The New Journalism as Avant-Garde Art

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ABSTRACT

Can journalism be avant-garde? This question arises from the body of work produced by the New Journalists, whose leading figures include Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, and Norman Mailer. Today, this question is urgent for considerations of the journalist's role within a political landscape increasingly hostile to the news media. Yet it is a question that has not been sufficiently explored in the field of literary study. Scholars of literary journalism have identified the features of an experimental journalism, traced its historical origins, and made claims about how to situate the New Journalism generically. While important, this scholarship overlooks the relationship between experimentation with conventional journalistic form and similar experimentations in other artistic fields. As a result, the stakes of the New Journalism's experimentations with conventional reporting have not been sufficiently mined. In order to remedy this, I place the New Journalism within a broader history of avant-garde art.

The agitation of mainstream journalistic practice undertaken by each of the writers above was spurred by a questioning of a foundational journalistic practice: objectivity. The New Journalists challenged the authority of fact and its capacity to represent the human condition. This challenge to objectivity drove an experimentation with journalistic form that produced a deeply innovative body of work; however, these innovations are not merely formal. They also call into question the epistemological assumptions that tether journalism to a phenomenal world assumed to be fully representable. Significantly, the challenges to objectivity posed by the New Journalists parallel the challenges to representation posed by avant-garde artists like Paul Cezanne

and Karel Appel. My dissertation thus situates the challenges to journalistic form undertaken by the New Journalists within a broader history of artistic experimentation and demonstrates that the significance of these experimentations exceeds the fields in which they occur. These arguments provide a framework for understanding not only the formal innovations of avant-garde artists, but also the epistemological consequences, and ethical imperatives, inherent in these innovations.

My understanding of avant-garde art is informed by the work of Jean-Francois Lyotard. Over the course of his career, Lyotard illuminated the philosophical dimensions of artistic innovation. For Lyotard, one of the hallmarks of avant-garde experimentation is its ability to confront and redress problems across a variety of discursive fields. That is, Lyotard values avant-garde experimentation because it responds to discourses beyond its own, and much of Lyotard's writing about avant-garde art establishes connections between artistic innovation and broader issues of ethics, politics, and justice. Over the course of this dissertation, I demonstrate how the New Journalism participates in this tradition by asking questions about the role and responsibility of the reporter through the self-conscious development of an experimental journalistic aesthetic.

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For Mom, Dad, Alex, Danica, and especially for Jared, whose life as a reporter is not only a testament to the value of journalism, but also a constant source of inspiration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

BRIDGING THE GAP: NEW JOURNALISM AND AVANT-GARDE ART

Not long after Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* was published, in January of 1966,

the author claimed he had created a new form of art. Capote's claim was rooted in a long-

harbored belief: "It seemed to me that journalism, reportage, could be forced to yield a

serious new art form: the 'nonfiction novel'" (Capote 1966). Capote argued that *In Cold*

Blood was informed by both a documentary impulse, a desire to create a factual record,

and an imaginative longing, a desire to pull on fictional techniques to deepen the

emotional range and impact of journalism. Intentionally or not, Capote's claim would

spark a long debate, both popular and scholarly, about the status, even the existence, of a

literary journalism. Philip K. Tompkins, for instance, argued that the nonfiction novel

could not exist: "Capote's new form must be a self-contradiction: nonfiction fiction. He

cannot have it both ways" (44). Fueling this debate was the flurry of publications,

including Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) and Norman Mailer's

Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History (1968), that further

challenged the boundaries between journalism and fiction.[1] In short, there was something

happening in the field of journalism that incited a "noisy critical controversy" (Weber,

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[1] In his essay, "Parajournalism, or Tom Wolfe and his Magic Writing Machine" (1974),
Dwight McDonald famously argued that what Wolfe and other New Journalists had
created was not journalism but rather "parajournalism." He wrote that literary journalism
was "a bastard form, having it both ways, exploiting the factual authority of journalism
and the atmospheric license of fiction." (223).

"Some Sort" 13). My dissertation enters this controversy through an unlikely door: a theory of the avant-garde. Avant-garde art has been theorized as a body of work that upends rigid, inflexible modes of thinking to reveal and redress injustices. I argue it is to these aspects of the avant-garde tradition that the innovations with conventional journalism mentioned above belong. Before explaining the framework of this project in more detail, I will first examine the various critical responses to the New Journalism. In reviewing some of the major debates within the field of literary journalism, I will be able to more clearly articulate how I see my dissertation both contributing to and expanding this field of scholarship.

The controversy over the New Journalism stemmed, in part, from its nomenclature. In 1973, Tom Wolfe published *The New Journalism* (1973), an anthology of works that represented the ongoing experimentation with conventional reporting. His title would become the de facto term used to describe these works,[2] but it would also be a contested term, one that provides an entry point into past and current critical conversations about a difficult-to-define body of work. Indeed, while the term New Journalism was privileged during the height of its popularity, it has since been displaced by the term literary journalism.[3] Yet the controversies surrounding both terms are similar

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[2] Ronald Weber argues that the term New Journalism became "the catchall term to classify the nonfiction work of writers as diverse as Wolfe, Gay Talese, Norman Mailer, Terry Southern, and Truman Capote…[it also] became the overarching term for such subtypes as saturation reporting, advocacy journalism, participatory journalism, underground journalism, journalit, and the nonfiction novel. In short, it became *the* term…" ("Some Sort" 14).

[3] Joshua Roiland points out that the term literary journalism "lost traction during the New Journalism era, but it reemerged in the early 1980s with the publication of Norman Sim's

and will shed light on a number of a critical issues that emerged with the New Journalism and have yet to be resolved.

Critics argued that the New Journalism was a problematic term because it was not, as its name suggests, "new." To scholars writing at the height of the New Journalism's popularity, experimentations with journalistic convention seemed visible in the preceding decades, 1940-1950. In the introduction to his 1974 collection of essays that addressed the controversy surrounding the New Journalism, Ronald Weber writes that critics "point out that writers like James Agee, Lillian Ross, and John Hersey functioned as New Journalists long before the term was invented—as did an earlier breed of newspapermen like Jimmy Cannon, Paul Gallico, and Jim Bishop" (14). For instance, Agee's 1941 *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* started as an assignment given to Agee and photographer Walker Evans by *Fortune* magazine. Agee was supposed to produce an article about tenant farming in Alabama, but the article never materialized. Instead, Agee turned his experiences with three tenant-farming families into a book-length work where Agee's own subjectivity, particularly his concerns and ethical misgivings over writing about impoverished people in the South, was foregrounded. The book, in other words, is not a straightforward documentary, and throughout it Agee constantly questions the proposition that initially sent him south at the urging of *Fortune*: that journalistic representation can render an accurate, fair picture of people or the phenomenal world they inhabit. The following statement by Agee outlines the representational struggle that motivated his experimental journalism: "I am liable seriously, and perhaps irretrievably

The Literary Journalists (1984), an anthology of (mostly) *New Yorker* pieces from the late 1970s and early 1980s" (66).

to obscure what would at best be hard enough to give its appropriate clarity and intensity; and what seems to me most important of all: namely, that these I will write of are human beings, living in this world...If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here...A piece of body torn out by the roots might be more to the point. As it is, though, I'll do what little I can in writing" (10). *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is as much a meditation on the concerns articulated by Agee above as it is about Southern tenant farmers. Indeed, the two are almost inseparable. Since much New Journalism will continue the kind of questioning taken up by Agee, there appears a continuum between the New Journalism of the sixties and seventies and earlier modes of journalistic experimentation. However, more recent scholarship has extended the historical range of innovative journalistic practices to include periods reaching further back in American literary history than just the few decades immediately preceding the New Journalism. John Hartsock argues that literary journalism emerged during the post-Civil War period in America.[4] His book *A History of American Literary Journalism: A Modern Narrative Form* (2000) traces the development of innovative reporting over the course of the twentieth century and forges an important connection between the emergence of the form and moments of epistemological crises. In effect, Hartsock links the struggle articulated by Agee above to even earlier practitioners of literary journalism including Stephen Crane, Abraham Cahan

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[4] Hartsock takes the post-Civil war period as a starting point based on the work of Thomas B. Connery, who's A *Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism* (1992) posits three major periods of experimentation with journalism: the post-Civil War Era, the Depression Era, and the era associated with the New Journalism, the 1960s and 70s. For more see especially Connery's preface to *Sourcebook*, "Discovering a Literary Form."

and Theodore Dreiser.[5] Joshua Roiland points out in his essay "By Any Other Name: The Case for Literary Journalism" that Hartsock's work "points out that in each of these historical periods, journalists faced an acute realization that the world was fraught (immigration, urbanization, depression, war, civil rights, et cetera) and made the epistemic determination that conventional ways of making sense of these social, cultural, and political ruptures would not do" (66). The New Journalism, then, was not "new" only because in the decades immediately preceding its emergence reporters were questioning their duties, but because reporters had a long history of responding to historical dislocations with challenges to their professional responsibilities. Then again, as Everette E. Dennis and William L. Rivers argue in their book *Other Voices: The New Journalism in America* (1974), "The important matter is that the several forms of and practices of the new journalism, misnomer or not, have coalesced at this point in time. It is quite remarkable, after all, that practices centuries old in some cases and decades old in others should suddenly appear together today, be developed along new lines, force a place for themselves, and threaten a structure of reporting that only recently seemed strong and stable" (2). In other words, even if the practices of the New Journalism appeared in earlier modes of journalistic experimentation, they did not appear together, at the same time, in such a noticeable way.[6]

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[5] Hartsock actually suggests that "Narrative literary journalism, or at least its roots, likely extends as far back as there has been the perception that an accounting of phenomena in the temporal and spatial world had value to the individual and community" and notes that Plato's "embellishment to his account of the execution of Socrates in 399 B.C.E." might qualify as an early example of narrative journalism (82).

[6] Norman Sims offers further support of this sentiment when he points out Agee's feelings at the time he was working on *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*: "The New

The second part of the terms "New Journalism" and "literary journalism" has also been the source of much debate. If what was produced by writers like Crane, Agee, and Wolfe questioned the role and responsibility of the reporter, was it journalism at all? This question foregrounds most scholarly work in the field. In the preface to their work *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (1997), Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda address the difficulty in putting their collection together, writing that "The challenge, of course, was to winnow the guest list from the thousands of potential invitees to the few dozen who made the final cut, and the key to this process was to bring some definitions to literary journalism, a profoundly fuzzy term" (13). For Kerrane and Yagoda, the works they included had to "first of all be factual," and therefore the works in their anthology were chosen based on their fidelity to the most basic journalistic norms.[7] Still, there are qualifications: "We do not mean to say that we guarantee the veracity of every statement in every in every piece in the collection. But we did disqualify works that were not, in our view, informed and animated by the central journalistic commitment to the truth (not just The Truth)" (13). Yet the difference between "truth" and "Truth" is not clearly defined, and thus circles back to the original fuzziness of the term "literary journalism." In other words, emphasizing a commitment

Journalism...seemed so coherent—writers knew they had colleagues working the same field, unlike Agee, who had felt isolated and alone at *Fortune*" (225). John Hollowell, in *Fact and Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel*, also suggests that "Although… 'fictive' techniques have been used occasionally by journalists for decades, not until the sixties have they coalesced in the unique and sophisticated style of the new journalists" (31).

[7] John Hersey, in his essay "The Legend on the License" (1986), also expressed concern about a literary journalist's fidelity to truth, writing that, first and foremost, a literary journalist must adhere to the credo: "None of this was made up" (125).

to "journalistic truth" does not provide a clear pathway out of this critical debate. In many

ways, it is attempting to understand what journalistic truth looks like that motivates the

work in this scholarly field. In a different approach to this problem, John Hellman

suggests that the new journalism is best understood not as a new form of reporting but as

a new form of fiction writing:

> new journalistic works, far from being realistically dramatized documentaries or
> even absurdist transcriptions of fact, are profoundly *transforming* literary
> experiments embodying confrontations between fact and mind...Their authors
> attempt to 'make up' or construct meaningful versions of 'news' that continually
> threaten to overwhelm consciousness...the result is a form of journalism which, in
> its most essential methods and concerns, is a genre of the new fiction (xi).

However, Hellman's insistence that the New Journalism is a new form of fiction relies

not on a fuzzy distinction but a fuzzy indistinction. As Jason Mosser points out, "Hellman

cites Robert Scholes' observation that 'fact' and 'fiction' share etymological roots, both

meaning 'to make,' and concludes that to use language to create any sort of narrative is

essentially to fictionalize...by the logic of Hellman's definition, the term 'fiction' applies

to so many forms of discourse...that it becomes useless as a term which makes

meaningful distinctions between the various forms" ("Four" 18). In collapsing

experimental works of journalism into subfields of fiction, emphasizing only the literary

aspect of literary journalism, the opportunity to derive more fine-tuned ways of

understanding innovations within the field of reporting is lost.[8]

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[8] Ronald Weber contributes an important, if rather simple, point in this particular debate.
He writes that works of New Journalism "are not fictions because the writers do not
choose to go beyond the facts or invent 'facts' to fit their purposes" (*Literature* 47). Thus
he leans more towards Kerrane and Yagoda's understanding that works of literary
journalism are not inventions of the imagination.

Coming to a definitive conclusion about what to call this body of work has proven

difficult, and many scholars circumvent the discussion by placing emphasis not on

nomenclature but on form and effect. Chris Anderson, for example, is less concerned in

his book *Style as Argument: Contemporary Literary Nonfiction* (1987) with the "larger

questions of genre, with the relationship between fiction and nonfiction, literature and

journalism" (2) that previous studies of literary nonfiction have addressed, than he is with

the "rhetorical strategies for shaping the reader's attitudes and perceptions" (2) that he

examines in works of the New Journalism. He writes that "nonfiction reportage is more

than informative: it is an effort to persuade us to attitudes, interpretations, opinions, even

actions" (2). His study offers a number of persuasive close readings, but they all work

towards shoring up the limitations New Journalists faced in documenting the events and

people of their historical moment. He writes that works of New Journalism "define their

subjects as somehow beyond words—antiverbal or nonverbal, threatening or sublime,[9]

overpowering and intense or private and intuitive—and then repeatedly call our attention

to the issue of inexplicability throughout their descriptions and expositions. A self-

consciousness about the limits of language is the structuring principle of their work" (5).

However, Anderson's argument does not move far beyond the idea of limits, and he fails

to forge any significant connections between the style of the New Journalism, the

rhetorical tropes one can see in their work, and the effects of these tropes. In other words,

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[9] Anderson's definition of the sublime is vague. For the most part, he defines the term in
the context of Longinus' *On The Sublime*, which focuses primarily on sublimity as an
elevation of style. The reemergence of the sublime as a category important to
poststructuralist philosophers like Lyotard still draws on Longinus' treatise, but also links
the sublime to the realm of the political, a link not explicitly made or explored in
Anderson's book.

Anderson does not link the rhetoric of the New Journalism to particular issues, and thus the political power and ethical imperatives of their work are only vaguely addressed. Indeed, Anderson notes that his work is not designed to accommodate an "epistemological framework for understanding the genre of nonfiction" (3). Thus while his work moves beyond vexing questions about how to categorize works of literary nonfiction, it does not offer a framework for understanding the significant cultural function of journalistic experimentation.

Phyllis Frus' work, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative* (1994) moves closer to a creation of this type of framework, but her focus is almost exclusively on the way in which texts of literary journalism can produce "reflexivity." Frus does not look at style and rhetoric independent of their effects; rather, she will "emphasize the importance of activating readers to become co-creators, rather than passive consumers of either pleasure or information" (xiv) in works by writers like Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, and Norman Mailer. For example, she values the way Mailer's 1980 work *The Executioner's Song* "acknowledges not only the process of the text's production but the importance of ownership of the means of producing narrative 'truth'" (183). In this way, Mailer creates active rather than passive consumers of narrative and this, for Frus, "may be an effective way to challenge the reification implied by most mass-cultural forms" (180). However, Frus' focus on the issues of reification and reflexivity occasionally limit her engagement with subtleties of style. For instance, she suggests that works like *In Cold Blood*, because it does not explicitly address its own means of production, "contribute[s] to the effect of transparency, and we feel we have had solutions to problems, answers to

9

questions, rather than remaining puzzled" (189). She writes that "In Capote's novel, interpretation and facts are asserted as 'the truth about the world,' and the power of the illusionary technique is not qualified by the presence of a dramatized narrator or other qualifier of the text's supposed transparency, much the way the news media or film or advertising present their images as real, not as text, because no enabling forms are visible" (189). This claim, however, overlooks the implicit gestures Capote makes throughout *In Cold Blood*—the scenic arrangement of the book, for example—that frustrate any kind of definitive critical closure. In short, Frus has the opposite problem of Anderson: she subordinates too many stylistic qualities of literary journalism to her quest for textual reflexivity.

While difficult to categorize the entire body of scholarship about the New Journalism in a definitive way, I have outlined some of its major concerns and movements above. There are critical discussions regarding nomenclature that speak to broader issues such as the origins and historical development of both the New Journalism in particular and literary journalism more generally. Sidestepping discussions of genre are those works that focus on the formal elements of a literary journalism, pointing out its characteristic features through close readings of particular texts.[10] Then there is scholarship that focuses its attention more on the effects of literary journalism than just its stylistic features, calling attention to the way practitioners of literary journalism question their own methods of reporting and thus challenge reified boundaries between

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[10] In addition to Anderson's work, see Barbara Lounsberry's *The Art of Fact: Contemporary Artists of Nonfiction* (1990). See also Tom Wolfe's "New Journalism" (1973).

reality and fantasy. All these forms of scholarship have made invaluable contributions to the field, and while I draw on them throughout the dissertation, I also expand upon them in the hopes of reconciling some of the critical threads above.

