work of the "prominent" four: Wolfe, Talese, Capote and Mailer.

As for media, little of their work appears in newspapers. Quite a few of them publish in magazines such as *Esquire* and *New York*, a few in *Life*, *Harpers* and *Atlantic*. Wolfe, Mailer and others have also appeared in "alternative" papers such as the *Village Voice* and *Rolling Stone*. Much of the new nonfiction appears in book form.

Relationships Among New Journalism Traits

Since the New Journalism under consideration here is distinguished from the more generic meanings of the term as *form* and *technique* are distinguished from *attitude*, the three traits of the genre are likewise unified along formal lines. That is, they all stem from the writers' concern with using dramatic literary techniques. These techniques are based to a great extent on intensive reporting, which in turn often results in an acknowledgment of one's subjectivity. And, although each of the three basic traits can be analyzed separately, they should be seen as overlapping and complementary.

Fictional technique is the trait most of the critical literature discusses and is at the heart of the new nonfiction. Its effect is to provide the report with an element of drama, or "story-telling."

The other frequent synonym, "reportage," is also helpful in understanding the primacy of fictional or literary techniques and their relationship to the other techniques. It refers to the kind of interpretative reporting which goes beyond the facts to draw from the reader an emotional reaction similar to the writer's own, as with the devices of the novelist or short story writer. "Reportage," Ford wrote, "may be defined as the presentation of a particular fact or facts, a specific event, in a setting that aids the reader to experience those facts or that event."[2]

Literary techniques include any and all of the techniques known

[2] Edwin H. Ford, "The Art and Craft of the Literary Journalist," in George F. Mott, ed., *New Survey of Journalism* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), p. 310.

to prose literature, such as irony, rhythm, foreshadowing, characterization, plot, dialect, dialogue, mood, imagery, metaphor and satire. In the present analysis, some of these many techniques will occasionally be noticed, since critics—Wolfe included—concede the fact that the New Journalist has all the devices of imaginative literature at his disposal. To streamline the argument, however, this analysis will concentrate on the four "techniques of realism" which Wolfe identified as the hallmark of the New Journalism: scene-by-scene construction, full record of dialogue, third-person point of view and the detailing of descriptive incidentals. These are the elements which allow writers to dramatize events, to get the reader involved by telling their stories in interesting, exciting and thus dramatic ways.

The Application of Literary Techniques

Wolfe regards scene-by-scene construction, always a primary characteristic of dramatic fiction, as most basic, setting it apart from straight narrative exposition. Though the short story and the novel have relied heavily on the technique, its role in journalism has been minor. In the new nonfiction, however, story telling by building scenes is paramount. All the literature of New Journalism exemplifies the trait, the key to its fictionlike form. Scene construction is the dramatic element which gives high appeal to *In Cold Blood* or to *Armies of the Night,* studies which otherwise would be simply detailed historical accounts. It is this trait which allows Wolfe to paint a vivid picture of stock car art in "The Last American Hero":

> Ten o'clock Sunday morning in the hills of North Carolina. Cars, miles of cars, in every direction, millions of cars, pastel cars, aqua green, aqua blue, aqua beige. . . . Honest Thrill orange, and Baby Fawn lust cream-colored cars are all going to the stock car races, and that old mothering North Carolina sun keeps exploding off the windshields.[3]

Another classic example of scene construction is Talese's portrait of Frank Sinatra in "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold." As that piece began:

> Frank Sinatra, holding a glass of bourbon in one hand and a cigarette in the other, stood in a dark corner of the bar between two

[3] Wolfe, *Kandy-Kolored,* p. 126.

attractive but fading blondes who sat waiting for him to say something. But he said nothing; he had been silent during much of the evening, except now in this private club in Beverly Hills he seemed even more distant, staring out through the smoke and semidarkness into a large room beyond the bar where dozens of young couples sat huddled around small tables or twisted in the center of the floor to the clamorous clang of folk-rock music blaring from the stereo. The two blondes knew, as did Sinatra's four male friends who stood nearby, that it was a bad idea to force conversation upon him when he was in this mood of sullen silence, a mood that had hardly been uncommon during this first week of February, a month before his fiftieth birthday.[4]

Closely related is the technique of fully recording the dialogue, Wolfe's second technique of realism. To a great extent, the skilled novelist allows his characters to develop the action, the plot and themselves in dialogue more than in description. And as dialogue is more involving for the characters themselves, so it is for the reader. In drama, in fact, dialogue is the primary constituent, giving that genre its feeling of involvement and immediacy. The New Journalists capitalized on this tactic and began to allow the characters' words to carry great portions of the story. It was this tactic, along with that of scene construction, that Wolfe said first led him to take note of Talese's early work (e.g., the article on Joe Louis). And Wolfe's own "Mau-Mauing the Flak-Catchers" marks the technique well, too:

"Man," says the blood, "you just taking up space and killing time and drawing pay!"

"Dat's right, Brudda! You just drawing pay!" Ba-ram-ba-ram-ba-ram-ba-ram.