What is often overlooked in scholarship about literary journalism is the relationship between experimentation with conventional journalistic form and similar experimentations in other artistic fields. As a result, the stakes of the New Journalism's experimentations with conventional reporting have not been sufficiently mined. In order to remedy this, I position the New Journalism, specifically its innovations with journalistic form, within a broader history of avant-garde art. The agitation of mainstream journalistic practice undertaken by the New Journalism was spurred, in part, by the questioning of a foundational journalistic practice: objectivity. The authority of fact and its capacity to represent the human condition was fundamentally challenged by the New Journalists. This challenge to objectivity drove an experimentation with journalistic form that produced a deeply innovative body of work; however, these innovations are not merely formal. They also call into question the epistemological assumptions that tether journalism to a phenomenal world often assumed to be fully representable. Significantly, the challenges to objectivity posed by the New Journalists parallel the challenges to representation posed by avant-garde artists like Barnett Newman, Paul Cezanne, and Karel Appel. It is these parallels that have yet to be examined within the field of literary journalism. Thus, my dissertation situates the challenges to journalistic form undertaken by the New Journalists within a broader history of artistic experimentation and demonstrates that the significance of these experimentations with form exceeds the fields

11

in which they occur. These arguments will provide a framework for understanding not only the formal innovations of avant-garde artists, but also the epistemological consequences, and ethical imperatives, inherent in these innovations. This project links scholarly discussions of literary journalism that focus on one of these elements at the exclusion of the other. Moreover, introducing the term avant-garde, while not an effort to replace the term New Journalism or literary journalism, can contribute to the development of a broader conceptual framework within which to situate works that challenge reporting norms. The scholarly spectrum often situates literary journalism between the poles of fiction and journalism. What the term avant-garde offers is a chance to expand this spectrum, to see the experimentations undertaken by literary journalists as part of a history of art, not limited by medium, which attacks assumptions and conventions designed to discourage critical thinking.

My understanding of avant-garde art is informed by the work of Jean-Francois Lyotard. Over the course of his career, Lyotard illuminated the philosophical dimensions of artistic innovation. For Lyotard, one of the hallmarks of avant-garde experimentation is its ability to "challenge a very open set of discourses, rather than a specific artistic tradition" (Chrome and Williams 285). Lyotard values experimentation with form because it can respond to discourses beyond its own, and much of Lyotard's writing about avant-garde art establishes connections between artistic innovation and broader issues of ethics, politics, and justice. For instance, of Cezanne's work in *Mont Saint-Victoire*, Lyotard writes, "It is as if the painter no longer placed us in a spatial cube, but at the threshold of the eye, to allow us to see what is supposed to occur on a retina

12

looking at Mont Saint-Victoire—as if, in other words, the painter made us see what seeing is" (*Discourse, Figure* 197). In abandoning the spatial cube,[11] Cezanne not only challenges the dominance of representational art on a formal level but also forces the viewer to think about the origins of perception itself. Cezanne's work, and the work of other avant-garde artists of value to Lyotard, is radical in its capacity to push the boundaries of our thinking through experimentation with form. The New Journalists also participate in this process by asking questions about the role and responsibility of the reporter through their self-conscious development of an experimental journalistic aesthetic.

Modernity and the Commodification of News

While I have provided above a brief explanation of why Lyotard's theory of the avant-garde is important to a discussion of the New Journalism, a more detailed examination of the relationship between Lyotard's thinking and the thinking of the writers under study here will make clearer why his work is a foundational element of this project. Despite the varying critical perspectives on how to categorize, name and understand the effects of the New Journalism, there is a general consensus that innovations in journalism during the sixties and seventies grew out of a growing frustration with standard journalism's ability to countenance the cultural and political upheavals of its moment. Kerrane and Yagoda argue that the New Journalism was "first

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[11] This is a reference to Brunelleschi's box, an invention which made possible the transcription of any object onto a painter's canvas by, in part, restricting peripheral vision. For more on Brunelleschi's box see especially Malcolm Park's "Brunelleschi's Discovery of Perspective's 'Rule" (2013).

and foremost, a direct response to the transforming events of the era: war protests, race

riots, assassinations, and counter-cultural challenges to all proprieties" (18). There were

several conventions of journalism that were, in varying forms and to varying degrees,

challenged by New Journalists. Everette E. Dennis and William R. Rivers point out

several attitudes common in standard journalism that came under attack with the advent

of the New Journalism:

1) The journalist's aversion to blending fact and opinion, coupled with their aversion to including themselves in the article
2) The journalist's belief that description, especially applied to people, is subjective and thus taboo
3) The journalist's concern with what is usually regarded as the obvious and significant trends, events and people
4) The journalist's fear that stylistic devices will confuse and mislead the reader (16-18).

It was not only these attitudes about journalism that were challenged by reporters, but

also the stylistic conventions that implicitly supported them by demanding an

engagement with only the surface level of reality. In other words, the methods used to

create journalistic narratives supported the epistemological assumptions about what

journalism was supposed to do. Conventional reporting asked for objectivity, clean prose,

and hard news. Much newspaper writing was formulaic in that what was covered had to

address a traditional set of questions: who, what, where, when, and why. In addition to

formulas that determined what was covered, there were also formulaic methods of

presenting this information that many reporters found suffocating. John Hellman notes,

"[The New Journalists] revolted against such rigid formulas as the 'inverted pyramid' (in

which isolated facts are presented in declining order of importance)" (3). Magazine

journalism also suffered from rigid structural boundaries, even if they were more flexible

14

in comparison to newspaper writing. Harold Hayes, editor of *Esquire* from 1962-1973,

argued the following:

> The magazine article was a convention of writing, and those who were successful
> at it understood the convention in the same way that a reporter understood the
> demands of a news story. There was an anecdotal lead opening into the general
> theme of the piece; then some explanation, followed by anecdotes or examples. If
> a single individual was important to the story, some biographical material was
> included. Then there would be a further rendering of the subject and the article
> would close with an anecdote (qtd. in Dennis and Rivers 15).

These formulaic approaches to reporting made the transmission of information the

primary task of journalism. Importantly, this task was underwritten by economic

concerns, and it was these concerns that contributed to the development of one of

journalism's hallmark features: objectivity.

Brent Cunningham contends that "one of the original forces behind the shift to

objectivity in the nineteenth century was economic. To appeal to as broad an audience as

possible, first the penny press and later the new wire services gradually stripped news of

'partisan' context" (27). A narrative told through a neutral tone and supported by a

compilation of facts could reach a wide-ranging audience and thus increase the

circulation of newspapers. Furthermore, as implied in Cunningham's statement above,

the technological advancements of the mid-19th century, including the telegraph, became

intimately linked with commercial interests.[12] For instance, the cost of transmitting

information via telegraph could be managed if correspondents presented only the most

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[12]Objectivity in journalistic narratives also developed alongside scientific positivism.
Stephen Ward argues that "Journalism's movement towards traditional objectivity
matched a similar shift by science towards a stricter, 'pure' objectivity. At the same time
as journalism was moving from an informal empiricism to a strict positivism in reporting,
empirical science was embracing a scientific positivism that sought the elimination of
perspective and 'metaphysical' opinion (216).

important facts from their stories and left out their more subjective impressions. James

Carey pointed out that "the telegraph required removing the colloquial and the regional

twang from a language that would now be available everywhere…it turned the

correspondent who analyzed news into a stringer who just relayed facts; and that the high

cost of telegraphic transmission forced journalistic prose to become 'lean and

unadorned'" (211). The development of objectivity as both an attitude and stylistic

imperative in journalism can thus be attributed to economic concerns that are linked with

technological advancements.

While the appeal of objectivity as a means to commercial success emerged in the

mid-19th century, it was not until the mid-1920s that it became a part of journalism's

professional code of ethics. Stephen Ward notes the following:

> The formal recognition of objectivity as a fundamental principle goes back to the
> formulation of two major statements about ethics – the 1923 code of the
> American Society of News Editors (ASNE) and the 1926 code of Sigma Delta
> Chi, forerunner of the Society of Professional Journalists. Both documents
> enshrined objectivity as a canon of journalism and drew the distinctions that
> define traditional objectivity. The ASNE's code – the first national code –
> stressed responsibility, freedom of the press, independence, truthfulness,
> impartiality, and decency. Anything less than an objective report was 'subversive
> of a fundamental principle of the profession' (214).

In becoming an official part of the profession's code of ethics, objectivity now had a

codified moral dimension. Yet it was still tethered to its origins as a tool useful for

economic and technological advancements. Thus its moral dimension was compromised,

at the very least influenced by, commercial interests: "This objective method supported,

and had support from, the economic and technological pursuit of news. The objective

method and style fit perfectly the stress on short, quick stories and the inverted pyramid.

16

In time, it became hard to distinguish whether a newsroom rule was based on ethical

concern for objectivity, on more pragmatic concern for brevity and ease of editing, or on

both" (Ward 217). It is at this intersection of knowledge, economy, technology, and

morality that a recourse to Lyotard is both necessary and illuminating.[13] Lyotard provides

a framework for not only understanding the consequences of subverting knowledge to

economic and technological interests, but also for thinking about forms of resistance to

these interests. The avant-garde will enact the most powerful of these modes of resistance

and it is within this tradition I position the experimentation of the New Journalists.

For Lyotard, modernity is characterized by an ever-increasing interest in

processes of efficiency that lead to an increase of capital. What is both new and

frightening with respect to these developments, however, are the types of commodities

available for exchange. In *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), Lyotard argues the

following:

> The old principle that the acquisition of knowledge is indissociable from the
> training (Bildung) of minds, or even of individuals, is becoming obsolete and will
> become ever more so. The relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to
> the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to

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[13] Lyotard was not the only philosopher to query the effects of modernity. His work is in
conversation with other postmodern thinkers including Jacques Lacan and Jacques
Derrida. My privileging of Lyotard comes, however, from the privilege he gives to art in
his philosophy. As Else Budkahl notes, "Of all the 'postmodern French philosophers,'
Jean-François Lyotard is the one who has been most involved with visual art. Widely
inspired by visual artists, he, in turn, influenced their view of art and their artistic
activities in a multitude of ways. With great force, he emancipated visual art from all
ideological ties to clearly bring out its creative and experimental aspects. Consequently,
visual art has enjoyed better opportunities for crossing pre-established boundaries,
opening up new horizons, revealing the unexpected and – in new ways and on its own
terms – inspiring ethical and social thought" (par. 2). Moreover, Bill Readings argues that
Lyotard's interest in the visual arts is part of what differentiates him from philosophers
like Derrida, who Lyotard attacks for his "excessive 'textualism.'" (5). For more see
Reading's book *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (1991), especially pages 4-7.

assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume—that is, the form of value. Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange (4).

Knowledge is no longer seen as part of one's education, the "training of minds," but has instead become part of a larger system of exchange. It has become a commodity rather than an end in itself. Graham Jones notes that "Part of what [Lyotard] is suggesting...is that knowledge is viewed in terms of its capacity to be transformed into and exchanged as 'information,' a supposedly neutral form of data...which can be transferred across numerous communicational platforms (and which by extension functions increasingly as the new 'currency' of capitalism)" (136). The development of journalistic objectivity alongside growing economic and technological interests bears out Lyotard's argument. Both what was considered news and how this news was presented to readers was driven, at least in part, by commercial interests. In short, the marketplace played a role in shaping journalistic norms: "In the new objective society of the early twentieth century, traditions began to count for less. What the market economy valued was money, success, expertise, technology, and useful knowledge...The norms of objective society supported journalism's transition from partisan craft to objective profession" (Ward 224). We can read the development of objectivity in journalism alongside a broader narrative of modernity that is characterized by turning knowledge, once part of an educational process, into something shaped by concerns that compromise its value as an end in itself and make it indifferent to human need.

By the 1960s and 70s, issues relating to journalistic convention became particularly troublesome, especially in light of the rapid cultural and political changes occurring in both the United States and abroad. For instance Michael Herr, a reporter for *Esquire* during the Vietnam war who turned his experiences in Vietnam into the 1977 book *Dispatches*, talked about the limits of fact-gathering in light of his experiences as a war correspondent: "The press got all the facts (more or less); it got too many of them. But it never found a way to report meaningfully about death, which of course was really what it was all about" (212). The adherence to objectivity, to facts and neutrality, might have led to the compilation of information about Vietnam, but it could not countenance the more abstract, more intangible realities of war. Thus the standards by which conventional reporting operated had to be abandoned in search of new approaches to reporting that might be able to engage with the contingencies of experience otherwise elided by an allegiance to convention. Importantly, a commitment to the presentation of that which is resistant to familiar modes of representation is central to Lyotard's theory of the avant-garde. There is a simultaneous struggle in Lyotard's work to resist the commodification of knowledge and to engage that which is marginalized in favor of such commodification. In other words, in an environment where knowledge is a commodity, there is a marketplace imperative to vanquish doubt. Thus it is a shared resistance to exchangeable, commodifiable knowledge and a subsequent openness to the unknown that links the efforts of Lyotard's avant-garde to the New Journalists under examination here.

Sites of Resistance: Avant-Garde Art and the New Journalism

19

If modernity has brought about the commodification of knowledge, and this

commodification is facilitated by the implementation of rules and standards influenced by

commercial demands, then resistance to this process comes through experimental modes

of expression, ones that disrupt the processes by which knowledge is produced and

shared according to its use-value in the marketplace. These expressions also, as noted

above, present what is otherwise unpresentable through an adherence to convention. In

"Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable" (1991), Lyotard develops an extended

comparison between the role of photography and the role of painting.[14] He suggests that

painting's cultural function has been supplanted by photography. Once able, through the

development of linear perspectivalism, to create accurate representations of the world,

painting no longer has a clear purpose. According to Lyotard, "Once placed on the

perspectivist stage, the various components of the communities—narrative, urbanistic,

architectural, religious, ethical—were put in order under the eye of the painter, thanks to

the *costruzione legittima*" (120). He continues:

> Photography brings to its end the programme of metapolitical ordering of the
> visual and the social. It finishes it in both senses of the word: it accomplishes it,
> and it puts an end to it...One click, and the most modest citizen, as amateur or
> tourist, produces his picture, organizes his space of identification, enriches his

[14] Lyotard also creates a comparison between journalism and literature that is supposed to
be analogous to the relationship between photography and painting. He writes "This
world needs photography, but has almost no need for painting, just as it needs journalism
more than literature" ("Representation" 119). However, Lyotard gives no consideration to
the challenges to journalistic convention undertaken by the New Journalists during the
sixties and seventies. In drawing out the parallels between avant-garde art and the New
Journalism, I can shore up some of the limitations in Lyotard's own thinking regarding
the mediums he considers as potential sites for avant-garde labor. Guy Callan and James
Williams note this in their article "A Return to Jean-Francois Lyotard's *Discourse,
Figure*": "Lyotard only deals with examples of Western high culture from the Middle
Ages onwards: he does not discuss [art works from] non-Western, folk, middle-brow,
popular or commercial culture" (47).

cultural memory, shares his prospectings...Tasks whose acquisition by the apprentice painter in the studio demanded huge experience (destroy bad habits, instruct the eye, the hand, the body, the mind, raise them to a new height) are programmed into the camera thanks to the refined optical, chemical, mechanical and electronic abilities (120).

In short, "the industrial *ready-made* wins out" (121). Despite this seemingly bleak outlook, Lyotard puts forward a new task for painting, one not beholden to the traditions of linear perspective that have been replaced by the camera. If the camera can produce exact replicas of what one sees and in so doing essentially mechanize linear perspective, initially perfected through Brunelleschi's box, then painting must now present what cannot be made visible through these technologies. Lyotard contends that "painters discover that they have to present that there is something that is not presentable according to the legitimate construction. They begin to overturn the supposed 'givens' of the visible so as to make visible the fact that the visual field hides and requires invisibilities, that it does not simply belong to the eye (of the prince) but to the (wandering) mind" (125). What I will be articulating in detail over the course of this dissertation is that New Journalists, in a way remarkably similar to Lyotard's avant-garde, became responsible for reporting that which could not be supported by the conventions of their profession, conventions informed by commercial demands. Photography changed the task of painting in that it made painters responsible for the presentation of something other than just mimetic representation. In a parallel manner, the technologies that influenced journalism's stylistic conventions, conventions that limited one's capacity to engage with contingency, forced journalists to find modes of expression that did more than just fulfill a particular professional or institutional imperative. Their approach to journalism, like the

21

avant-garde's approach to painting, became exploratory. Since the "basic units of reporting [were] no longer who-what-where-when-how-and why" (Markel 256), journalists could experiment with new methods of reporting that might subsequently create for journalism a cultural function not delimited by the gathering and presenting of information, facts. Instead, the New Journalism would share with avant-garde painters a "wandering mind" that pursues as its end not knowledge but the kind of reflective thinking capable of an ethical countenancing of the unknown.

There are aspects of both Lyotard's thinking, and the thinking of the avant-garde artists about whom he writes, that are held in common by the New Journalists under consideration here. Though I have outlined some of the most relevant points above, my dissertation continues to bring these similarities into sharper focus. By exploring the intersection of seemingly disparate fields, in this case those of philosophy, painting, and journalism, the familiar conceptual frameworks of literary journalism studies can be broadened. Indeed, In her book *The Art of Fact*: *Contemporary Artists of Nonfiction* (1990), Barbara Lounsberry called for the study of literary journalism to be undertaken through more serious critical frameworks, arguing that "what is needed is serious critical attention of all kinds to this work [literary nonfiction]: formal criticism (both Russian Formalism and New Criticism), historical, biographical, cultural, structuralist and deconstructionist, reader-response criticism and feminist [criticism]" (xvi). My work begins to answer this call by employing a new critical framework in the study of journalism, one that emphasizes journalism's philosophical dimensions in ways previously obscured by the institutional boundaries of journalism scholarship. In putting

works of innovative journalism in conversation with works of avant-garde art through a critical framework emphasizing the ethical and political stakes of artistic experimentation, I hope a greater appreciation for journalism as a site for artistic experimentation might be developed and encouraged.