"Man," says the blood, if you don't know nothing and you can't say nothing, "why don't you tell your boss what we want!"

"Dat's right, Brudda! Tell the man!" Ba-ram-ba-ram-ba-ram-ba- ram.

"As I've already told you, he's in Washington trying to meet the deadlines for *your* projects!"

"You talk to the man, don't you? He'll let you talk to him, won't he?"

"Yes . . ."

"Send him a telegram, man!"

"Well, all right—"

"Shit, pick up the telephone, man!"

[4] *Fame and Obscurity* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1970), p. 5.

"Dat's right, Brudda! Pick up the telephone!" Ba-ram-ba-ram-ba-ram-ba-ram.

"Please, gentlemen! That's pointless! It's already after six o'clock in Washington. The office is closed!"

"Then call him in the morning, man," says the blood. "We coming back here in the morning and we gonna *watch* you call the man! We gonna stand right on *top* of you so you won't forget to make that call!"

"Dat's right, Brudda! On *top* of you!" Ba-ram-ba-ram-ba-ram-ba-ram.

"All right, gentlemen . . . all right," says the Flak-Catcher.[5]

The third technique Wolfe labels the third-person point of view. He probably stressed it originally to counteract what he felt was a misleading conception of New Journalism as first-person journalism. In an earlier article[6] he had tried to reverse the growing tendency of critics and journalists to lump New Journalism with all kinds of witness-reporting, interior or advocacy journalism and personal testimony. Instead, he felt the one distinguishing mark of the genre was its method of letting the reader deeply experience a particular character—not the writer—by seeing the action through that character's eyes. Wolfe's own term was "chameleon," i.e., taking on the coloration of whomever or whatever he wrote about. For instance, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* included lengthy stream-of-consciousness writing. The opening of "Radical Chic" shows how Wolfe used point-of-view:

> At 2 or 3 or 4 a.m., somewhere along in there, on August 25, 1966, his forty-eighth birthday, in fact, Leonard Bernstein woke up in the dark in a state of wild alarm. That had happened before. It was one of the forms his insomnia took. So he did the usual. He got up and walked around a bit. He felt groggy. Suddenly he had a vision, an inspiration. He could see himself, Leonard Bernstein, the *egregio maestro*, walking out on stage in white tie and tails in front of a full orchestra.[7]

Talese developed the interior monologue—recording the internal, emotional experience of a character—but in their total

[5] Wolfe, *Radical Chic and Mau-Mauing the Flak-Catchers*, Bantam, New York, 1971, pp. 140-11. The example gives a glimpse into Wolfe's use of dialect for purposes of irony.

[6] *ASNE Bulletin*, p. 19: ". . . it strikes me as so weird, currently, to see the New Journalism lumped together with a great gush of moralistic, apologistic, committed, romantic, personal and thoroughly conventional essays. . .."

[7] *Radical Chic*, p. 3.

adherency to the third-person writing, both Talese and Capote have become what are sometimes called self-effacing authors, never personally intruding into the scenes they present, always the omniscient narrator-reporter. Mailer's is a special case, for although he manages to maintain a third-person style throughout his nonfiction, he is himself usually the main character—under such names as Norman, reporter, or, in *Of a Fire On the Moon*, "Aquarius" (" 'Did you want them,' asked Aquarius, 'to send a Protestant, a Catholic and a Jew to the moon?' ")[8]

Another example is Wills and Demeris's Jack Ruby story, the long, two-part *Esquire* piece which is also an example of intensive reporting. Its final paragraph reads:

> When police swarm toward him Ruby the scuffler does not try to take *this* play. They are friends, they'll understand ("He usually did the wrong thing in reaching his goal"). But why are they so rough? Don't they know he's on their side, just like on South Ervay, fighting at the side of Blakenship and Carlson? He came to their rescue. Why turn on him? ("He wanted to help, and he only got in the way"). They must know I did it for Jackie ("Jack, I don't *want* you to hit him"). For Dallas ("Even if it wasn't his fight, he would step in, in a second"). For Caroline ("Diana, we've got to do something about that girl"). They must see that: YOU ALL KNOW ME! ("Mr. Ruby got the man who killed the President"). I'M JACK RUBY!"[9]

Wolfe's final technique of realism involves what he calls "social autopsy," the attention the writer pays to the minute details of his subject's life, manners, and all other trappings fully characterizing the subject. Thus the intent is to present a more comprehensive picture, to allow the reader information and depth of insight into personalities and situations. In "The First Tycoon of Teen," for example, Wolfe describes Phil Spector and some of his trappings:

> Spector walks into the inner office, gingerly, like a cowboy, because of the way the English boots lift him up off the floor. He is light, five feet seven, 130 pounds. His hair shakes lightly behind. It is a big room, like a living room, all beige except for nine gold-plated rock

[8] *Of a Fire On the Moon* (New York: Signet, 1971), p. 127.

[9] Gary Wills and Ovid Demaris, "You All Know Me, I'm Jack Ruby!" in Hayes, *Smiling Through*, p. 99.

and roll records on the wall, some of Phil Spector's "goldies," one million sales each. "He's a Rebel," by the Crystals, Blue Jeans. . . . And beige walls, beige telephones all over the place, a beige upright piano, beige paintings, beige tables, with Danny Davis crowding over a beige desk, talking on the telephone.[10]

Intensive Reportage

The application of fictional techniques clearly comprises the most distinctive characteristic of this New Journalism, one that is usually either present or not. Intensive reportage, on the other hand, is not so distinctive. It is rather a question of degree. All writers and reporters can lay some claim to intensity, the more so in interpretative or investigative or other in-depth reporting. Intensive reportage (Wolfe's "saturation reporting") is therefore ancillary to fictional techniques, a stylistic variable only in the sense that the fictionlike form grows out of it.

The trait is exemplified in part by the length of time or breadth of research on a topic. A classic example is *In Cold Blood*, whose author spent some six years interviewing and researching the material.[11] Similarly, Talese stated in The Author's Note to *Honor Thy Father* that he had worked on the book throughout a seven-year period, from 1965-1971.[12] And Wolfe spent months with Ken Kesey and his Pranksters before writing about their escapades in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Among a wealth of additional examples are John Sack, who went through training and into combat with an infantry company in order to write *M;* and Hunter Thompson, who "ran" with the Hell's Angels for a year and a half to write *Hell's Angels: a Strange and Terrible Saga*. Joe McGinniss spent most of the 1968 presidential campaign with the Nixon camp gathering material for his *The Selling of the President 1968*.

Intensive reporting can also be seen in its effects, in the depth of report which grows out of the immersion of the writer in his subject. The close connection between intensivity and the four techniques of realism is apparent. Extended dialogue and "social autopsy" can be achieved only as the result of the close, extended,

[10] *Kandy-Kolored*, pp. 62-3.

[11] See J. Howard, "Six Year Literary Vigil." *Life*, January 7, 1966.

[12] (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1971), pp. 499-504.

probing coverage that is saturation reporting. The same is true of Talese's interior monologues and Wolfe's stream-of-consciousness.

Subjective Reportage

Subjectivity represents by far the thorniest problem in a discussion of New Journalism's traits. Not the least of the difficulties is that much of the criticism of New Journalism is a reaction to conventional journalism, and, since conventional journalism espouses "objectivity," New Journalism is assumed to espouse subjectivity.

Indeed, many New Journalists (and many "old" journalists, for that matter[13]) acknowledge the inevitability of subjectivity. John Hersey, whose years of experience with *Time* helped mold him into something far different from an "objective" journalist, detailed, in *The Algiers Motel Incident*, the steps he had taken to insure accuracy. Then he added:

> Let not any of this suggest to you that I have been trying to persuade you, in the fraudulent tradition of American journalism, that I have been, or shall be, "objective." There is no such thing as objective reportage. Human life is far too trembling-swift to be reported in whole: the moment the recorder chooses nine facts out of ten he colors the information with his views.[14]

Nevertheless, most of the work of the four prominent New Journalists cannot be classified as personalist, activist or advocacy journalism, which are some of the common guises of subjectivity.[15]

[13] Such as the late Ralph McGill, who wrote, "I want truth and not objectivity, for the simple reason there isn't any such thing as objectivity, and cannot be any such thing. Not only that, there shouldn't be. Objectivity is a phantom" (as quoted in Cal M. Mogue, "The Distinction Between Truth and Objectivity," *Nieman Reports*, December, 1968, p. 14), and Bill Moyers' now-famous comment that "of all the myths of journalism, objectivity is certainly the greatest."

[14] John Hersey, *The Algiers Motel Incident* (New York: Bantam, 1968), p. 27.

[15] Mailer's *Armies of the Night* and *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* could possibly be viewed as exceptions if one were to interpret Mailer's involvement, particularly in the case of the march on the Pentagon, as an activist approach to journalism. Wolfe, however, in "The New Journalism" (*ASNE Bulletin*, p. 22) proposes that Mailer's account of the march represents that writer's statement of his and his literary colleagues' *lack* of commitment.

Rather, their no-techniques-barred approach generally means telling a story as thoroughly and as accurately as possible. Wolfe, in fact, said as much in his "last word" on the *New Yorker* affair, when he claimed for New Journalism an accuracy and thoroughness of reporting which took it far beyond traditional journalism, offering the reader "more of the truth than he is likely to get any other way."[16]

On the other hand, the New Journalists acknowledge the uniqueness of their approach and style and of their own vision of "truth." Joan Didion perhaps spoke for many when she wrote, "since I am neither a camera eye nor much given to writing pieces which do not interest me, whatever I do write reflects, sometimes gratuitously, how I feel."[17]

The point, then, is that the New Journalists tend to admit the inevitability of imparting their own vision to the world. But in this they are not alone. The reaction against the ideal of objective reporting has become increasingly vocal during the past few years, especially in the underground press and other forms of advocacy journalism.[18] The new nonfiction writers in effect capitalize on this trend toward non- (or anti-) objectivity, no matter what their individual position on the matter. At issue is not that objectivity is, *de facto*, an impossibility but rather that many of them readily *admit* its radical impossibility, and consequently acknowledge their own subjectivity. Thus the important factor is their recognition of the selectivity and creativity of their observations.