Chapters and Methodology

Each of my chapters examines the individual contributions of four leading figures of the New Journalism—Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, and Norman Mailer—through the lens of a relevant component of avant-garde experimentation that serves to highlight the ways each of the authors above challenge our thinking about the role and responsibility of the reporter across a number of discursive fields. While Capote, Wolfe, Didion, and Mailer produce works that are unique in their individual approach to particular journalistic norms, primarily a manipulation of conventional journalistic perspective, they are united in their efforts to illuminate experiences otherwise concealed by the traditions of their profession. My first chapter on Truman Capote uses Lyotard's theory of the differend to examine Capote's employment of both an omniscient narrator and a shaping consciousness in his re-telling of the Clutter family murder in *In Cold Blood*. The differend is a conflict between two parties that cannot be resolved because there are no rules of judgement that can be equally applied to both parties. Lyotard argues that a differend cannot be finally resolved, but that we can become aware of the fact *of* a differend through an attunement with that which is otherwise concealed by the application of a singular rule of judgment to different and non-intersecting discourses.

Our awareness of the differend can be particularly aroused through artistic innovation, and I compare Capote's use of both an omniscient narrator and a shaping consciousness in *In Cold Blood* with Karel Appel's innovation with color in works like his 1978 *Trees with Falling Leaves*. In so doing, I demonstrate how both artists force their audiences to experience incommensurability and thus become more attuned to the injustices otherwise hidden through more rigid modes of representation.

In my second chapter on Joan Didion, I employ Lyotard's theory of the figural, as outlined in his 1971 work *Discourse, Figure*, to demonstrate not only the disruptive power of Didion's use of language but also her radical use of a first-person perspective. Part of Lyotard's work in *Discourse, Figure* involves exploring the imbrication of language and vision. Lyotard claims that the intertwining of the textual and the visual, present in the aesthetics of the High Middle Ages, was undone by Renaissance perspectivalism where vision was bridled by artistic technology. Consequently, both vision and language have been flattened and anything that does not make these fields more capable of representation has been excluded. Lyotard re-invigorates the intertwining of language and vision by looking at works of avant-garde artists like Paul Cezanne. These artists violate conventions that seek the separation of the textual and the visual and in so doing engage with that which is normally marginalized for the purposes of representation. Didion's work in both *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968) and *The White Album* (1979) demonstrates a similar approach to artistic experimentation as that undertaken by the avant-garde artists above. Didion violates conventional journalistic practice not only by continuously writing in the first person but also by welcoming the

24

visual into the textual. Through a sustained analysis of Didion's use of perspective and her employment and manipulation of the white, blank space of her page, I demonstrate that Didion's work fundamentally disrupts the cognitive processes we rely on to read the news and thus belongs among other works of art that offer new ways of seeing and reading through the violation of conventions.

In my third chapter, I argue that Norman Mailer's literary nonfiction labors to keep processes of meaning-making open to the future by rejecting those stylistic conventions of journalism that seek the foreclosure of meaning. More specifically, Mailer is concerned in his nonfiction with how knowledge is acquired and memories made from the narratives of both journalism and history. Throughout Mailer's work, the limitations of conventional journalistic narratives parallel the limitations of historical narrative. This is because journalism and history assume the objects of their narratives to be fully representable and thus knowable. In his work, Mailer exposes this as a flawed assumption. What he subsequently advocates for is a type of journalistic and historical accounting capable of countenancing the changing nature of experience. Instead of seeing journalism or history as narratives attempting to document and recover, respectively, static phenomena, Mailer opens them to a futurity for which he believes they must account. This is manifested in Mailer's work through a first-person-third perspective where Mailer's authority and reliability as a documenter of reality is subject to questions that leave the final significance of the event's he documents open to the future. Mailer's openness to a future temporality will be understood in this chapter as a form of anamnesis. This term will link Mailer's work to the work of other avant-garde artists

through a shared belief, articulated through particular aesthetic choices, that one's work must inspire a disposition towards knowledge and meaning as processes rather than ends. Through an examination of *Armies of the Night* and Mailer's early boxing journalism, I demonstrate how Mailer's approach to perspective and temporality enacts an anamnesic labor in the fields of both history and journalism that exposes these narrative forms to their limitations and their possibilities.

Finally, my fourth chapter argues that Tom Wolfe, in works like *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, develops and employs a mutable, shifting textual self. He does this by continuously changing the point of view from which he reports the events about which he writes. For example, in *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test*, Wolfe moves between a first person perspective and a third-person-omniscient point of view in order to represent the experiences of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. The reader experiences Wolfe's shifting perspectives as necessary in order to engage with and understand experiences radically different from his own. When the limits of Wolfe's experience make a first-person rendering of his time with Kesey and the Pranksters ineffective, he changes perspectives in order to best countenance experiences unfamiliar to him. In so doing, he enacts a de-centering of the subject which emerges from the Enlightenment. In this chapter, I employ Lyotard's critique of the Enlightenment subject who was once the center around which language and knowledge were organized and legitimated. In works like *Just Gaming* and *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard develops a new concept of subjectivity where the subject, fragmented through the proliferation of language games, is now "a node at which different incommensurable language games intersect." (Woodward

par. 43). Importantly, Lyotard sees avant-garde art as a site for the subject's de-centering.

This chapter will position Wolfe's shifting textual self among other works of avant-garde

art that do not seek to affirm the subject's centrality, but to call this centrality into

question. This questioning is done in service of plurality; that is, a subject who is not

conceived as the axis around which knowledge and language are legitimated is better

positioned to countenance the unknown. Thus Wolfe's experimentation with the

conventional, objective perspective from which journalistic accounts are rendered

participates in a longer history of artistic experimentation that can prepare its audiences

to engage ethically with alterity.

CHAPTER 2

TRUMAN CAPOTE'S *IN COLD BLOOD* AS AVANT-GARDE GESTURE

Introduction

When William Shawn was editing the galley proofs of Truman Capote's "In Cold

Blood," set to run as a series in *The New Yorker* in the fall of 1965, he left marginal

comments that expressed concern about Capote's sourcing of particular information. In

About Town: The New Yorker and the World It Made (2000) Ben Yagoda notes that

"Next to one passage about the romantic travails of teenaged Nancy Clutter...Shawn

wrote 'd/a [discuss with author] How know? No witnesses? General problem" (347).

That I am opening my dissertation with a discussion of *In Cold Blood* is not arbitrary.

Not only did Capote's comments about the creation of a new art form, the nonfiction

novel, spark the critical conversation about the New Journalism,[15] but also the

epistemological and ethical crises within *In Cold Blood* foregrounds the problem,

articulated by William Shawn above, central to New Journalist texts: How does one

know? This question was particularly important to Shawn because, as Yagoda notes,

"*The New Yorker*...along with *Time* magazine, originated the practice of fact checking"

("Fact-Checking" par. 4). Capote's work, however, would challenge such practices and

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[15]Though Capote's claim would be disputed and, as I outlined in the introduction, the
origins of the New Journalism would become a source of continued exploration in the
field of literary journalism studies, it is nonetheless the case that the publication of *In
Cold Blood* was significant to the development of the New Journalism. Even Tom Wolfe,
who saw his own work as building the foundation for the New Journalism, acknowledges
that *In Cold Blood* gave the movement an "overwhelming momentum" ("New
Journalism" 41).

expose their limits. Indeed, Capote's work employs a number of techniques—extended

dialogue, the representation of his subjects' thinking—not associated or encouraged in

conventional journalism. The information expressed through these techniques was then

difficult to verify. Despite Capote's fact-checker at *The New Yorker* claiming "Capote

was one of the most accurate authors he had ever checked," it was nonetheless difficult to

"guarantee the accuracy of scenes and dialogue based on the statements of sources, no

matter how many hours they had been interviewed" (Yagoda, *New Yorker* 347). There is

a tension in Capote's book that stems from two impulses articulated simultaneously: to

create a factual record and to challenge the limitations of factuality. On the one hand,

Capote's work could be fact-checked and pass with flying colors; he was not "sloppy in

his details" (Yagoda, *New Yorker* 347). At the same time, because Capote's writing

employed techniques not associated with journalism, he frustrated the processes

employed in fact-checking. In so doing, Capote redefined the field of journalism, opening

it to more experimental modes of representation that could better account for material

that resists processes of verification.

  In Cold Blood tells the story of the murder of four members of the Clutter

family—Herb, the father; Bonnie, the mother; Nancy, their daughter; and Kenyon, their

son—in Holcomb, Kansas, in 1959. It also tells the story of the murderers, Perry Smith

and Richard Hickock: their capture, prosecution, and execution. Within the telling of this

story, though, Capote deals with questions about how we validate and verify experience.

When there are, as Shawn pointed out, "no witnesses," how can one write about events

that presuppose witnesses? In the case of Capote's recreation of Nancy Clutter's last

moments, the choice may have been between writing nothing about her—she was dead

by the time Capote arrived in Kansas and thus unable to be her own witness—or

recreating her final moments through a more experimental journalistic treatment. This

issue applies not only to the Clutter family, but also to their murderers. Over the course of

In Cold Blood, Capote evokes empathy for Hickock and Smith through the revelation of

information about their lives that was not given a space for presentation during their trial.

Their backgrounds and psychological profiles were deemed irrelevant in court and

witnesses intending to speak to these issues were silenced. There is an injustice Capote

dramatizes in *In Cold Blood* that arises from the conflict between particular processes of

verification and those experiences which do not conform or find expression through such

processes. What I demonstrate over the course of this chapter is not only how Capote

enacts this injustice through the simultaneous presentation of opposing perspectives, but

also how readers are meant to feel this injustice as a result of his aesthetic choices. The

first perspective in *In Cold Blood* is presented through a third-person omniscient narrator

and generally adheres to the standards by which journalism operates. This perspective

presents information that can be corroborated through official documents—including

diaries, court transcripts, etc. It was the material presented in this mode that passed *The*

New Yorker's fact-checking process and gave *In Cold Blood* its documentary appeal.[16]

Yet this perspective is never operating independently of a second perspective. The second

is what has been called in the scholarship about the New Journalism, originally by

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[16] Yagoda notes that fact checking at *The New Yorker* at the time "In Cold Blood" was
published "was mainly a matter of checking facts that pertained to dates, distances,
spelling of proper names, and the like" (par. 8).

Ronald Weber in the introduction to his collection *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*, a "shaping consciousness" ("Some Sort" 20).[17] This perspective is one that engages and represents experiences otherwise marginalized by particular standards of validation and draws on techniques not common within the field of journalism to do so. The scenic arrangement of *In Cold Blood* along with the non-intersecting perspectives above will work to shore up the limitations of journalistic convention that conceal injustices in need of recognition.

Importantly, the type of conflict Capote confronts in *In Cold Blood* is one theorized by Jean-Francois Lyotard in his 1988 work *The Differend*. Lyotard defines the differend as follows: "a differend would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments" (xi). Without a universal set of rules to govern all conflict, questions about how to fairly judge disagreements between opposing parties arise. For Lyotard, these conflicts are inevitable, but he focuses on occasions when judgment is determined according to standards that exclude the possibility of the experiences of one side of a conflict from ever being countenanced. Thus the questions raised by William Shawn in the galley proofs of *In Cold Blood*—"How know? No witnesses? General Problem"— point to a broader issue faced by the journalist who must operate under particular institutional boundaries that might delimit his opportunity to present material that cannot

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[17] Weber links this term to the "meticulousness of the reporting and the novelistic artistry of scene and characterization" ("Some Sort" 20) through which a journalist can make his presence known in works of literary journalism. What I make clearer in this chapter than Weber does in his definition of this term, though, is that the choice for a reporter to make his presence known comes from a moral imperative related to the recognition of a differend.

conform to those institutional boundaries. There are incommensurabilities, in other words, that exist between what a journalist might feel is necessary to present and what he is capable of presenting in accordance with his professional duties. What results from a differend is what Lyotard terms a "wrong." He argues that "a wrong results from the fact that the rules of the genre of discourse by which one judges are not that of the judged genre or genres of discourse" (*Differend* xi). Given that these conflicts are framed by Lyotard as inevitable since there are no all-inclusive standards by which to judge them, the wrongs they produce may never be fully resolved. Indeed, differends do not demand a search for final, ubiquitous rules of judgments. Instead, they require the continuous search for new modes of expression that might be able to both testify to the presence of differends while also seeking out better modes of expression for the countenancing of conflicting perspectives.

This search for new modes of expression that can testify to the presence of differends and also open more avenues of expression is one undertaken by Lyotard's avant-garde, and one I argue Capote undertakes in *In Cold Blood*. To sharpen my discussion of art in this chapter, I will examine avant-garde experimentation through the lens of another term of significance in Lyotard's work: gesture. Though the term will be fully defined later, for now it should be noted that the term is indicative of artistic endeavors that resist the representational techniques associated with their particular medium. In resisting pre-existing modes of representation, artistic gestures shed light on what is yet possible outside the confines of representation. This effort on the part of the artist is significant because it can shed light on injustices that stem from privileging

representational efforts at the expense of that which resists representation; in other words, artistic gestures can reveal differends. Thus the term gesture will be important in this chapter as a way to understand not only the avant-garde nature of the experimentations with journalistic form undertaken in the field of journalism by Capote, but also their effects. To this end, Lyotard's work in *Karel Appel: A Gesture of Color*, *The Differend* and *The Inhuman* will provide a framework wherein Capote's experimentation with journalistic form can have the most generative meaning.

The Differend

Lyotard's concept of the differend is grounded in a theory of language that demonstrates the fundamental incommensurability of different modes of expression. According to Lyotard, language is comprised of phrases and we employ them in myriad ways: to prescribe, to interrogate, to describe, etc.[18] Lyotard calls these different uses phrase regimes. A phrase regime not only describes different grammatical instantiations of language, but also suggests the ways in which speakers, listeners, and referents are positioned by language. Depending on the type of phrase, or its regime, the positioning of speakers, listeners and referents, and the very content of the phrase, will change. Lyotard uses the phrase *The door is open* as an example. This phrase is descriptive, and the reality of the referent within this phrase, the door, can only be determined by the invocation of another phrase: *Which door are you talking about?* This phrase is not descriptive but

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[18] A phrase is the basic unit through which people communicate. There has been some debate over the translation of this term, with writers like Geoffrey Bennington privileging the term "sentence" instead of phrase. Still, as Stuart Sim points out, "most translators of Lyotard have nevertheless opted for 'phrase'" (171).

interrogative. The answer to the interrogative is, according to Lyotard, typically

ostensive: *This one here* (*Differend* 42). While each phrase above is dependent on the

others in the flow of conversation for its meaning, none of the phrases which follow the

initial phrase, *the door is open*, can confirm the reality of the door invoked by the initial

phrase because the subsequent phrases all belong to different regimes. Thus they are

positioned differently by, and position differently, the speaker, listener, and referent.

Lyotard argues:

> We see that we can distinguish different families or regimes of phrases from one
> another, since it is impossible to convert one phrase into another without
> modifying what I will simply call the pragmatic situation of the instances I have
> just mentioned (referent, addressee, addressor). *The door is closed* is a descriptive
> phrase. In the universe it presents, the question is whether or not the door is
> closed: it is therefore governed by the criterion of truth or falsity. *Close the door*
> is a prescriptive phrase, and the question it raises hinges on the justice of the order
> given to the addressee and on the execution of the act it prescribes (*Differend* 42).

The regimes that govern descriptive and prescriptive phrases are different, as outlined by

Lyotard above, and the success of a particular phrase depends on how one understands

the regime to which it belongs. Though phrase regimes are different from one another,

they can be linked according to genre, or the ends to which they are being employed. The

regime could be one of description, and the genre could be constituted by one's desire to

know, to be just, or to be funny. Like regimes, there are rules that govern the ends to

which a linkage is made and these rules, importantly, cannot be translated from one genre

to another. Consequently, phrase regimes and the genres under which they might be

subsumed are always in conflict, always incommensurable with one another because they

are governed by particular rules and particular ends that do not serve the same purpose

across the field of language.

Yet linkages between phrases must be made; this is how communication occurs. Stuart Sim argues that phrases actually "demand linkage; even silence is regarded as a link by Lyotard, since it still invites a link to be made to it, the chain itself neither ceasing nor breaking down at such points" (171). There are occasions where successful linkages are made because agreed upon terms about *how* to link the phrases were established. However, in the absence of agreed upon rules, the privileging of one method of linking over another gives rise to the differend. Lyotard writes that "In the absence of a phrase regime or of a genre of discourse that enjoys a universal authority to decide, does not the linkage (whichever one it is) necessarily wrong the regimens or genres whose possible phrases remain unactualized?" (*Differend* xii). This problem is not merely theoretical; indeed, Lyotard argues that the issue of how to create linkages is a political one that impacts our daily experiences. Gary Browning provides the following example:

> The relations between capital and labour, for instance, in some ways are not susceptible to arbitration. A proletarian might describe her or his experience in terms of exploitation and alienation, which is not recognised by a capitalist or manager, who, in contrast, conceives of the worker as a flexible resource receiving a market rate of pay. Arbitration and compromise are neither possible nor expressible where the participants in a practice conceive of its conditions in radically different ways (52).