[16] *New York*, February 21, 1972, p. 46.

[17] Joan Didion, *Slouching Toward Bethlehem* (New York: Dell, 1968), p. xiii.

[18] For example, this comment from underground advocate-practitioner Raymond Mungo in *Famous Long Ago: My Life and Hard Times With Liberation News Service* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), p. 68: "*Facts* are less important than *truth* and the two are far from equivalent, you see; for cold facts are nearly always boring and may even distort the truth, but Truth is the highest achievement of human expression."

Journalistic Aspects

In this study "literature" is used in two different senses. The first refers to the body of critical writing or scholarly research on a subject, in this case New Journalism. The second is literature as written language in artistic form. The meaning of literature at issue at this point is the second, often marked by a personal, unique style characteristic of individual writers, and is associated with the use of artistic literary techniques such as metaphor, rhythm, irony, mood, imagery and so on. The lexicon of literary techniques is extensive.[1]

"Journalism" is also used here in two different senses. It refers to the modern professional institution of collecting, writing, editing and publishing news. It also refers to the reportorial work of individuals writing news—the report of events of current interest or wide popular appeal. Etymologically, "journalism" is rather poorly suited to the host of meanings now associated with it.[2] Nonetheless it is today the conventional term for the variety of tasks associated with gathering and disseminating news.

In writing about journalism, scholars and theorists generally tend to equate it with news, or newswriting, and then proceed to describe the elements or characteristics of news. Bleyer identified the three characteristics of news as timeliness, interest and significance.[3] Other writers vary that basic list somewhat: Hohen-

[1] See Meyer H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston [Third Edition], 1971); and W. F. Thrall, Addison Hibbard, and C. H. Holman. *A Handbook to Literature,* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1960).

[2] The *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* shows the word developing from the Latin diurnalis (diurnal), a daily record of transactions or events. Thus the *acta diura*, a daily news chronicle of Imperial Rome. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first modern English usage of journalism was not until 1833, when the word was transliterated in an English review of a French work, "du journalisme."

[3] "In actual practice the definition of news for a given newspaper amounts to this: News is anything timely that is selected by the news staff because it is of interest and significance to their readers or because it can be made so." Willard G. Bleyer, *Newspaper Writing and Editing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin). 1932, p. 32.

berg[4] and Charnley[5] add accuracy; Westley[6] adds the "basic appeals" of proximity, prominence, consequence and conflict; and MacDougall[7] and Hohenberg[8] add a social function element, which the former calls interpretation, the latter explanation. Most theorists agree on the basic points, that journalism means the business of news or newswriting and is the report of the event as distinguished from the event itself.[9]

Because of its history and characteristics, the usual medium for the reporting of news is the printed word. In the Twentieth century the electronic media came to be widely used. But the appearance of "news," as that word is commonly understood, in books is uncommon. Yet much of what is here is called New Journalism appears in book form.

Historical Perspective

Much has been made of the differences between literature and journalism. Literature has commonly been thought of as an art, an enduring work; journalism has been deemed a craft, a fleeting work. MacLeish, in "The Poet and the Press," saw poetry and journalism as "two poles of the world of words in our time."[10] To disparage a work of literature is to call it "mere journalism." "Journalese" has often connoted poor expression. Not long ago,

> . . . it was fashionable to use journalese as a synonym for ragged and unwashed prose. What was journalistic about a work was a long list of stylistic monstrosities covering the gamut of errors from barbarism to Britticism.[11]

[4] Hohenberg, *The Professional Journalist*, p. 64.

[5] Mitchell V. Charnley, *Reporting* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 19-22.

[6] Bruce Westley, *News Editing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin), 1953, pp. 335-6.

[7] MacDougall, *op. cit.*, 12 ff.

[8] Hohenberg, *The Professional Journalist*, p. 64. And Charnley, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15, calls explanation "orientation."

[9] For example, Charnley, *op. cit.*, p. 1: "When the newsman defines news as 'report' rather than 'event,' he is saying, in effect, that until the knowledge of an event is communicated, the event is not news."

[10] Archibald MacLeish, "The Poet and the Press," *Atlantic*, March, 1959, p. 40.

[11] Susan W. Gregory, "Literary and Journalistic Aspects of *In Cold Blood*," unpublished master's thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1969, p. 42.

A check of scholarly source material[12] reveals that recognition of positive relationships between literature and journalism was slow in coming. Not until late in the nineteenth century did scholars began to suggest such a connection by speculating on the literary elements of journalism. Cody, in his 1894 *Art of Writing*, defined literature as a kind of higher-order journalism, a "literary journalism, done with more care, more thought, more profound sympathy, wider truth, a finer art."[13] At the time—the heyday of the yellow press—his comments seemed appropriate.

Lee's "Journalism As a Basis for Literature," in 1900, took a social function approach. Lee spoke of the difference between the average reporter, who asks what the people want, and the great reporter, the "poet reporter," who asks, "What do I want them to ask?"[14]

> It is the business of the poet reporter to report a day forever, to make a day last so long that no procession of flaming sunsets shall put that day out. . . .[15]

Lee predicted that such "transfigured reporting" would be journalism's destiny.[16] In 1904 Boynton, in "The Literary Aspect of Journalism," found an occasional journalist who could be a literary artist through expression of his own personality, going beyond journalism to "some larger interpretation of life."[17]

> So from the "article" of higher journalism literature frequently emerges. The given composition ceases to be a something "written up" for a purpose. . . . It is not merely an arrangement of data and opinions; it stirs with life, it reaches toward a farther end than immediate utility. Under such conditions the journalist does honor to his craft by proving himself superior to it. He has dedicated his powers to a

[12] Gregory *(ibid.)* has surveyed some of these sources. And see also Edwin H. Ford, *A Bibliography of Literary Journalism in America* (Minneapolis: Burgess, 1937).

[13] Sherwin Cody, *The Art of Writing* (New York: Old Greek Press, 1894), pp. 31-2.

[14] Gerald S. Lee, "Journalism as a Basis for Literature," *Atlantic Monthly*, February, 1900, p. 233.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 232.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 237.

[17] H. W. Boynton, "The Literary Aspect of Journalism," *Atlantic Monthly*, June, 1904, p. 850.

practical society, but he has not been false to his duty in transcending it.[18]

Park's 1924 classic, "The Natural History of the Newspaper," referred to the use of dramatization in the portrayal of news: " 'News story' and 'fiction story' are two forms of modern literature that are now sometimes so like one another that is difficult to distinguish them."[19]

A more contemporary source, a 1958 article by Podhoretz, "The Article As Art," extolled the literary qualities of current discursive magazine pieces. Podhoretz found their newly-discovered artistry tied closely to the writers' needs to fulfill significant social functions:

> [A] writer whose interests and talent go beyond the merely journalistic can be forced into very exciting pieces of work by the necessity to demonstrate the continuing importance of his social concerns by throwing them into the buzz and hum around him.[20]

For Podhoretz, nonfiction was usurping the artistic primacy of fiction, and he speculated that the reasons for the shift were related to a current pragmatic functionalism, in which" our sense of beauty today is intimately connected with the sense of usefulness."[21] Podhoretz argued for a more positive name for this "nonfiction."[22] That same year George Fox Mott, in "Journalism As a Vocation," found that:

> There is wide opportunity for magazine journalists to help clarify thought, and all worthy literary devices may be used to that end. When well done, magazine articles are among the very best literary efforts of modern times.[23]

MacLeish's 1959 article, "The Poet and the Press," eradicated some of the primary bases for terming poetry (or literature) as art and journalism as non-art. Both, he said, are re-creations of

[18] *Ibid.* Ford (*op. cit.*, pp. 6-7) lists other sources.
[19] Park, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[20] Norman Podhoretz, "The Article As Art," *Harpers*, July, 1958, p. 79.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 80.
[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 76-7.
[23] *New Survey of Journalism* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1958), p. 15.

experience in ways that make sense.[24] His argument was at once a plea for increased awareness of the social relevance of poetry and of the artistic potential of journalism.

Ford's "The Art and Craft of the Literary Journalist" found examples of journalism over three centuries which the author considered literary in style, approach and technique. He compared the literary journalist to the novelists, short-story writers, poets and dramatists, and found the literary journalist writing a freer, more personalized brand of journalism than the average reporter, concerned not only with communicating news of events but the "feel" of an event as well.[25]

Much of the discussion of journalism's literary roots comes to a head in the work of Seymour Krim, who coined "journalit." For Krim it is a literary art, one which goes beyond the "pale echo of fiction" to deal artistically with the material with which journalism is conventionally concerned. Thus, journalit is an application of the techniques of literature, particularly fiction ("The American Novel Made Me"), to nonfiction, or to what Podhoretz called discursive writing.

> The American novelistic imagination as I received it with open heart and mind 25 and 30 years ago was really the most fully human expression of this society at that time; and it is the new humanizing of American writing by the boldness of direct communication, the revolutionizing of the writer's relationship to his reader, that seems to me tremendously more needed right now than the pale echo of fiction. Instead of "novelists" I believe we now actually have only literary individuals themselves, men and women struggling with their own destinies as people in relation to other people and with the problems that threaten to swamp us all—emotional, sexual, political, racial, artistic, philosophical, financial—and that these should be stated to the reader as candidly as possible so that he, too, can be brought into the new mutual non-novel of American life and make possible a truly democratic prose of total communication which can lead to new action in society itself.[26]

And, in "The Newspaper as Literature/Literature as Leadership":

[24] "The Poet and the Press," p. 41.

[25] P. 310. This is Ford's definition of reportage.

[26] *Shake It*, pp. 21-2. Krim wrote the article in 1967.