Each of the parties above presents their relationship to the world in non-intersecting ways. The way in which a proletariat understands his reality is fundamentally unrecognizable *as* reality by his manager. In other words, reality is not merely given; instead, "it is a state of the referent (that about which one speaks) which results from the effectuation of establishment procedures defined by a unanimously agreed-upon protocol, and from the possibility offered to anyone to recommence this effectuation as often as he or she wants" (Lyotard, *Differend* 4).

35

Establishment procedures, while they vary depending on regime and genre, are the methods employed to determine the credibility of one's claims about reality. For the context of my argument here, establishment procedures in the field of journalism might require, for instance, that one has reliable sources for the information they present to readers. Without actualizing this requirement, a journalist might risk either not having his story printed or, if it is printed, risk undermining his credibility. But establishment procedures become an instrument of oppression when their demands, the requirements for the establishment of reality, come at the expense of lived experience.

Lyotard's most well-known example of this kind of oppression involves the revisionist historian Robert Faurisson. Faurisson created impossible-to-fulfill establishment procedures for the existence of the Holocaust. He wanted to hear from eyewitnesses who could testify to the use of gas chambers. The problem is that a witness to the use of the gas chamber would have been killed by the gas chamber and therefore unable testify to his/her experience. Faurisson's criteria for establishing the reality of the Holocaust required eyewitnesses that would be impossible to produce, and given that Faurisson required eyewitnesses in order to be persuaded of the reality of the gas chambers, no other empirical evidence of their existence was considered valid for the purposes of establishing their reality. For Faurisson, then, a "lack of verification [eyewitnesses] is taken to mean lack of a referent" (Sim 203). In other words, Faurisson set up a method for the establishment of reality that was not actually invested in the establishment of reality. Rather, Faurisson sought only to confirm *his* version of reality, and he constructs a method for doing so that actively suppresses the experiences of Holocaust victims. There is a fundamental incompatibility between Faurisson's standards for proof that

the Holocaust happened and the experiences of the victims of the Holocaust, and this actively

divests Holocaust victims of a means to expression. This is the differend, a case where the

employment of one genre of language implicitly or explicitly denies or marginalizes another.

The significance of the differend to this chapter is that it points more broadly to problems

of representation and to the assumption that reality is verifiable according to one set of

standards or establishment procedures. The challenge to this assumption was a core

component of the New Journalists' aesthetic practice and was visible in their eschewing of the

traditional, objective point of view of the journalist. Ronald Weber notes that the detached

stance of traditional reporting "not only lead [the reporter] to being less than candid with the

reader, but to positively misinforming him; it allowed the journalist to print what he believes

to be false because someone in authority said it...in such cases it's the conventions of

journalism that are served, not the reporter's commitment to truth" ("Some Sort" 18). The

expectation of objectivity prevented reporters from communicating that which could not be

explicitly verified, but not all experiences can be verified. This is the problem illuminated by

Lyotard's theory of the differend. Bill Readings, in *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics*

(1991), suggests the following:

> The sufferers in the gas chambers are victims of the double bind imposed by a representable law: to have seen a gas chamber work is to be dead, unable to speak of the wrong one has suffered...This is a strong example of the injustice of reality, of the hegemony accorded to the cognitive genre by the demand for representable law, the insistence that justice can be justified, that law can be become the referent of description, an object of cognition (122).

Making the Holocaust an object of cognition is to assume and then demand it to be fully

represented through the presentation of evidence that adheres to the genre of cognition. But

the Holocaust is not fully representable in these terms; the experience of Holocaust victims

supersedes them. The question of what is to be done regarding the above conflict is what drives *The Differend*: "Given 1) the impossibility of avoiding conflicts...and 2) the absence of a universal genre of discourse to regulate them (or, if you prefer, the inevitable partiality of a judge): to find, if not what can legitimate good judgment (the 'good' linkage [between phrases]), then at least how to save the honor of thinking" (Lyotard xii). To save the honor of thinking means to preserve the moment before a linkage is made in order to allow a differend to emerge, to be felt, before it becomes concealed through the application of generic rules. Thus when the New Journalists rejected objectivity they left open the possibility for a differend to emerge and be felt by their reading audience.

Avant-Garde Experimentation and the Feeling of the Differend

Feeling is an important touchstone for Lyotard's thinking about the differend. The differend is not disclosed by a cognitive recognition of conflicting genres but by a feeling that "one cannot find the words." (*Differend* 13) There is a pain, a feeling of injustice, which signals the differend. This feeling of pain is akin to an experience of the sublime, and the sublime plays a significant role in Lyotard's thinking about the differend. Indeed Herman Parret, in his preface to *Karel Appel*: *A Gesture of Color* (2009), suggests that Lyotard "reformulates the Kantian sublime as the feeling of a fundamental differend" (18). In an experience of the sublime one feels a painful pleasure as the imagination attempts to become attuned with reason.[19] Lyotard writes "The sublime is not a pleasure, it is a pleasure of pain: we fail to present the absolute, and that is a displeasure, but we know that we have to present

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[19] For Lyotard's full reading of the sublime and his re-visiting of the Kantian sublime see Lyotard's *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1994).

it, that the faculty of feeling or imagining is called on to bring about the sensible (the image). To present what reason can conceive, and even if it cannot manage to do this, and we suffer from this, a pure pleasure is felt from this tension" ("Representation" 126). Though we cannot present the absolute and experience pain as a result, we nonetheless strive to do so, and our efforts towards presentation are pleasurable. The pleasurable pain which stems from the demand to present the unpresentable is the feeling which signals the differend, and it is this feeling to which literature, politics, and philosophy must respond. Lyotard writes:

> In the differend, something 'asks' to be put into phrases, and suffers from the wrong of not being able to be put into phrases right away. This is when human beings endowed with language who thought they could use language as an instrument of communication learn through the feeling of pain which accompanies silence... that they are summoned by language, not to augment to their profit the quantity of information communicable through existing idioms, but to recognize that what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist (*Differend* 13).

What remains to be phrased in the differend are experiences that cannot be represented according to the conventional rules that govern the forming and linking of phrases. In the case of the differend described above, what remained to be phrased were the experiences of Holocaust victims denied through Faurisson's demand for empirical evidence of the gas chambers. If a differend is to be resolved, one must respond to the feelings aroused by the differend by striving to produce new idioms that shore up the limitations inherent in systems which rely on representation. By arguing that one can bear witness to the differend by finding idioms for it, Lyotard endorses a form of experimentation that is inflected with an ethical imperative. During the tumultuous middle years of the twentieth century, journalists realized, as I argued in the introduction, that the standards of their

39

professional actively prevented them from communicating their experiences and the

experiences of others. Reporting on events such as Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement,

and the assassination of John F. Kennedy demanded another form of journalism, one that

was not beholden to the impersonal transmission of information. The conflict between the

standards of the profession and the experiences of reporters is representative of the

clashing of phrases Lyotard argues results in the differend. Moreover, when journalists

began challenging the standards of detachment and objectivity in their reporting, they

were creating a new language, a new journalism, in Lyotard's words, "new idioms," that

could communicate those things otherwise concealed by institutional demands. In sum,

the challenge to objectivity posed by the New Journalists drove experimentation with

journalistic form, particularly the manipulation of point of view, and resulted in a form of

journalism that could better countenance the contingencies of lived experience otherwise

concealed by the demands of impersonal reporting. This type of experimentation has a

privileged position in Lyotard's work, and he values avant-garde art for its capacity to

expose, through experimentation with form, what remains to be phrased.

Working as an avant-garde artist means one works in a space not determined by

rules that establish and delineate genres. At the time he embarked upon the story of a

multiple murder, Capote believed that nothing yet had been written which approached

what he termed "the nonfiction novel."[20] After *In Cold Blood* was published, Capote

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[20]Capote distanced himself from most other practitioners of literary journalism at the
time. He explains the differences between his work and the work of people like James
Breslin, Tom Wolfe and Oscar Lewis in his interview with George Plimpton. See
"Truman Capote: An Interview" in *The Reporter As Artist: A Look at the New Journalism
Controversy* (1966).

spoke openly about the unique nature of his work: "If I sound querulous or arrogant about this [the idea that *In Cold Blood* was the first nonfiction novel], it's not only that I have to protect my child, but that I truly don't believe anything like it exists in the history of journalism" (Capote 1966). Capote felt his work had forged a new path in the field of journalism. This is underscored by the fact that when Capote began work on *In Cold Blood*, he had no clear sense of what he was doing. While he believed journalism had the potential to foster new art forms, he had no definitive sense about how a nonfiction novel should be shaped, particularly because when he began reporting the story of the Clutter murder, no arrests had been made. In other words, he did not know if there was anything to write. To write without rules is to place oneself and one's work in danger, the danger of producing nothing. "Nothing" here does not mean a physical nothingness; rather, it refers to the idea that in approaching an artistic endeavor without a sense of what the final product will be, the artist sets his work on the edge of an abyss. The possibility that Capote would go to Kansas and produce nothing was distinct. Lyotard suggests most artistic programs operate on the assumption that something will always happen, a work will always be produced, because they follow rules that guarantee linkage, or the continuation of a particular artistic tradition. In "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" Lyotard argues that "What all intellectual disciplines and institutions presuppose is that not everything has been said, written down, or recorded, that words already heard or pronounced are not the last words. 'After' a sentence, 'after' a colour, comes another sentence, another colour. One doesn't know which, but one thinks one knows if one relies on the rules that permit one sentence to link up with another, one colour with another"

(91). The avant-garde artist, however, works in the space of the differend where linkage is *not* guaranteed and generic boundaries are suspended. For Lyotard, this space is a "*pagus*, a border zone where genres of discourse enter into conflict over the mode of linking...the *Heim* [home] is a zone in which the differend between genres of discourse is suspended. An 'internal' peace is made through narratives that accredit the community of proper names as they accredit themselves" (*Differend* 151). By working in a space of conflict rather than a space of "home," a space where the differend is suspended in favor of linkage, the avant-garde artist sacrifices not only the very possibility of artistic production, but also attempts to make visible that which is otherwise lost or concealed in the name of linkage.

For Capote, *In Cold Blood* had no real predecessors, and thus his writing of the book occurred in the zone of conflict between genres wherein the differend resides. Facing the blank canvas or the blank page without the comfort of a particular artistic program is the misery of the avant-garde artist who must ask at every turn "and what now?" ("Sublime" 92). This question was particularly significant for Capote not only at the beginning of his work on *In Cold Blood* but also throughout. Capote had to wait through years of legal appeals before he was able to finish the book. He acknowledged that "it is true that I was in the peculiar situation of being involved in a slowly developing situation. I never knew until the events were well along whether a book was going to be possible. There was always the choice, after all, of whether to stop or go on" (Capote 1966). Of course, Capote chose to go on. By working in the pagus, the borderland between genres wherein the differend resides, which Lyotard also refers to as a war zone,

Capote relinquishes full control over the development and reception of his work and offers to the reader the gesture of the avant-garde.

Karel Appel's Avant-Garde Gesture

Earlier in this chapter I noted the term gesture would signify, in part, artistic endeavors that resist the representational techniques associated with their medium. But the term is more complex. In "Gesture and Commentary" Lyotard offers a brief explanation of what the term gesture means. Gesture is an artist's "way of being, toward space, color, tone and so on" (74). This "way of being" embodied in the gesture reflects a particular stance of the avant-garde artist toward his work, and Lyotard uses Karel Appel's relationship with color to further illuminate the stance of the avant-garde. In *Karel Appel: A Gesture of Colour*, Lyotard creates a dialogue between Thought and Color. Thought and Color come to stand, respectively, for the pull felt by an artist between the powers of representation and the freedom from representative constraints. When Color wonders whether it could be "without frame, without/circumscription, spread out like nothing" (112), Thought says: "But even so...this impalpable Great Color, I will be able to rediscover/ its tone from coloured objects. I can/ easily rediscover the key from the/ tones of the melody. I will easily rediscover it, for example, by testing/ local colours that are out of tune with the dominant tone under which all visible tones are arranged" (115). Color wonders about its possibilities, its potential to be something outside of its role within the framework of a painting, but Thought promises to tame color's wonderings, to uncover in its abstraction a purpose, like uncovering the key from the tones of a melody. Thought resides in the Heim discussed above, the Home where the

43

potential for conflict is suspended in favor of linkage, or particular ends; here the ends are

recognition. Color goes on to suggest to Thought that colors are not impermeable: "They

are by no means in a fixed state/It is the mind that/neglects to the point of forgetting

their/chromatic inconsistency because it is/satisfied with identifying objects that they

colour/...It [thought] takes hold of a coloured garment as if it were an identity card./ One

says yellow as one says rectangular, and/green as one says leaf...It makes recognition

possible./This is not seeing,/it is the thought of seeing,/which can only recognize" (*Karel

Appel* 119). The "thought of seeing" is recognition, or the uninterrupted process whereby,

in this case, colors are inseparable from the objects associated with them: green leaf (see

figure 1). Approaching color in this way allows for recognition, but prevents seeing.

Seeing would take place before recognition, and Appel's gesture as an avant-garde artist

allows one to experience color as a material event separated from its role in the process of

recognition.

It is important to point out that Appel's work does not simply avoid representation

or use color in purposefully deceiving ways. His work is not mere abstraction. This

would only be an opportunity for thought to grapple with abstraction in the hope of

taming it, by "testing/ local colours that are out of tune with the dominant tone under

which all visible tones are arranged" (*Karel Appel* 118). Thought must be disarmed, not

just challenged, in order for color to be experienced before it is employed in the service

of recognition. Lyotard writes of Appel's work that a viewer can:

> Recognize a fish, a shore, a windmill, face, storm in the paintings: these vestiges
> are there so that he [Appel] may say there has been violence. If one purely and
> simply removes them, like the Americans and Parisians did in the 50s, one will be
> made to *forget*…The reason, on the support and in the title, for the persistence of

a 'subject,' even in tatters, is not the intention to scandalize the too civilized eye [which would be pure abstraction] but the conviction that, like an anamnesis, the work towards matter-colour does not finish traversing the appearing chromatisms (*Karel Appel* 75).
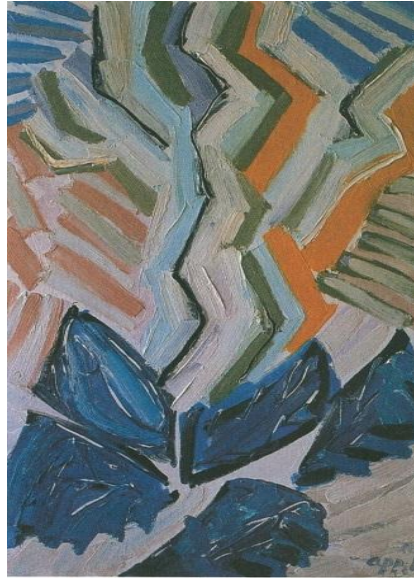
Figure 1. Karel Appel. Trees with Falling Leaves

Abstraction carries with it the potential for thought to forget, to be "let off the hook," by forms that can be written off by cognition as purely unrecognizable. What Lyotard sees in Appel's work is that while forms might be initially recognizable, Appel's application of color to these forms places cognition at risk.

Appel's *Trees with Falling Leaves* exemplifies the arguments above. The title of this painting along with the forms on the canvas spark in the viewer a moment of recognition. But the colors on the canvas challenge the viewer's capacity to fully cognize the image of a tree with falling leaves. What might first be recognized as a leaf, and what the title promises to present as a leaf, is blue and black, like a bruise. Thick painted lines of what might be a tree and its branches are various shades of orange, blue, and mauve.

Color seems to interrupt Appel's representational efforts, and the viewer subsequently

struggles to make the image in front of him fit completely with the Idea of a tree. The

sublime is a touchstone here. The sublime is not the obliteration of reason, but the

heightening of our awareness of reason's powers through our striving to present the

absolute, or that which is unpresentable. Lyotard writes of Appel's work, "The

understanding feels itself assailed by an *excess of presence* that comes from this deeper

motive. It can neither distance itself nor orient itself. It is as if colours burst on the scene

to prevent the understanding from organizing them" (31). Color prevents the

understanding from organizing the scattered forms in *Trees with Falling Leaves* and the

mind is caught between orientation and abstraction. This movement of the mind between

orientation and abstraction is reflection, and it is the type of thinking that labors without

end. It is also the effect achieved by the avant-garde artist:

> The thinking to which the artist makes appeal when he calls for us…is not the
> thinking that knows or wants, but the thinking that, regardless of what it may do,
> is affected by what it does, that feels itself as having pleasure or displeasure, or
> both at the same time (as is the case with the sublime, as we know). And this
> affection happens immediately, i.e. without being relayed *through the
> consideration* of an end, of a practical, empirical or pure interest, or through
> concept (*Karel Appel* 191).

When prompted to think according to particular ends one is not really thinking, but only

working through the process of applying concepts to phenomenal presentations. Avant-

garde art offers an entry point into a form of thinking not compelled by concepts, but by

the feeling that one is presented with something he cannot fully cognize. This feeling is a

painful pleasure—the touchstone for the emergence of a differend. In addition to evoking

the feeling of a painful pleasure, Appel's artistic gesture further bears witness to the

possibilities of the differend because his use of color "leaves in the visible, *in act*, the traces of what matter-colour *can still do*" (*Karel Appel* 201, emphasis original). By using color to privilege neither pure abstraction nor representation, Appel leaves traces of color's possibilities. In other words, within the forms of Appel's work that are recognizable there is a trace, through color, of what color is yet capable of becoming. What I now argue is that Capote's experimentation with journalistic form, like Appel's work with color, offers to the reader the gesture of the avant-garde. Capote employs both documentation and figuration to reveal that which cannot be presented by the privileging of one discursive field over the other. Moreover, his experimentation with conventional reporting was created out of a necessity to bear witness and evokes the kind of reflective thinking necessary for the redressing of a differend.