Perhaps there was a time, really, truly, down in the belly, when fiction in America shed more light on the outlook of a generation than nonfiction: but today the application of fictional and avantgarde prose techniques to the actual scene before us seems much more crucially necessary.[27]

New Journalism as Journalit

But it took the publication of books like *In Cold Blood* to publicize widely the issue of the hybrid which Krim calls journalit, i.e., journalism that is artistic and literary.

Mailer's later nonfiction also led to a discussion of its location on the literature-journalism spectrum. One writer concluded that Mailer's nonfiction is neither imaginative literature nor journalism, but a new procedure which the writer called "consciousness and events seen in reciprocity."[28] Another called Mailer's work "novelistic journalism."[29] Yet both Capote and Mailer shunned the label of journalist. Mailer subtitled *The Armies of the Night* "History as a Novel: the Novel as History." In his *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* he said of the New York *Times* coverage of the Poor People's March that "the *Times* was not ready to encourage its reporters in the thought that there is no

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 345. It is interesting to note that Krim has consistently been a spokesman for what he now calls journalit. In "Our Middle Aged 'Young Writers,'" 1952-3, he wrote: "We must have a fiction—nay, a fact!—equal to the intellectual pace and new sense of possibility which our minds have become tuned to. Otherwise I can't see our novels and stories being important to us who are, alas, real not fictional people. Our fiction now is addressing a fiction of ourselves—not what is actually going on, nor the new visions of beauty and disorder which contemporary necessity has inspired." *Views of a Nearsighted Cannoneer* (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 87.) And in 1958, in "'Fiction'—and Total Imaginative Writing," he wrote: "Such classic distinctions as fiction, autobiography, essay and even some poetry, have yielded up much of their formal exclusiveness before the one classification of 'relevatory imaginative writing,' or perhaps better, 'total imaginative writing.' . . . [t]he life-need appears to have leaked out of . . . fiction into the most imaginative literary demonstrations of the world-enlarged crisis of personal being." (Ibid., pp. 224-5.)

[28] Richard Gilman, *The Confusion of Realms* (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 143.

[29] Peter T. Costa, "Norman Mailer: The Novel As Journalism," unpublished master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1970, p. 51.

history without nuance."[30] And in *Of a Fire On the Moon* he points to the irony of his being deemed by some "the best journalist in America" when he personally viewed himself as a novelist.[31]

Nonetheless, some of his nonfiction, like Capote's, Wolfe's and Talese's, does contain most of the journalistic elements. These writers are concerned with reporting events and their reports are, to an extent, *news*. A well-argued thesis by Gregory[32] views Capote's work (and implicitly other New Journalism as well) as a combination of literature and journalism.

> The publication of *In Cold Blood* eradicated in a single stroke the . . . notion that journalism and literature, as art, were either incompatable or not possible, and that journalism was the inferior.[33]

She then set out to test the thesis by analyzing the book in terms of its literary and journalistic aspects. She compared Capote's coverage of the Kansas murders with the newspaper accounts of the same event, concluding that *In Cold Blood* could be considered news reporting and, in fact, could on some points be considered the better journalism of the two.[34]

The issue of accuracy requires some attention here because of its close bearing on the problem of fact and fiction in New Journalism. Wolfe claims for New Journalism an accuracy of report which not only parallels but goes beyond the ideal for conventional journalism.[35] And elsewhere he reiterated the point that New Journalism combined a literary form with a reportorial accuracy: "The reader knows all this actually happened."[36]

Yet "reality" may be vastly different for different observers, each of whom may report it accurately. When one begins to apply fictional techniques to the report of the observation, as the New Journalists do, the fictional techniques can easily become fiction itself. Writer-critic Martin Mayer once said that Mailer's characters in his nonfiction probably would not recognize themselves:

[30] New York: Signet, 1968, p. 56.
[31] Pp. 12-13.
[32] *Supra*, n. 11.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 54 ff.
[35] *New York*, Feb. 21, 1972, p. 48.
[36] Wolfe, the *Esquire* piece, p. 272.

"The places he describes do not look like his description; the people he quotes do not talk the way he has them talk."[37] And about the work of Talese, he added, "The world that Gay sees is not likely to be the world that the people he has written about are going to see."[38] The same could be said of Wolfe. And as Brown wrote: "The danger of this approach to journalism is that Mailer's truth is surely not everyone's truth."[39]

An element of subjectivity is inherent in all reporting: selectivity and some personal coloration is inescapable. But in "storytelling" the reporter becomes the artist, fashioning his material in clever ways, imposing his views of "reality" with greater license than the "straight" reporter, mixing in a degree of "fiction."

Wolfe's discussion of fiction and nonfiction tends to treat them as polar opposites. Perhaps a continuum would be more appropriate, with what is called "accuracy" or "report" or "nonfiction" located near one end, "fiction" or "poetry" nearer the other. But, as MacLeish has indicated, neither journalism nor poetry is a creation. Both are re-creations of experience. In New Journalism, the creative or imaginative elements are perhaps more consciously used and more visible than in much conventional journalism.

Further Differentiation

In applying literary journalism to New Journalism, "literary" is here limited to the dramatic techniques usually associated with fiction. This disallows from consideration as New Journalism many of the books and articles that generally go by the name. King's *Confessions of a White Racist*, Wakefield's *Supernation at Peace and War* and most of Halberstam's nonfiction, for instance, use few fictional techniques identified here as New Journalism. They are instead great pieces of nonfiction writing by outstanding journalists.[40]

[37] Martin Meyer, in a classroom lecture on New Journalism, University of Iowa School of Journalism, October 23, 1972. (Tape recording available.)

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] Charles Brown, "New Art Journalism Revisited," *Quill*, March, 1972, p. 22.

[40] Halberstam's latest collection, *The Best and the Brightest*, for instance, had ridden the best seller lists for nonfiction for quite some time. Perhaps he and the others tend to acquire the New Journalist label partly because they

On the other hand, when "journalism" as the report of events is applied to New Journalism, it also disallows much of what the acknowledged New Journalists write. Wolfe, for instance, has written a number of essays and discursive pieces which are not reporting, among them his treatises in defense of New Journalism itself. The same may be said of others, such as "What If He's Right," on McLuhan, or his polemic against "porno-violence,"[41] or "Tom Wolfe's New Book of Etiquette."

So the concern here is with that genre of journalistic literature exemplified by Capote's *In Cold Blood*, Mailer's *Armies of the Night*, Talese's *Honor Thy Father* and Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid* Acid Test. There are many other books and shorter pieces[42] by these writers and others whose primary characteristic is their use in *reporting* of *dramatic literary techniques.*

The classification of New Journalism as literature and journalism has resulted in a variety of names being attributed to the form: literary journalism, novelistic journalism, the nonfiction novel, new nonfiction, reportage and journalit, but whatever the name, there is some basis for considering New Journalism as journalism.

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are all rather well known as journalists. Their newspaper backgrounds are quite evident in their reportorial ability as shown by their nonfiction. No matter how "literary" the quality of that nonfiction, however, it is not New Journalism as defined here.

[41] Wolfe, "Pause, Now, and Consider Some Tentative Conclusions About the Meaning of This Mass Perversion Called Porno-violence: What It Is and Where It Comes From and Who Put the Hair on the Walls," *Esquire*, July, 1967. Here, as elsewhere, Wolfe's obsession with "new" is evident. He describes the writers of porno-violence as ". . . the avantgarde of a new genre. . . . In the new pornography, the theme is not sex. The new pornography depicts practitioners acting out another, murkier drive: people staving teeth in, ripping guts open. . . ."

[42] Shortly after this treatise was finished, Tom Wolfe unleashed his long-expected anthology, *The New Journalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), with B. W. Johnson). Although in his introduction Wolfe adds virtually nothing to his earlier critical commentary on New Journalism—the front matter consists of slightly rewritten versions of his *New York* and *Esquire* pieces—the selections in the rest of the book provide a good cross-section of examples of New Journalism as defined here. The selections are from both obscure and well known writers. Some are complete shorter pieces, some are excerpts from books. Many embody some or all of the four New Journalistic traits discussed here.

Some Conclusions

WOLFE has written that "Any movement, group, party, program, philosophy or theory that goes under a name with 'New' in it is just begging for trouble." "New Journalism" is no exception. If it is to be a useful label, it should refer to a specific form of writing, rather than a host of trends unified merely as "new directions."

An examination of much of the critical literature of the past few years which discusses a New Journalistic genre led to an identification of the more salient characteristics of this New Journalism. Assuming for the sake of argument that one could isolate such a genre, a definition was stated: New Journalism would be reportage which uses fictional techniques. Four such specific techniques were identified: full recording of dialogue, third person point of view and what Wolfe called "social autopsy."

If New Journalism is a literary genre, what justification is there for calling it journalism? Gregory's pioneering effort in presenting such a justification allowed an opportunity to distinguish examples of New Journalism which fit the definition. Perhaps the primary contribution of this study has been in its laying to rest the myth that the New Journalists are the literary White Knights who burst in full armor on an unsuspecting American literary-journalistic stage. One could easily get such an impression from some of the more supportive criticism, especially that of Wolfe.

It is clear that New Journalism is not new. What is now billed as a literary genre is the product of gradual development and a reflection of the times more than it is a radical innovation. It remained for the radical, iconoclastic decade of the 1960s to encourage its use. So what was new in the growth of New Journalism was not the utilization by journalists of different techniques, but greater promotion and greater use of pre-existing techniques.

Also different was the fact that writers were beginning to use the techniques consciously *as* literary techniques. Earlier writers seemed to employ any and all devices which would result in a

good report. The current group gives the impression of using the devices of literature because they are literary devices.

The label is a poor one, but it is functional, as is the case with the "New Criticism" of the 1930s, considered the referent for a group which rose to prominence as a "school."