<div align="center">

In Cold Blood as Avant-Garde Gesture

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Before examining *In Cold Blood*, it is important to acknowledge that it was not Capote's first work of literary journalism. Having started his career at the *New Yorker*, Capote published several works of nonfiction in the years prior to the publication of *In Cold Blood*. However, *In Cold Blood* stands out among Capote's works of nonfiction and is most exemplary of avant-garde experimentation.[21] His two most well-known pieces of reportage to have been published before *In Cold Blood* were *The Muses are Heard* (1956) and a profile of Marlon Brando entitled "The Duke in His Domain" (1957). In *The Muses*

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[21]John Waldmeir importantly notes that in his preface to *The Dogs Bark*, Capote distances himself from some of his earlier works, including his works of nonfiction. See "Religion and Style in *The Dogs Bark* and *Music for Chameleons"* in *The Critical Response to Truman Capote*, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir and John C. Waldmeir (1974).

are Heard, Capote followed the production of *Porgy and Bess* to Russia where the company performed in Leningrad in 1955. Though *Muses* was Capote's first long-form piece of nonfiction, it is a much more contrived work of reportage than *In Cold Blood*. Capote embarked on his project in *Muses* with a clear goal in mind: to write a work of nonfiction that would read like a "brief comic novel" (Clarke 291). Capote applies the technique of the comic novel to his experiences with the company of *Porgy and Bess* in order to achieve a particular effect: "I wanted it to be very Russian, not in the sense of being reminiscent of Russian writing, but rather of some Czarist objet, a Faberge contrivance, one of his music books, say, that trembled with some glittering, precise, mischievous melody" (qtd. in Clarke 291). Where *In Cold Blood* began without an end in mind, *Muses* did the opposite. Capote precisely and carefully executed his aesthetic vision of *Muses*, and its reception by critics mirrored the terms in which it was written. In his biography of Capote, Gerald Clark notes that "critics...were almost unanimous in their praise, regarding it as Truman did, as an amusing bauble" (295). In his introduction to *The Critical Response to Truman Capote,* Joseph Waldmeir accounts for similar critical responses to *Muses*: "the anonymous reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* calls it frothy, superficial" (26). Capote's sense of direction in *Muses*, informed by the conventions of the comic novel, shaped not only the form his recounting of the *Porgy and Bess* production took but also how the book was received. *Muses* stirred decidedly less controversy than *In Cold Blood* because its purpose was clearly delineated in its aesthetic.

Similarly, in "The Duke and his Domain" Capote approaches reportage with a

48

clear sense of direction. After the success of *Muses*, Capote took on what he termed a bet

with then editor of *The New Yorker* William Shawn. Capote, still developing his belief

that journalism could lend itself to a new art form, suggested to Shawn that he could turn

"the most banal thing in journalism" (*Capote* 99), the celebrity interview, into something

more. His choice to interview Marlon Brando was not random, unlike his catching of the

blurb about the Clutter murders in the *New York Times* two years later. Robert Long

importantly notes that "in the mid-1950s there was no one in the performing arts more

talked about, more imitated, and more exciting to the public than Brando; and a rare

interview with him by Capote would be certain to attract attention, as *The New

Yorker*….would surely have known" (70). Capote's choice to interview Brando was

deliberately made not only because it would attract readers to the *New Yorker*, but

because Brando's persona at the time made writing a profile about him particularly

appealing. Brando's popularity was often based on the "dangerous mystique…[that]

fueled the early years of [his] stardom." (Long 70). Thus Capote's goal in the interview

was to reveal an opposing portrait of Brando, one that would complicate the public

persona he had developed. To execute his vision of the profile, Capote needed Brando to

forget he was talking to a reporter so Brando would reveal to him the other side of his

persona, one that was thus far protected from the media. In order to do this, Capote told

Brando wildly embellished stories of his own troubled childhood. Believing then that he

and Capote were friends, Brando "falls under Capote's spell" such that Capote "gets

what he wants—an ample account of Brando's insecurities, and tales of a father who had

shown no interest in him and an adored mother who became a slave to alcohol" (Long

70). Capote uses this material to craft a devastating portrait of Brando, one which Brando attempted at length to prevent Capote from publishing. Furthermore, Capote's methods for obtaining the material he would use to mold his portrait of Brando was likened to "a set up [on the part of Capote]…it was written to wound" (Long 71). Capote's interactions with Brando were in a sense scripted, molded by Capote such that he could obtain the information he needed to create a portrait of Brando that would oppose his public persona. The nonfiction written by Capote before *In Cold Blood* reveals little of the avant-garde gesture. It was more calculating and determinate, as in his application of the techniques of the comic novel to his experiences of traveling with the company of *Porgy and Bess*. Furthermore, Capote was often in full control of the narrative he was shaping, and the way in which he gained access to documentary material, as in his interview with Brando. While his profile of Brando may have been well-written, it did not fundamentally challenge journalistic form. It remained "a character study—a genre piece" (Hicks 170).

In Cold Blood, however, is a departure from these works. As I noted earlier, Capote's stance in beginning his work on the Clutter murder was entirely open. Capote started reporting the case before the arrest and trial of the accused killers Dick Hickock and Perry Smith. Thus Capote could neither know the story that would eventually unfold nor the exact form his reporting would take. Kenneth Reed notes that "the outcome of the police investigation, like the outcome of Capote's own research into the case, was somewhat blindly and open-endedly undertaken" (112). Moreover, Capote was not particularly convinced that the Clutter murder was a story worth pursuing. Both William

Shawn and Capote knew that a profile of Marlon Brando would attract readers to the *New Yorker*, but Capote's undertaking of the Clutter murder was less convincing. Of his initial encounter with the story of the murder Capote said, "There was nothing really exceptional about it; one reads items concerning multiple murders many times in the course of a year" (Capote 1966). While he did feel a multiple murder could offer the scope he needed to write a novel-length work, and that murder was not a theme of which people grew tired, Capote's decision to travel to Kansas was less a definitive choice than a reflection of his willingness to face the misery of the blank canvas that, as I argued earlier, is particular to the avant-garde artist. When he embarked on his trip, Capote said only "Why not pack up and go to Kansas and see what happens?" (Capote 1966). This openness towards possibility is not only reflected in Capote's attitude regarding his undertaking of the Clutter murder, but also in the formal composition of the book.

Capote's book, like Appel's painting, does not privilege representation over abstraction or vice versa. Instead, the story is told from two perspectives simultaneously. The first perspective of the story represents the ordinary approach to reporting and gives the detailed, factual account of the Clutter family murder from a detached, impersonal point of view. The reader gets the facts of the case and much of this comes through Capote's use of official documents. The use of official records was a particular hallmark of conventional reporting. John Hellman notes that journalism's reliance on official sources produces an "assumed perspective of objectivity" (3). The use of official sources created the sense that what the reporter was writing could be externally verified and was thus objectively true. As a reporter Capote was meticulous, and the material he was able

to gather using reportorial techniques lends the book its documentary feel. Donald Pizer

suggests that Capote is meant at these moments to appear as an "impartial chronicler" of

the events and conversations surrounding the case, and that the themes which are derived

from these moments in the text "appear inseparable from the 'truth' of reportage" (214).

This is a significant insight into Capote's use of official documents in the construction of

his narrative. It is not only that these documents verify the occurrence of the events, but

also that they seem to verify the thematic content of the events. As Pizer notes, the

themes seem "inseparable" from the "truth" of reportage. For example, Capote includes

part of the actual autopsy report which states that all four members of the Clutter family

suffered from "severe traumas to the brain and vital cranial structures inflicted by a

shotgun" (ICB 280), and the last part of Perry Smith's confession to police where he

details the prolonged suffering of the Clutter family and ultimately admits that the

Clutter's were murdered for "between forty and fifty dollars" (246). There is no

commentary or explanation that follows these moments in the book. They are some of the

many incontrovertible facts of the case, facts developed through the presentation to the

reader of official records. Moreover, Capote notably avoids the first person throughout

the book. Capote felt that using the first person was an intrusion into the narrative, and

avoiding the first person was a technique common among traditional reporters. It

produced the feeling that what was being reported was coming from an all-seeing but

invisible "I" and was thus reliable: "Impersonal journalism implied that detachment was

accuracy, that whatever was stripped of individual feeling and judgment was therefore to

be trusted and relied upon" (Weber, *Literature* 23). Capote's avoidance of the first

person in combination with his extensive use of official documents develops important thematic content. In particular, these formal elements of the text suggest a theme that underscores one of the meanings of Capote's book title, that Perry Smith and Dick Hickock committed the Clutter murders in cold blood or without reason. The interpretive insights here are inseparable from Capote's employment of official documents and his refusal to use the first person. In combination, these elements of the text seem to reveal the objective, singular truth that the Clutter murder happened without cause.

However, there is another perspective in the book. This perspective is the shaping consciousness, and it develops something not verifiable according to official records or any objective truth: namely, that Perry Smith and Dick Hickock are as deserving of the reader's sympathy as their victims. What Capote does by developing an alternate but co-present perspective is present what is unpresentable according to the conventional standards of reporting. To develop the reader's sympathy for the killers, and shed light on the injustices he felt occurred during their trial, Capote cannot rely solely on documentation. By this I mean that Capote cannot rely only on the traditional techniques employed by journalists, such as using official documents to source information, as a means to tell the story of the Clutter murder. As I outlined earlier in this chapter, a presentation of reality according to only one set of rules, one set of establishment procedures, inevitably prevents an engagement with experiences that cannot be countenanced by such procedures. This is the predicament of the differend, and it is one Capote confronts in *In Cold Blood*. Thus the second perspective of the book presents reality not according to familiar journalistic standards of objectivity; instead, the second

perspective, the shaping consciousness introduced at the beginning of this chapter, is one that presents the Clutter murders through the presentation of experiences resistant to the processes of verification that underwrite the documentary impulse of the first perspective. Capote's shaping consciousness is often at odds with the perspective developed through the use of official documents, and the reader is made to feel the tension between the two as the narrative progresses. Like the viewer's simultaneous recognition and non-recognition of the figures in *A Tree with Falling Leaves*, the reader of Capote's text is moved between documentation and figuration.

One of the ways in which Capote's shaping consciousness develops is through the arrangement of his narrative; he manipulates the timeline of the murder in order to present some of the more intangible traumas which shaped Smith and Hickock and contributed to their actions the night they killed the Clutter family. The full details of the murder, some of which I presented above, are not actually made available to the reader until more than halfway through the book when Capote finally presents Perry Smith's full confession of the crime. The delay in this presentation affords readers a chance to gain an intimacy with the killers, particularly Smith, before they are presented with the crime's particularities. The first section of Capote's book takes readers through the Clutters' last day before they are murdered. Simultaneously, Capote takes readers through the preparations made by the killers on the same day. This movement between killers and their unknowing victims ends with Smith and Hickock driving slowly down the driveway of the Clutter house on the night of the murder. But the narrative here ends abruptly: "Presently, the car crept forward" (57). This is the last line before the next section of the

54

book which begins the morning the bodies are found. Readers are left wondering what exactly happened between the Clutters and their killers in the interim. The end of this first section of the book is like the moment before a linkage is made between heterogeneous genres of language. By the time *In Cold Blood* was published, readers would assume they had some knowledge of what happened between the victims and their murderers. The case had been solved and the murderers put to death. Linking the moments of the crime together had not only happened, but also had been confirmed through guilty verdicts for both men. This is the kind of linkage the omniscient narrator recounts through the presentation of official documents.

However, Capote interrupts this process by halting the narrative of the crime, delaying the process of linking in the moments before it happens such that he can create a new linkage between the moments *before* the Clutters were killed and the moment of their actual death. Lyotard's argument that Appel's use of color prevents recognition is relevant here. An experience of color is normally inseparable from the process of cognizing the object which the color colors: green leaf. Yet Appel's use of color allows for one to experience color apart from its normal use in the processes of cognition. Lyotard frames his discussion of Appel in terms that indicate the importance of delay or interruption: "Appel postpones the proper end of painting by splashing drops of colour on them, by defiling them" (*Karel Appel* 155). Lyotard compares the "proper end" of painting to a banker who credits an account in full: the transaction between painter and canvas is normally complete and ready to be cognized when the painter finishes painting. But Appel's brushstroke, his "splashing of color," undoes the proper end of painting.

Lyotard writes that "one must not leave to the instruments of painting the time to accomplish the reconciliatory task" (71). Appel's splashing of color creates "thick gushes of paint...in thick coats" (*Karel Appel* 71) such that paint and brush can no longer be used to reconcile a phenomenal object with its painterly representation. There are traces of the representational in Appel's work, but his use of color and the texture of his paint delay the processes we normally use to bring different elements of a painting together such that they create a cognizable image. Capote's manipulation of the murder's timeline also disarms cognition. As I mentioned above, because Capote's work was published after Smith and Hickock were put to death, there was an assumption that the evidence of the crime led only to one conclusion: Smith and Hickock were cold-blooded killers. By interrupting this narrative, Capote creates an entryway into a kind of thinking antagonistic to the notion that there is only one way to understand what happened the night the Clutters were killed.[22] David Galloway suggests that manipulating the timeline of the Clutter murder was a radical departure from techniques associated with conventional modes of reporting: "Structurally…*In Cold Blood* departs from the linear mode of documentary reporting….such intrusions and overt manipulations of point-of-view are hostile to documentary" (148). Capote's hostility towards documentary reflects the necessity of challenging conclusions drawn from the book's own documentary impulses. These impulses are the ones underwritten by the conventions of journalism—

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[22] In "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," Lyotard argues that one of the tasks of the avant-garde is "undoing the presumption of the mind with respect to time" (107). This task is important as Lyotard argues that conceptions of time as uninterrupted forward progress "conforms to the metaphysics of capital, which is a technology of time" (107). For more see Lyotard's "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (1988).

objectivity, the use of authenticated records—and supported through the third-person

omniscience of the book's first perspective. Moreover, this more conventional

journalistic material leads the reader to believe what has already been confirmed by the

courts: the Clutters were murdered in cold blood. However, Capote's manipulation of the

timeline of the murder, like Appel's defilement of painting's "proper end" through his

splashing of paint, challenges how the reader engages with the book's documentary

material. Delaying the details of the murder, many of which are supported by official

records, postpones one's ability to draw a definitive conclusion about the cold-

bloodedness of the killers. More specifically, between the moment before their death and

the moment of their death, Capote offers to readers a glimpse into the life Perry Smith,

one of the killers, for whom Capote had the most sympathy.[23]

The portrait Capote creates of Smith comes to embody the conflict between

representation and figuration that informs the movement of Capote's narrative and from

which readers derive a sense of sympathy for him. Smith lives in a world situated

between fantasy and reality. In his first introduction to the reader, Smith is perusing

magazines and dreaming of places he could live free of social and economic pressures.

He thinks of striking it rich by digging for gold in the Sierra Madre: "Sierra Madre meant

gold, meant *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, a movie he had seen eight times" (15). Smith

immediately moves from reality to fantasy here, from Sierra Madre as a geographically

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[23]This is not to suggest that Capote does not offer a portrait of Hickock that elicits
sympathy. Diana Trilling offers an insightful reading of both Hickock and his family. See
Diana Trilling's "Capote's Crime and Punishment" in *The Critical Response to Truman
Capote* (1999). However, on the whole, Capote's attention in the book is focused
primarily on Smith.

located place to the Sierra Madre as it appears in a film. For Smith there is no difference between the two, and he becomes frustrated when Hickock, whom Smith describes as "practical Dick," reminds Smith that in the movie everyone ends up "nuts" and that "when they got the gold—remember, a big wind came along and blew it away" (15). Smith moves freely between reality and fantasy and remains unable to conceive of the difference between the two. Importantly, Smith's inability to conceive of a difference between reality and fantasy is not stubbornness or mere refusal but a coping mechanism Smith develops as a way to deal with childhood traumas.

Smith's mother and father separated when he was young, and though he lived with his mother for a few years, her addiction to alcohol eventually made her unable to care for her children. Smith and his siblings are sent to an orphanage run by nuns, "shrouded disciplinarians who whipped him for wetting the bed" (93). The abuse he endures at the hands of a particular nun forces him to create an alternate reality, one where he is freed from the abuse:

> It was after one of these beatings, one he could never forget ["She woke me up. She had a flashlight, and she hit me with it. Hit me and hit me. And when the flashlight broke, she went on hitting me in the dark"], that the parrot appeared, arrived while he slept, a bird "taller than Jesus, yellow like a sunflower," a warrior-angel who blinded the nuns with its beak, fed upon their eyes, slaughtered them as they 'pleaded for mercy,' then so gently lifted him, enfolded him, winged him away to 'paradise.' As the years went by, the particular torments from which the bird delivered him altered…but the parrot remained" (93).

Whenever Smith is physically or emotionally threatened, the parrot who rescued him from the abuse he endured at the hands of the nun reappears. The parrot is Smith's coping mechanism, and the bird takes Smith away from the brutality of his existence "to a paradise that in one version was merely 'a feeling,' a sense of power, of unassailable

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superiority—sensations that in another version were transposed into 'A real place. Like out of a movie'" (93). Like the opening scene where readers are introduced to Smith, here again Smith cannot separate a "real" place from a place "in a movie." In the context of his attempts to escape suffering, reality and fantasy become blurred. Thus the Sierra Madre as a real place and the Sierra Madre as it appears in film are not usefully differentiated for Smith because thus far the circumstances of his life have been based on the necessary and comforting blurring of reality and fantasy. Indeed, Smith "does not abide" by "anyone's ridiculing the parrot" (92-3) because for Smith the bird, despite the impossibility of its actualization, is real.

In addition to his inability to conceive reality and fantasy as different, Smith's physical body remains irresolvably double. When Capote first introduces Smith, in the scene above when he contemplates Cozumel, Smith is seated. As such, he "seemed more than a normal-sized man, with the shoulders, the arms, the thick, crouching torso of a weightlifter" (15). But Smith's appearance while seated is deceiving. Capote notes that "When he stood up, he was not taller than a twelve year old child, and suddenly looked, strutting on stunted legs that seemed grotesquely inadequate to the grown-up bulk they supported, not like a well-built truck driver but like a retired jockey, overblown and muscle-bound" (15). Smith's character, including his appearance, functions as a mirror to Capote's narrative. From one perspective, Smith's appearance is intimidating; he is large, muscular, and appears capable of inflicting physical harm. But observed in another way, Smith becomes child-like, diminutive. In a similar sense, when reading the documentary elements of Capote's narrative Smith is only a cold-blooded killer. But the alternate, co-

present perspective of the book allows for the possibility that Smith is not *just* a cold-blooded killer, that he is too complex for a label that confirms only that which is seen from a singular vantage point. Capote presents these irreconcilable elements of Smith's life in the moments between the end of the book's first section, "The Last to See Them Alive," and Smith's eventual confession in the third part of the book entitled "Answers."[24] Thus by the time readers are confronted with what happened during the last moments of the Clutters' lives, there is a developed sense of sympathy for Smith.

Indeed, after Smith's confession to the murder ends, Capote turns to the thoughts of Alvin Dewey, the lead detective for the Kansas Bureau of Investigation who handled the case. Dewey remembers that "It had been his ambition to learn 'exactly what happened in that house that night…But the confessions, though they answered the how and why, failed to satisfy his sense of meaningful design" (245). The how and why of the murders are representable: the Clutters' were shot to death for a very small amount of money. But the significance of this crime beyond the facts is not presentable *only* according to this type of information because this information does not, and cannot, engage the complexities of Smith's life that foster empathy. Thus even after hearing what happened the night of the murder, Dewey's feeling that he understands the crime, his sense of "meaningful design," remains unfulfilled. Smith's inability to separate reality from fantasy is relevant here. When he later reflects on the crime, Smith notes that his motive for killing the Clutters was not robbery or an attempt to conceal a robbery. This

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[24] Like the title of Appel's painting, *Trees with Falling Leaves*, the title of this section, "Answers," never fulfills its promise to cognition. For more see Lyotard's *Karel Appel: A Gesture of Color*, especially pg. 75.

was the motive garnered from much of the evidence in the case.[25] Instead, Smith notes,

"It wasn't anything the Clutters did. They never hurt me. Like other people. Like people

had all my life. Maybe it's just the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it" (290). In

the moments before he kills Herbert Clutter, Smith is drawn back into the middle ground

between reality and fantasy that he has developed as a refuge from his abuse. In Smith's

mind he is not killing Herbert Clutter, but the people who tormented his childhood.[26]

Between the end of the book's first section, "Presently, the car crept forward," and the

moment Smith kills Herbert Clutter is the recounting of Smith's own suffering. Thus

despite his confession to the horrific killing of the Clutter family, the reader's feelings

towards Smith are mirrored in Dewey's own: "He found it possible to look at the man

beside him without anger—with, rather, a measure of sympathy—for Perry Smith's life

had been no bed of roses but pitiful, an ugly and lonely progress towards one mirage and

then another" (246). The manipulation of the murder's timeline, a move hostile to

conventional documentary, allows for a reading of Smith's character concealed by a

presentation of the facts of the case alone.

 The reader's access to Smith's troubled life often comes through Capote's

presentation of what was happening inside Smith's mind—namely his inability to

distinguish reality from fantasy. By reporting what was happening inside Smith's mind,

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[25] Hickock was told by a former cellmate, Floyd Wells, that the Clutter family kept a safe filled with money. Wells was the person who notified police of Hickock and Smith's possible involvement in the Clutter murder. Wells' tip eventually led to Hickock and Smith being arrested.

[26] Capote believed Smith had a "brain explosion" in the moment he killed the Clutters. For more see "Truman Capote: An Interview" (1966) especially pg. 200.

Capote engaged in a practice common among the New Journalists. Ronald Weber argues

that the use of "a third person point of view...allows the writer to reveal what goes on

inside the mind" ("Some Sort" 14). He further notes that this was a practice which stirred

the most controversy about the New Journalism because it seemed to step beyond the

limits of conventional reporting. How can one know and then report what someone else is

thinking?[27] Though many questioned the veracity of this practice, reporters found it

necessary in order to present to readers not just the facts of the case, but the interior states

of mind, the thinking, of those people about whom they wrote. In order to do this,

journalists now had to involve themselves more fully in their work. Knowing what

someone else was thinking meant interviewing subjects about "thoughts and emotions

...to get such material required intense reporting and the full cooperation of subjects"

(Weber, *Literature* 29). Reporters literally had to leave the newsroom and go out into the

world. Gay Talese writes that "The old journalism was never eye-witness….But most of

us [New Journalists] went out and got the police sergeant's version of the thing, together

with the social worker's, or the bombardiers, or the press agent's or the PR man's" (qtd.

in Weber, *Literature* 30). Going out into the world and becoming deeply involved with

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[27] While this question might be applicable to any artistic effort that seeks to create
complex characters, it is different to undertake this task in journalism where a burden of
truth rides every decision a journalist makes. Philip Mitchell argues that "a note of
caution frequently sounded is that however wide the compositional latitude which authors
working within a literary journalism tradition may grant themselves, in contradistinction
to conventional daily journalism, they are nonetheless ultimately 'informed and animated
by the central journalistic commitment to the truth' (Yagoda 13), however that 'truth'
might be conceived or circumscribed. The resultant tension between literary journalism's
stylistic leeway and its more purely journalistic goals is crystallized in a set of core
ethical conundrums which relate to its handling of the representation of others' voices"
(534).

multiple participants in a story became known as saturation reporting, and it made

"demands on him [the reporter] that surpassed anything experienced in the ordinary

journalistic situation" (Weber, *Literature* 30). These demands forced the reporter outside

his comfort zone, forced him to, as Capote said initially of his interest in reportage,

"empathize with personalities outside his imaginative range" (Capote 1966). It also

allowed reporters to know more intimately the people about whom they wrote and

present to readers perspectives that were traditionally not reported. This kind of intimacy

was not central to journalism, and it was Capote's work on *In Cold Blood* that highlighted

the stakes of a journalist's personal involvement in his work. The demands made on

Capote during his five-year involvement with the Clutter case were substantial and came

at great personal cost.[28] Capote's presentation of Smith's interior state of mind in *In Cold*

Blood was not only an attempt to get beyond the facts of the case, but also functions as an

attempt to redress something he saw as an injustice during Smith's trial.

Evidence of Smith's mental health was prohibited in court. In the early 1960s in

Kansas, evidence of a defendant's mental state was not permitted in court unless it passed

the M'Naughten rule. The M'Naughten rule stated that if a defendant knew right from

wrong at the time of the crime, then he or she was sane and responsible for the crime

committed and thus no evidence of the defendant's mental state would be allowed during

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[28] Capote was present during the executions of Smith and Hickock and was, according to Robert Long in *Enfant Terrible*, "shattered" by them (93). This experience exacerbated his addiction to drugs and alcohol and his physical and mental breakdown after *In Cold Blood* "would become public knowledge" (Long 113). Capote would go on to say of his decision to cover the Clutter murder "If I had realized what the future held, I never would have stopped in Garden City. I would have driven straight on. Like a bat out of hell" (Capote 1966).

trial. Since this was a death penalty case, however, Smith's lawyers intended to challenge

this rule. One of their contentions was that the abuse suffered by Smith during his

childhood contributed to his actions the night of the murder and could possibly mitigate a

sentence of death. However, because of the M'Naughten rule, nothing regarding Smith's

mental health was voiced in court. While Smith's mind has thus far been presented as one

dependent upon gradation for reprieve from his abuse, Capote characterizes the

M'Naughten rule as "color-blind to any gradations of black and white" (294). As a result

of the law's color-blindness, there are limitations placed on the language of the

psychiatrists used in Smith's defense. The psychiatrists may only respond to questions

about Smith's behavior with a "yes" or "no," a limitation that refuses to countenance the

possibility that Smith's life cannot be accounted for in such terms. Moreover, character

witnesses for Smith are "hushed and banished" because their testimony regarding Smith's

character is deemed "incompetent and irrelevant" (294). The law, in other words,

prohibited the vocalization of evidence regarding Smith's traumatic childhood and

permitted into the official record only the facts which fit the letter of the law. Capote's

characterization of the law here functions as commentary not only on legal limitations,

but also the limitations of conventional reporting. After testimony regarding Smith's

confession of the crime, Capote is careful to note that one of the headlines of a local

paper reads "Unveil Mute Murder House—*Cold, Chilling Facts Told*" (286, emphasis

mine). The newspaper headline reflects exactly the material presented in court. In

presenting only that which is explicitly verifiable, both the court and the news media fail

to bear witness to the contingencies of Smith's experience that offer an alternative way to

judge Smith's crime. Capote, however, includes the testimony of the psychiatrists that is

banned in court. Capote interrupts the narrative of the trial, as he interrupted the details of

the murder earlier in the book, to present what is unpresentable. The banned testimony

appears in the book immediately after the psychiatrists respond to questions regarding

Smith's mental health with only the "yes" and "no" they are allowed. Capote frames the

banned testimony as follows: "had Dr. Jones been permitted to discourse on the cause of

his indecision [about whether Smith knew right from wrong when he killed the Clutters],

he would have testified…" (296). What follows is the full opinion of Dr. Jones that

outlines the complicated nature of Smith's mind, one which causes Dr. Jones'

"indecision" in a court that allows for no such indecision to exist. Because of the work

Capote has already done during the first sections of the novel, giving voice to Smith's

inner life that is silenced in court, readers feel more fully the second meaning of the

book's title: that the State of Kansas will execute Smith in cold blood because they refuse

to engage with the particularities of his experience, experience which cannot be

represented by the legal language in which it must be spoken. Between the legal system

and Smith's life exists a differend. Capote's experimentation with journalistic form

dramatizes this differend by presenting readers with two simultaneous and opposing

perspectives. These perspectives are developed through both traditional documentary

impulses and challenges to these impulses that resulted in Capote's innovation with

conventional reporting.

   While Capote experiments with traditional journalistic modes, I want to

emphasize that Capote's book neither fully abandons the documentary impulse nor

condemns it. *In Cold Blood* is a testament to Capote's labor as a reporter, a monumental

collection of factual material gathered over the course of more than five years. The

material used in service of documentary not only develops the perspective that Smith is a

cold-blooded killer, but also naturally elicits the reader's sympathy for Smith's victims.

In other words, readers of *In Cold Blood* are not asked to *only* sympathize with Smith.

Instead, Capote's refusal to privilege one mode of representing reality over another, his

co-presentation of competing perspectives, takes readers through a complex emotional

response. Alfred Kazin argues that "Through his feeling for both the Clutter family *and*

its murderers, Capote was able to relate them—a thought that would have occurred to no

one else" (24). The particular thought which would have occurred to no one else appears

most clearly through the relationship Capote creates between Smith and Nancy Clutter,

Smith's victim. Though Capote never met Nancy, he often spoke of his tenderness

towards her.[29] In many ways, Nancy is an all-American girl. She teaches her young

neighbor how to bake cherry pie, she cooks supper for her family, and she dates the hero

of her school's basketball team. All of these elements seem to cement Nancy's

personality and dramatize her death at the hands of someone who seems her total

opposite: Perry Smith. In short, Nancy Smith seems to be a manifestation of the

American Dream and Perry Smith the dream's destroyer. But Nancy and Perry develop a

kinship in *In Cold Blood* that stems from Capote's unconventional presentation of their

fateful encounter. Capote's emphasis on Smith's mental in-betweenness finds its

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[29] His affection arose primarily from his reading of her diary. In a conversation with
Kenneth Tynan, Capote defended his anger over Nancy's violent death by claiming that
Tynan would not understand his feelings unless he "read Nancy's diary" (131).

correlate in Nancy's presentation of herself in her diary. Capote does not use the diary to

detail what Nancy does day to day. It does not serve primarily as a documentary record.

Instead, Capote focuses on the changes in Nancy's handwriting over the course of her

five-year journal:

> A different ink identified each year: 1956 was green and 1957 a ribbon of red,
> replaced the following year by bright lavender, and now, in 1959, she had decided
> upon a dignified blue. But in every manifestation, she continued to tinker with her
> handwriting, slanting it to the right or to the left, shaping it roundly or steeply,
> loosely or stingily—as though she were asking, 'Is this Nancy? Or that? Or that?
> Which is me?' (Once Mrs. Riggs, her English teacher, had returned a theme with
> a scribbled comment: 'Good. But why written in three types of script?' To which
> Nancy had replied: "Because I'm not grown-up enough to be one person with one
> kind of signature" (57).

Nancy's refusal to keep one kind of signature, one color of script, is her refusal to commit

to a particular identity. She admits to Mrs. Riggs that she is not yet old enough to make

this commitment. Capote writes that Nancy's handwriting reflects an "emerging

maturity" (65), one still in the process of developing, growing. The possibility that Perry

Smith and Nancy Clutter are not polar opposites, that both lived in a between-world

which made them more deeply alike than different, begins to take shape as readers are

made to reconcile the impossible similarities between Smith's life and the life of his

victim. Lana Whited suggests that Smith and Nancy are both, in Capote's

characterizations of them, "thwarted artists" (9), and Donald Pizer suggests that "the two

major sources of our compassionate involvement in the Clutter murders [are] Nancy and

Perry" (218). It is Capote's arrangement of the narrative, his co-presentation of opposing

perspectives that allows readers to continuously negotiate the complexities involved in

feeling equally compassionate for a killer and his victim.[30]

Enacting the Ethical in Journalism

Earlier in this chapter, I noted that when William Shawn questioned Capote's

sourcing of information—No witnesses? How know? General problem—he was also

pointing to a broader conflict over the methods we employ to establish reality. It is

perhaps the case that had Capote omitted material not entirely supported by processes of

verification, he would have been left with nothing out of which to construct a narrative

that not only challenges readers to simultaneously engage conflicting perspectives but

also, in so doing, develop compassion for the lives of those represented through these

perspectives. This idea that nothing exists beyond the scope of establishment procedures

is one of primary concern to Lyotard and one that provides a deeper link between

Lyotard's avant-garde and Capote's work in *In Cold Blood*. I argued that Faurisson's

demand for empirical evidence that the Holocaust occurred reduces the reality of the

Holocaust to something that, in order to have existed, must be representable according to

the establishment procedures Faurisson constructs. Lyotard objects to Faurisson not only

because of what Faurisson denies, but also because of what he affirms through his denial:

nothing. If it cannot be represented empirically, if it cannot be spoken, then it does not

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[30] This is more deeply developed when readers learn that Smith prevented Hickock from
raping Nancy on the night of her murder. Hickock would admit that the real reason he
went to the Clutter farm was to sexually assault Nancy. Smith says of his Hickock's
intentions to rape Nancy "Now, that's something I despise, Anybody that can't control
themselves sexually. Christ, I hate that kind of stuff" (*In Cold Blood*, 243). Later in the
night, however, Smith shoots Nancy to death. Capote leaves it to readers to reconcile
Smith's instincts to both preserve and destroy.

exist. The broader struggle of Lyotard's work in *The Differend* is against a nihilistic belief in nothing to which we avail ourselves when we assume that all experiences are representable according to a particular method of representation. Keith Chrome and James Williams argue that "The reality of the Holocaust is signaled by its inability to be put into words...the silence that surrounds the Holocaust, and resists being put into words, impugns…an understanding of language [that assumes language must only transmit and verify information]" (32). The work of the avant-garde, then, has a great significance. Avant-garde artists' labor testifies to the possibility that there is *something* rather than nothing and struggles against the cynicism to which Faurisson's thinking makes him vulnerable. Importantly, their work does not function as the "other side" to nihilism; this would only resurrect the dichotomous thinking (it can either be represented or does not exist) that Lyotard is arguing against. Instead, their work makes possible the kind of thinking that opens itself up to the possibilities that it does not know, that there is *something* beyond what one can account for through the ordinary means of cognition.