New Journalism qualifies as a *literary genre* because of its utilization of dramatic fictional techniques. It is *journalism* because it applies these techniques to reporting events. The New Journalists attempt to draw their material from "life" and engage in "fact" reporting, even if they do not restrict their coverage to the high consensus facts of most conventional journalism. They are therefore far removed from surrealism and fantasy and much closer to report. By conventional journalism's standards New Journalism may be considerably "fictionalized." Yet the technique of the composite character as immortalized by Gail Sheehy and the hyperbolic parody of *The New Yorker* by Wolfe may be atypical excesses. Most New Journalism seems to be a representation of events and issues which is close to the "facts" of specific observations, even though New Journalists are willing to acknowledge their inescapable subjectivity, perhaps more so than "conventional" journalists.

This subjectivity must be played off against their insistence on accuracy. When Talese affirms that his quotes and interior monologues are report, not fabrication, he is aware that the vision of reality he presents is admittedly his own. The writer's acknowledgment of his subjectivity puts more responsibility on the reader than does high-consensus "factual" reporting. In approaching New Journalism the reader must take account of the uniquenesses of each writer's vision.

New Journalism's intensivity also admits of only reluctant and inconclusive analysis. Every reporter, every writer can be intensive in his own way. The writer's immersion of himself in his subject is more apparent in lengthier accounts, and that is why much New Journalism, especially when at book length, manifests this characteristic more clearly than most in-depth reporting.

The major conclusions of the study may now be listed: *1*) New Journalism is not new as technique; the novelty lies in the high *degree* to which the techniques are utilized today, their *conscious* use, and in the *notoriety* which their current utilization has gained.

2) New Journalism is a distinctive genre only to the extent that all those who use or have used fictional techniques in reporting may be said to form a distinctive group. 3) New Journalism is literary because of its application of the techniques of dramatic literature to nonfiction; it is journalism because it uses those techniques in news reporting. 4) The distinction between fiction and nonfiction, epistemologically shaky at best, should in no way be called on to justify any distinction between literature and journalism, or literature and non-literature. 5) Elements of subjectivity and intensivity or their opposites in writing or reporting are matters of degree, and should not be judged by either-or criteria.

* * *

WHAT is now called New Journalism might proceed in one of two divergent ways. On the one hand it may become a consecrated nonfiction form following specific rules and formulae in a way that parallels the standardization that infected conventional journalism following the rise of "objectivity." On the other hand, the future could bring more freedom. Writers could show more interest in good, clear expression of their ideas, whether they are thought of as new journalists or not.

The proliferation of good writers in America of the last quarter of a century, writers of a variety of forms, styles, media and modes of expression, leads to the hopeful conclusion that *good writing* will win out over any need to identify them as schools of writing. Writers today, as in every age, must stand or fall on the strength of their own merits and artistic ability, not the categories to which they are, for convenience, assigned. A more meaningful projection, then, is that all journalism will move toward better quality and greater freedom of expression, approach and style. The hopeful signs of such a movement are apparent in some of the better newspaper journalism today.

One recent example is a 1972 story by Bob Greene of the Chicago *Sun-Times* on an American combat death in Vietnam, constructed like a short story. Greene sets the scene:

The rain was coming down hard in Custer. Lou Thebo, 72, was in

his barber shop, cutting hair. He had a rancher in the chair. They were talking about the rain, of course, and about the price of beef. . . .

Sustaining his own omniscent narrator point of view, Greene then lets Thebo carry the story in dialogue: " 'I've got no use for McGovern. . . . My daughter Mary's got a son over there in Vietnam." "And then," writes Greene,

as if in a horrifying snatch from a dreadful, perverted afternoon soap opera, Mary Trant appeared in the doorway. Mary is Lou Thebo's daughter. She was crying, almost choking as she called out.

"Dad, Dad," she sobbed, "A man from the Army just came. Stevie's dead. . . ."

Greene then sustains the mood by attending to detail:

They sat in the living room, on two green couches with faded cloth covering. An endless succession of quiz shows came across the television screen, but the sound was off and no one was watching.

The story continues through a number of columns of flashback, handled by extended narration and dialogue. Eventually Greene returns to the subject of Thebo's inner conflict over the war: " 'Someone's got to do the fighting,' he said. 'Someone's got to stand up for what we believe in.' " Then, near the end, this poignant paragraph of resolution:

In the morning, the man from the Army would come back and talk about how the body would be shipped home, to a little hill town in South Dakota where the population had just been decreased by one.

A recent investigative story by John Wheeler of Associated Press on the problem of child abuse in America begins:

In those final hours of a wintry night, Alice made a decision deep in her 6 month old mind that nearly cost her life.

She cried.

It wasn't a soft sobbing. It was a full blown wail that wound up like an air raid siren. Whether she was hungry, grumpy or wet, no one will ever know.

Her mother, already pregnant with her second child, remembered lying in bed and beginning to hate. . . .

If these two examples show contemporary journalism utilizing the techniques associated with New Journalism, writers will hopefully explore other worthwhile tactics as well. If so, it seems safe to say that those who call themselves New Journalists will, in the main, have aided the thrust toward a freer and better American journalism.