In *In Cold Blood*, the movement between an omniscient narrator and a shaping consciousness, between documentation and figuration, thrusts upon the reader an entry point into the kind of thinking that bears witness to the differend, to the possibility that something might exist that resists our current abilities to account for its existence. I emphasize this because Capote was accused, after the publication of *In Cold Blood*, of not doing enough to stop the execution of Smith and Hickock. Kenneth Tynan condemned Capote for not fulfilling a debt he had to his subjects. He writes "We are talking…about responsibility; the debt that a writer arguably owes to those who provide

him…with his subject matter and his livelihood" (133). Tynan eventually comes to the

conclusion that Capote's book is written in the blood of the killers for whom Capote has

"done less than he might have to save [from execution]" (133). Tynan's accusations here

lower the stakes of Capote's efforts in *In Cold Blood*. It is important to remember that

the feeling of the differend, its painful pleasure, is a call to "human beings endowed with

language…not to augment to their profit the quantity of information communicable

through existing idioms, but to recognize that what remains to be phrased exceeds what

they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not

yet exist" (13). This is the warrant for experimentation that is the unique purview of the

avant-garde artist, and it is one taken up by Capote in *In Cold Blood*. The accusation that

Capote violated his responsibilities as a writer because he did not help prevent the State

of Kansas from executing Smith and Hickock overlooks the possibility that *In Cold

Blood* is a realization of his responsibility.[31] By moving between a presentation of the

facts and a presentation of that which cannot be verified as fact, readers are made to feel

the similarities between Perry Smith and Nancy Clutter, to develop sympathy for both a

murderer and his victim, to feel pain when Smith is put to death at the hands of a court

that cannot countenance the circumstances of his life. These elements of Capote's

experimentation with conventional journalism create a space wherein readers can feel,

and thus become more aware of, that which is unpresentable. *In Cold Blood* also initiated

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[31] While Capote did not write *In Cold Blood* out of a desire to challenge death penalty legislation, in his essay "Real Toads in Real Gardens: Reflections on the Art of Non-Fiction and the Legacy of Truman Capote," David Galloway importantly notes that "*In Cold Blood* plainly contributed to a shift in public opinion that led to the temporary abolishment of the death penalty in the United States" (144).

a discussion, regardless of how one positions Capote within this discussion, about the role and responsibility of the reporter in relationship to his subjects. Norman Sims notes, "Because most reporters never develop a deep relationship with their ordinary (or their criminal) subjects, a relationship where personal responsibility would enter the ethical debate, the question [does work come first or does life?] seemed relatively new in journalism" (240). In this sense, Capote's innovations with reporting can be seen as revealing otherwise concealed assumptions about what responsible journalistic engagement looks like. Perhaps there is even a differend that exists between a journalist's work and his life, one that is revealed and countenanced as a result of Capote's work *In Cold Blood*. For Capote, the work of *In Cold Blood* was actually never done: "I'm still very much haunted by the whole thing. I have finished the book, but in a sense I haven't finished it: it keeps churning around in my head" (Capote 1966). The reader shares in this sense of being haunted, of continuously trying to reconcile the simultaneity of opposing voices within *In Cold Blood* along with the responsibility Capote had to both his work and his conscience. Yet this is precisely the work an engagement with the differend is intended to inspire. By never considering his work in *In Cold Blood* done, and by creating a journalism informed by an aesthetic that resists critical closure, Capote enacts a resistance against the privileging of one set of establishment procedures over another. This is a resistance that, especially considering *In Cold Blood* was published after Smith and Hickock were executed, labors towards something especially after there is nothing. This is the labor of the avant-garde.

CHAPTER 3

JOAN DIDION AND THE FIGURAL

Introduction

Truman Capote's use of both an omniscient narrator and a shaping consciousness

enacts an implicit evocation of the personal—Capote's sense that Perry Smith is as

deserving of our empathy as those whom he murdered. Yet the evocation of the personal

is latent in Capote's literary journalism. In *In Cold Blood*, the personal emerges in the

slippage between what Capote's omniscient narrator can countenance and what exists

beyond the margins of journalistic convention and thus demands a shaping

consciousness. Capote felt the use of a first-person narrator would be intrusive, noting

that "Once the narrator does appear, he has to appear throughout, all the way down the

line, and the I-I-I intrudes when it really shouldn't" (1966). Where Capote felt the first

person should be hidden, concealed within a text's other formal qualities so as not to

intrude upon the narrative, Joan Didion grounded her journalism in an explicit conjuring

of the personal, using her first-person experiences as the foundation for the critiques she

levies across a number of discursive fields. In an essay titled "Why I Write," Didion

argues that her writing is rooted in the very "I" Capote sought to conceal: "Of course I

stole the title for this talk from George Orwell. One reason I stole it was that I like the

sound of the words: Why I Write. There you have three short unambiguous words that

share a sound, and the sound they share is this: I I I I" (2). Nonetheless, Capote's choice

of words in the above passage, particularly his suggestion that a first-person point of view

is "intrusive," is useful for understanding the significance of Didion's personal journalism. Didion's emphatic use of a first-person point of view *is* intrusive, but the intrusion is necessary. By rooting her journalism in the expression of the personal, Didion agitates the processes by which conventional journalism produces overly simplistic, generalized narratives that disarm speculative thinking. This gives Didion's literary journalism, as I articulate over the course of this chapter, a more explicitly political bent. For Didion, a reporter's fidelity to journalism's conventions, particularly the principle of objectivity, leads to the indolence of thought: "The genuflection towards 'fairness' is a familiar newsroom piety, in practice the excuse for a good deal of autopilot reporting and lazy thinking" ("Political Pornography" 207). The imbrication in Didion's work of personal impressions and verifiable fact encourages a labored thinking otherwise inaccessible in traditional reporting. That is, Didion's "I" supersedes its semantic function to act as a figure of disruption whose intentions are to return to journalism the nuance and complexity of which it has been stripped by convention.

To mine the transgressive value of Didion's first-person journalism, I position Didion's work alongside works of avant-garde art that have not only violated a fidelity to mimetic expression but also, in so doing, have initiated a process of complex, open-ended reflection capable of challenging the same force against which Didion's journalism struggles: unrigorous, imprecise thinking. I argue that Didion's use of the first person in her journalism is an example of what Jean-Francois Lyotard termed the figural in his book *Discourse, Figure*. This term is critical for an understanding of Didion's experimental journalism because it theorizes a relationship between artistic innovation

and epistemological disruption. Though I will later more thoroughly define the term, for now it should be noted that the figural manifests an abandonment of regulatory principles in both visual and discursive fields. What the figural subsequently enacts is the deregulation of familiar processes by which one thinks and procures knowledge. Indeed, Lyotard does not refer to the effects of the figural in terms of knowledge; rather, he argues that the figural can lead to truth, though not a truth which is the equivalent of something whose veracity remains unquestioned or unchanging. Truth in *Discourse, Figure* is a process, a struggle: "one must fight to allow the effects of truth to come to the surface, to unleash its monsters of meaning in the midst of discourse, within the very rule of signification. Thus one must learn not to distinguish truth from falsity—both defined in terms of the internal consistency of a system, or of operativeness upon an object of reference—but to discern between two expressions, the one that exists to thwart the gaze (to capture it) and the one that is there to expand it, to allow it to see the invisible" (12). The figural transgresses values that are employed for the purposes of meaning-making; in so doing, it can engage that which is normally repressed in the service of convention. What I argue in this chapter is that Didion's emphatic first-person reporting enacts the figural in the field of journalism. Didion's belief that journalists become uncritical in a servile relationship to objectivity is made manifest in the formal qualities of her journalism, particularly the way she employs an emphatic first-person as the foundation for her reporting. Sandra Braman has argued that "Didion believes that much of the world is living in a somnambulistic state created and sustained by the media. Thus, she sees communicating the evidence of one's own senses as a radical and central human effort"

(353). Didion's senses, though, are unregulated and shifting and have the effect of fracturing her narratives, delaying the ease with which readers can consume her reporting. In other words, Didion's communicative efforts are motivated by a desire to frustrate communication. What Didion offers instead is a form of journalism that awakens critical faculties by actively intruding upon their routine, calling them to attention through the invocation of an unfamiliar and unpredictable first-person voice in a field where the first person is generally suppressed. By using Lyotard's theory of the figural as a bridge between Didion's experimental journalism and other modes of avant-garde art, I can demonstrate not only how journalism becomes a site for artistic innovation but also how innovations in the field of journalism enact the labor of thought—the struggle towards truth defined above by Lyotard—otherwise atrophied by convention.

Lyotard and the Figural: Exposing and Redressing the Problems of Painterly and Journalistic Representation

Didion's journalism is a form of intervention, a response to the institutionalization of "fairness" as a cornerstone of reporting. The language of conventional journalism is not informed by personal impression but verifiable fact. Consequently, journalistic language is often stripped of the ambiguity out of which subjective impressions are made and expressed. Everett E. Dennis and William L. Rivers argue that the expectation of American journalism in the middle of the twentieth century was that it would "try and hold a mirror up to an event and show its surfaces" (2).Standard journalism was thus

written through the suppression of disorderly linguistic elements that might invite

ambiguity into a reporter's work. Ronald Weber notes that going back as far as the mass-

circulation press, "the newsman is supposed to take a detached attitude towards his

material, dispassionate while reporting and objective while writing. His function is

largely that of a conduit between event and reader and he performs the function well

when he keeps the line open and flowing, unclogged by emotional or intellectual

intrusions on his part" ("Some Sort" 20). Including evidence of one's emotions and

intellect in conventional journalism is considered, as Weber notes, an "intrusion." It is a

force that prevents the easy communication of information, clouds the mirror of mimesis.

Thus, the stylistic imperatives of conventional reporting create a language that has been

stripped of personal expression such that it can most effectively deliver information to its

reading audience.

The separation of journalistic language from the unruliness of personal expression

is representative of a broader problem, theorized by Lyotard, involving the estrangement

of language from other modes of expression. Lyotard's concern in *Discourse, Figure* is to

explore the ways that language and vision, saying and seeing, have been divorced from

one another despite what he sees as evidence of their imbrication. The figural, as I briefly

noted above, is the term Lyotard uses to describe efforts towards imbrication, efforts that

are uniquely visible in the arts and, as I will argue, in journalism. This discussion will

not only demonstrate the consequences that arise when language is isolated from other

modes of representation, but also the ethical dimensions of a language, including a

journalistic language, of which Didion will be an exemplary case, reinvested with the ambiguity of which it has been deprived.

In order to examine the way language and vision are mutually dependent, Lyotard looks to examples of painterly representation, a field in which the interplay of script and figure is prominent. The starting point for Lyotard is the High Middle Ages, where one can see an entanglement of text and figure that productively challenges the conventional processes we use to both see and read images and texts. Lyotard's main focus is on the folio from the Book of Numbers in the *Bible of Saint-Martial*, which dates back to the end of the eleventh century. One of the most important features of this work is the arrangement of text on the page. According to Lyotard:

> On one side, the letters (capitals and uncials) occupy the page plastically, and not merely so as to be read. For example, the initial and the text are not at the same scale; one reads a text, one notices that a letter is missing, and one sets out to find it: a space that *slows down the gaze*, forcing it to spend time within its borders. The meaning of the letters, too, is figural, as a passage from the holy story through which difference is signified (creation-fall-redemption)" (*Discourse, Figure* 166, emphasis mine).

The text on this page resists the gaze normally activated by reading. Lyotard points to the manner in which the viewer's gaze must *scan* the image above, must become *un-fixed* in order to see. Reading is dependent upon a fixing of the gaze, upon excluding that which exists at the periphery of our vision such that vision does not cloud. If we did not impose a visual order on text (top to bottom, left to right), it would be impossible to derive meaning from the activity of reading; the page would remain a jumble of figures. The fixing of the gaze flattens depth: "This fixing is not merely that of the distance between the mind's eye and what it sees—a distance that must be optimal, just as the focal

77

distance is in the field of optics. It also affects the field's delineation, its 'distinctness.'...legitimate vision is defined by the exclusion of everything that does not appear to the observer in 'an obvious way,' by the repression of the lateral" (*Discourse, Figure* 181). To make sense of the visual field, to see "clearly," we impose order on that which we encounter. However, the imposition of order also involves an act of exclusion. This is not only the case for the visual field but also the field of linguistics. In Saussurean linguistics, meaning is dependent upon the differences between sounds, letters, and words being flat: "signification results from scrupulously preserving the *invariable* distances between sounds, words, and letters that make them recognizable, and upon which hearing, understanding, and reading...depend" (Lydon 14). In the visual field, we repress the periphery in order to see. In linguistics, we repress aural similarities, and maintain the "invariable distances," between letters and words in order to communicate. The manner in which one reads and understands language is akin to the manner in which one sees and understands images in so far as they are both dependent upon eliminating difference and depth, the very things that disrupt the processes we employ to understand the phenomenal world. This point is particularly relevant in a study of journalism since the communication of news is dependent upon stylistic conventions rooted in, as I briefly noted above, the exclusion of personal impressions that might impinge upon a reading audience's capacity for discernment.

Yet in the illuminated manuscripts of interest to Lyotard, the eye cannot become fixed and thus the operations of both seeing and reading are frustrated. The arrangement of the text in the manuscript resists the imposition of order. Lyotard notes that the scale

78

of the initial on the left-hand side of the manuscript is different from the scale of the

letters on the right-hand side: space is not flattened but made richer by the variation in

scale, and reading becomes more difficult. Moreover, Lyotard notes that the scroll in the

manuscript, though laden with text, is "laid out here according to the iconic plane's

verticality and curvature—making, in other words, a significant concession to figural

expression" (*Discourse, Figure* 166). The figural is the incorporation of that which we

normally repress—depth, difference—in our efforts towards communication. The

illuminated manuscripts Lyotard discusses do not maintain fixed differences in the

presentation of either text or image; therefore, they pose a significant challenge to normal

cognitive processes. The manuscripts, in other words, facilitate an emergence of the

figural. Berhard Siegert notes in his book *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, and Other*

Articulations of the Real that in the illuminated manuscripts "Pictorial, ornamental, and

textual space are intertwined...the writing initially contained in the textual space can at

any moment break out into ornamental proliferation, and the ornament at the margin, in

turn, can be transformed into a representational picture" (190). The presence of the

figural in the illuminated manuscripts promises to interrupt cognition at any moment and

awaken the possibility of new ways of seeing and reading otherwise concealed through

conventional forms of representation.

If the art of the Middle Ages is rooted in an overlapping of discursive and visual

spaces, the Renaissance is marked by a distinguishing of these two spaces and the

establishment of rules under which language and image can both function as pure

signifiers. The development and mastery of linear perspective was designed to overcome

the curvature and verticality that created the overlapping of textual and visual boundaries in art from the High Middle Ages. In other words, the imbrication of discourse and figure is the condition from which Renaissance thinkers and painters seek to recover. Importantly, the technology that made linear perspective possible parallels the technology that required the elimination of personal expression from journalism.

Filippo Brunelleschi is credited with creating the first works of art that accurately employ linear perspective; Brunelleschi's depiction of the Florence Bapistry (depictions now lost) are said to "accurately [transpose] a perceived view from a particular viewpoint onto the two dimensional surface of the painting's panel" (Park 259). What Brunelleschi masters is the ability to replicate three dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane. The method employed by Brunelleschi is of particular importance to Lyotard.[32] He writes:

> This bridling of the gaze is the condition of the geometrization of the field of vision. The edge of the hole had the effect of blocking out the peripheral field, thus of 'de-curving' perceptual space and rendering it as consistent as possible with the central focal area where the curvature (the anamorphosis) is negligible. It would henceforth be possible to enforce precise guidelines for the production of any object whatsoever on the picture plane (180).

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[32] Antonio Manetti, Brunellschi's biographer, was given a demonstration, by Brunelleschi, of how perspective was used to create an image of the Florence Baptistry. Malcolm Park summarizes Manetti's description of the demonstration: "Brunelleschi's viewing position was "some three braccia" (approx. 1.75 m) inside the central portal of the Cathedral; that the panel's approximate size was "about half a braccio square" (approx. 28–30 cm); and, that one looked from the reverse side of the painting through a hole made in the panel to view a reflection of the painting in a flat mirror held in front of the hole at an appropriate distance. The hole was conical, with its smallest diameter, 'as tiny as a lentil bean,' on the painted side of the panel and at a position in the Baptistery's image that was directly opposite the viewpoint. The demonstration's purpose is less clear but, as 'the spectator felt he saw the actual scene when he looked at the painting, the accuracy of Brunelleschi's image and perspective was confirmed'" (260).

Where the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages featured the overlapping of the discursive and the visual fields through curvature and verticality, the Renaissance "bridles" the gaze in order to make possible the geometrization of the field. While Brunelleschi's box makes possible the transcription of any object onto a picture plane, it also "represses figural difference in favor of a unified Euclidean field" (Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure* 180). This difference, as noted earlier, is the depth of the field of vision conquered by perspectivalism. The elimination of the periphery produces a clear picture, makes possible the imposition of a linear grid on any object. In short, it makes possible representation.

Similarly, as I outlined in the introduction, journalism's claim to objectivity stems from the stylistic imperatives derived from technological advances: namely, the advent of the telegraph. The telegraph functioned for journalists, like Brunelleschi's box for painters, through a process of restriction such that a greater mimetic effect might be achieved. Michael Schudson notes that "the invention of the telegraph placed a premium on economy of style, brought about reporting habits that stressed bare-bones factuality rather than discursive commentary, and so gave rise to an ethic of objectivity" (150). Writing with a "bare-bones factuality," a necessity driven by the expense of the telegraph, created a journalistic style that appeared to mirror the world because it was divorced from the "discursive commentary" of the individual reporter. The telegraph required the repression of a reporter's idiosyncrasies and any "discursive commentary" because these expressions prevented news stories from being understood by and

distributed to a wide-ranging audience.[33] The appearance of objectivity in conventional journalism was driven by technological and financial demands imperceptible to a reading audience. Similarly, while representational art that employs linear perspective makes viewers see an object from the same point of view as the artist, this is only made possible by something viewers cannot see: the repression of that which exists at the periphery of an artist's' vision. In both cases, what is taken for granted are the exclusions that make representational clarity possible and the manner in which these exclusions encourage an imprecise and unnuanced cognitive process.

Artistic efforts to inspire a more rigorous and critical thinking, efforts that facilitate an emergence of the figural, are central to Lyotard's understanding of the avant-garde. To exemplify the manner in which painterly experimentation can function as a form of resistance, Lyotard looks to the work of Paul Cezanne. Lyotard claims that one finds in Cezanne's work the anti-representational impulses that characterized the aesthetic of the High Middle Ages (see figure 2).
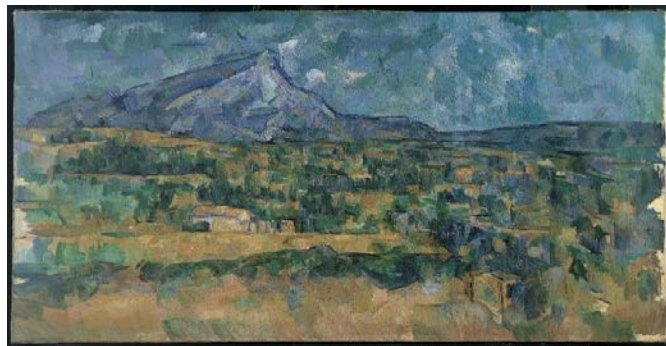
Figure 2. Paul Cezanne. *Mont Saint-Victoire*.

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[33] Phyllis Frus contends that "wire services were founded for the purpose of serving up the same 'unbiased' news to many papers" (103).

Cezanne's work, though, extends the experimentation of the High Middle Ages in that he poses a challenge to the very foundations out of which perspective is built. Cezanne's work "embodies the deconstruction of the focal zone by the curved area in the periphery of the field of vision. It no longer makes an 'over there' visible according to geometric optics, but manifests Mont Sainte-Victoire in the process, as it were, of making itself visible, that is, manifests the landscape with its distortions, overlappings, ambiguities, and discrepancies, such as one can see it before looking at it, before the orthogonal coordination of its site takes effect" (*Discourse, Figure* 197). Cezanne's work (see figure 2) seeks *not* to escape from that which exists at the periphery of vision but rather uses the periphery to challenge the origins of our thinking about perception. Without providing an answer, this series of paintings by Cezanne asks: What does it mean to see? It is Cezanne's engagement with this question that produces the experimentation with form on display for viewers. As Stuart Sim notes, *Mont Saint-Victoire* demonstrates "Cezanne's intensity of engagement with the landscape and a refusal to process it through existing aesthetic models" (234). Consequently, Lyotard claims that in Cezanne's work one can *see* Mont Saint-Victoire before looking at it. Looking is what one does when peering through the spatial cube; it is the action we take when we can immediately recognize what we see; we look at most Renaissance paintings because they are designed to accommodate vision rather than challenge it.

With Cezanne, we are not offered the opportunity to look because we are confronted with the unregulated movements of the eye that sees without its periphery being harnessed and bridled. In this way, Cezanne facilitates an emergence of the figural,

or that which is normally repressed in service of representational efforts. What exists at the periphery is difference, and we suppress difference, flatten depth, and maintain fixed differences between letters and sounds, in order to produce meaning. However, this meaning cannot really mean, just as the looking solicited by Renaissance painting is not equivalent to seeing. In other words, language used only in service of representation, which is the expectation of conventional journalistic language, cannot exercise our critical faculties; this is the cause of the indolent thinking against which Didion's journalism and Lyotard's avant-garde painters struggle. What remains to be addressed is how accommodating the figural, an accommodation central to avant-garde experimentation, can productively challenge familiar modes of thinking. In other words, what is it that the avant-garde offers that is otherwise unavailable through the conventions of representation?

The institution of oppositions that undermine critical thinking conceal a space where meaning is not foreclosed in a pursuit of knowledge. It is a space wherein one no longer attempts to overcome the imbrication of discourse and figure for the sake of clarity. Lyotard writes that what Cezanne does in *Mont Saint-Victoire* is "deconstruct representation and invent a space of the invisible, of the possible" (*Discourse, Figure* 231). Not only does Cezanne's work take apart the space of the visible in challenging the origins of perception, but also he encourages viewers to imagine what other spaces and ways of seeing might exist when the eye is freed from representational constraints. The figural, in other words, does not merely stand in opposition to representation; instead, it is wholly other, incapable of being drafted into mimetic service. This is why Lyotard

84

frames the space opened by Cezanne's pictorial innovation as a site for the possible. Bill

Readings argues for the importance of the figural's irreducibility: "If the rule of discourse

is primarily the rule of representation by conceptual oppositions, the figural cannot

simply be opposed to the discursive. Rather, the figural opens discourse to a radical

heterogeneity, a singularity, a difference which cannot be rationalized or subsumed

within the rule of representation" (4). The emergence of the figural remains a testament

to and a reminder of that which is marginalized in favor of representation, and its

emergence signals an opportunity for thought to re-engage with the forgotten condition of

its very possibility: the unknown. Without an avant-garde art to engage the figural, we

face a danger, articulated by Lyotard, of "never finding anything but what [we] already

know" (*Discourse, Figure* 382).

Film, Architecture, and the "Tarnishing of Wonder"

Before examining in more detail the presence of the figural in Didion's writing, I

want to first demonstrate how Didion draws on problems revolving primarily around the

denial of possibility, the absence of the figural, in her critique of both film and

architecture. *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* includes a number of pieces that articulate

Didion's belief in an aesthetic that offers the opportunity for the emergence of the

unexpected. In "I Can't Get That Monster Out Of My Mind," Didion argues that

American film directors produce films that reaffirm values already internalized by the

American public; that is, their films do not challenge, or present a cinematic space for

challenging, the already-known:

85

American directors, with a handful of exceptions, are not much interested in style; they are at heart didactic. The 'issues' they pick are generally no longer real issues, if indeed they ever were—but I think it a mistake to attribute this to any calculated venality, to any conscious playing it safe…Call it instead—this apparent calculation about what 'issues' are now safe—an absence of imagination, a sloppiness of mind in some ways encouraged by comfortable feedback from the audience, from the bulk of reviewers (153).

For Didion, films with a didactic intent privilege the presentation of particular issues over stylistic experimentation. Moreover, the issues that American directors choose to tackle are not often "real" issues in the sense that there is some unexplored, as-yet-discovered intellectual territory within them. They are, instead, a reflection of what sells, a reflection of what might be favorably reviewed. In the same way journalists become over-reliant on the conventions of their profession and begin operating on autopilot, film directors develop a "sloppiness of mind" through a submission of innovation to industry. Stanley Kramer's *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961) is an example for Didion of a film that fails to create a space for the emergence of the unknown. She argues that *Nuremberg* "was an intrepid indictment not of authoritarianism in the abstract, not of the trials themselves, not of the various moral and legal issues involved, but of Nazi war atrocities, about which there would have seemed already to be some consensus" (154). She goes on to note that during his Academy Award acceptance speech, the film's writer, Abby Mann, accepted the award "on behalf of all intellectuals" (154). Didion's use of the word "intrepid" above, as well as her positioning of Mann's claims about intellectualism so near her statement that the film confronts an "issue" about which there is already some resolve, evokes a powerful irony. What Mann considers intellectual is, for Didion, only a rehearsal of consensus, a cinematic presentation of that which we already know. Didion's

problem with Kramer's film stems from her sense that Kramer missed an opportunity for

making one's thinking about Nazi Germany more complex, more rigorous. In their book

Frames of Evil: The Holocaust as Horror in American Film, Caroline Joan Picart and

David A. Frank point to the limitations of the film's aesthetic:

> For instance, when [General] Lawson takes the stand as commander of the American troops who liberated the [concentration] camps, he [Stanley Kramer] shows harrowing archival footage of the camps and inmates, including children tattooed for extermination. The material is already in itself emotionally stirring enough to provoke a strong reaction, but rather than let the images imprint themselves on us, Lawson and Kramer effectively hammer it in: Lawson's voice-over is an emotionally heavy-handed harangue, and Kramer intercuts reaction shots that essentially force audiences to identify with the surrogates in the courtroom rather than see them as individuals (67).

They go on to note that Kramer's use of the archival footage is "used in a sensational way

to shock us into acknowledging the moral enormity of the crimes, but we are not asked to

probe deeply into their nature or origins or to inquire about the identity of the victims,

whose bodies form an undifferentiated mass" (67). As a result, Kramer's film works on

confirming our sense of how to make an appropriate and familiar moral judgment,

resulting in complacency rather than attentiveness.

If Kramer's film is a testament to the correctness of virtue, then the architecture of

Newport, Rhode Island, the subject of Didion's essay "Seacoast of Despair," is a

testament to the unvirtuous. Both, however, deny the need for speculative thought. When

Didion visits Newport Beach, a place where the enormously wealthy, like the

Vanderbilts, built summer homes around the turn of the century, she is struck by the

obviousness of the homes' architecture. She writes the following:

No aesthetic judgement could conceivably apply to the Newport of Bellevue
Avenue, to those vast follies behind the their hand wrought gates; they are
products of the metastasis of capital, the Industrial Revolution carried to its
logical extreme...Newport is the monument of a society in which production was
seen as the moral point, the reward if not exactly the end, of the economic
process. The place is devoid of the pleasure principle. To have had the money to
build 'The Breakers' or 'Marble House' or 'Ochre Court' and to choose to build
at Newport is itself a denial of possibilities; the island is physically ugly, mean
without the saving grace of extreme severity, a landscape less to be enjoyed than
dominated (210).

What is suggested by the overwhelming opulence of architecture in Newport are only the

conditions that made the opulence possible: an economic culture driven by mass,

unadulterated consumption. There is nothing left for the imagination at Newport;

imaginative possibilities have been nightmarishly fulfilled by homes that have made

manifest, quite literally, all things money can buy. This makes Newport's mansions less

an exploration of architecture's possibilities than tombstones in memoriam of its

complete realization. In the case of both Kramer's film and the architecture of Newport,

emergence is foreclosed. Didion was not the only New Journalist to pay keen attention to

the destruction of innovative aesthetic practices. Norman Mailer also wrote extensively

on the subject, but focused on the manner in which government-led design signaled the

advent of totalitarianism. Mailer wrote that the United States government:

took over state preserves, straightened crooked, narrow roads, put up government
buildings, removed unwelcome signs till the young Pop eye of Art wept for
unwelcome signs—where are our old friends?—and corporation land would
succeed, if it hadn't yet, in making nature look like an outdoor hospital, and the
streets of U.S. cities, grace of Urban Renewal, would be difficult to distinguish
when drunk from pyramids of packaged foods in the aisles of the supermarket.
For years he [Mailer] had been writing about the nature of totalitarianism, its need
to render populations apathetic, its instrument—the destruction of mood. Mood
was forever being sliced, cut, stamped, ground, excised, or obliterated; mood was
a scent which rose from the acts and calms of nature, and totalitarianism was a
deodorant to nature (*Armies of the Night* 117).

88

What readies the field for authoritarianism is the eradication of anything that might be evocative—whether in film, architecture or journalism. Importantly, their recognition that idiosyncrasies have been suppressed in aesthetic practice across a number of different fields does not make Didion or Mailer nostalgic for mere quaintness. As Chris Anderson notes, the "resolute superficiality of contemporary American life…[its] mechanized and unread surfaces" cannot accommodate the "real, concrete lives of people" (159). The chance for the imagination to be stirred, for difference to be countenanced, is denied through aesthetic regulation, and it is the "subtleties and disciplines of style" (Anderson 159), which Didion and Mailer argue are missing from American culture, that can offer refuge to the complexities and contingencies of experience. In *The Postmodern Explained,* Lyotard creates a comparison between the bureaucratic, regulated language, called Newspeak, of the totalitarian state Oceania in George Orwell's *1984,* and the poetic language of the avant-garde. Lyotard notes that poetic language works "to save the instant from what is customary or understood; whereas Newspeak has to tarnish the wonder that (something) is happening" (91). Newspeak eradicates the need for personal thought in language such that, eventually, thinking might atrophy completely. The meaning of words in Newspeak are designed to so completely and utterly express their meaning that wonder and curiosity, the conditions that facilitate thought, might be forever eliminated. Central to Didion's critique above is this shared awareness that predictable aesthetic practices vanquish a spirit of inquiry, and Didion's awareness of the danger inherent in this practice becomes more urgent in her coverage of politics.

Joan Didion and the Political

For Didion, the most pressing instances of imaginative suffering are revealed

through political rhetoric, a rhetoric that operates in a manner parallel to, and in

conjunction with, conventional journalistic language. Both insist that one speak through

generalizations that work against the possibility of critical thinking. Moreover, the

hostility towards language not informed by generic rules reveals traces of an

authoritarianism not easily seen through the lens of conventional journalism. It also

reveals the disruptive power and ethical potential of Didion's figural journalism, rooted

as it is in the non-generic: a radical particularity, an emphatic first person.

Didion opens her essay "Good Citizens" by describing political activity in

Hollywood as follows:

"What a sacrifice on the altar of nationalism," I heard an actor say about the death
in a plane crash of the president of the Philippines. It is this way of talking that tends to
preclude further discussion, which may well be its intention: the public life of liberal
Hollywood comprises a kind of dictatorship of good intentions, a social contract in which
actual and irreconcilable disagreement is as taboo as failure or bad teeth, a climate devoid
of irony (86-87).

In the hopes of avoiding an "irreconcilable disagreement," one relies on clichés and

generalizations. Language of this kind is vacuous of meaning so as to actually preclude

disagreement and discussion, the very tools by which one might expand his or her

worldview. Didion limns the collaborative force between authoritarianism and cliche

when she suggests that the language spoken in "liberal Hollywood comprises a kind of

dictatorship of good intentions," meaning that platitudes, while seemingly banal, actually

carry with them an implicit violence. The violence is done to that which resists being

expressed through language that can only accommodate generalities, and it is perpetrated

not only by liberal Hollywood, but also by journalists and politicians, often in collusion with one another.

In her essay about the 1988 Democratic and Republican National Conventions, "Insider Baseball," Didion argues that the press and its subjects have "tacit agreements, small and large, to overlook the observable in the interests of obtaining a dramatic story line" (37). Thomas Reinert notes that for Didion a "'dramatic story line,' means a coherent, simplifying, and morally confident one" (122). In other words, storylines eliminate complexity in the same manner as clichés. This practice, however, is particularly troubling in the field of journalism. According to Didion:

> American reporters "like" covering a presidential campaign (it gets them out on the road, it has balloons, it has music, it is viewed as a big story, one that leads to the respect of one's peers, to the Sunday shows, to lecture fees and often to Washington), which is one reason why there has developed among those who do it so arresting an enthusiasm for overlooking the contradictions inherent in reporting that which occurs only in order to be reported (30).

The "tacit agreement" between journalists and politicians is designed to conceal the contradictions that often adhere to a reporter's interactions with politicians. This means reporters become, as Didion writes, "willing, in exchange for 'access,' to transmit the images their sources wish transmitted...to present these images not as a story the campaign wants told but as fact" (31-32). Journalists often transmit only that which fits the narrative demands of a particular political campaign; these demands, however, are *not* presented and thus political reporting presents as fact that which has been constructed only to *appear* as fact. This process is supported by the general demands of professional reporting. As Phyllis Frus notes, "'reconstruction' is, of course, the news story that will fill the reporter's employer's need for neutral but interesting coverage in order to sell

91

enough papers or magazines to justify the rates charged to advertisers" (xv-xvi). This

problem is further exemplified in Didion's recounting of an opportunity she had, along

with several other journalists, to interview Huey Newton in 1968. During the interview,

Didion is struck by the generic answers he provides to the questions he is asked:

> Q: Tell us something about yourself, Huey. I mean your life before the Panthers.
> A: Before the Black Panther Party my life was very similar to that of most black
> people in this country.
> Q: Well, your family, some incidents you remember, the influences that shaped
> you.
> A: Living in America shaped me. ("The White Album" 30).

Didion writes that Newton was "one of those autodidacts for whom all things specific and

personal present themselves as minefields to be avoided...for whom safety lies in

generalizations" ("The White Album" 30). The use-value of generalizations and clichés

is their ability to foreclose meaning; by avoiding the particular, one can create a narrative

free of paradox. For Newton, the avoidance of the particular offers him a chance to create

and maintain a consistent political message, and the press becomes a willing participant,

perhaps even an instigator, in this effort: "The Panthers give press conferences where all

the questions and replies are prearranged and abstracted into meaningless, droning

generality" (122). What Didion sees as radical about the Black Panthers is their belief

that "political power began at the end of the barrel of a gun" (31). However, this violent,

disruptive position is compromised when it turns into political rhetoric: "[a] 'quotation,' a

'pronouncement' to be employed when the need arose" ("The White Album" 31). As

Didion watches Newton speak, she writes, "I kept wishing he would talk about *himself*,

hoping to break through the wall of rhetoric" (30, emphasis mine). Didion searches in

Newton's speech for eruptions personal expression that might complicate the empty

92

generalities through which he speaks, but the "tacit agreements" between journalists and their political subjects prevent such eruptions. Consequently, what is presented to readers is information driven and pre-determined by journalistic convention. Jason Mosser points out that "in conventional journalism, form often determines content. The result, predictably, is that the perceptions of traditional journalists are predetermined by their medium. Consequently, readers of conventional journalism perceive events in the same context [in which they are written], that of the standard journalistic formula" ("Four" 15). If journalists perceive events and people through the conventions of their medium, then elements of real experience that resist conventions like narrative coherence will either never be countenanced or will be reduced in their complexity to digestible bits of news. However, if one's perceptions are not informed by convention, there remains the possibility for speculative thought to emerge. Didion's manner of perceiving the world defies the institutional boundaries of reporting that foster only a limited perceptual scope. Didion's insistence on employing the first person in her writing, on engaging the irreconcilable features of her personal observations in her reporting, introduces into her journalism an element of disruption that can be understood as a manifestation of the figural. It is the return of that which is normally repressed in service of convention, and in re-engaging the unruly elements of journalistic language, Didion extends the epistemological range and power of journalistic texts.

Joan Didion as Embodied Figure

Didion's "I" invites into journalism a sense of the personal invested with figural dimensions. These dimensions can be mined through a consideration of two things: 1) how certain linguistic operators, like the personal pronoun "I," point beyond the system of language in which they are situated and 2) the manner in which Didion's "I" reflects an imbrication of bodily and cognitive boundaries. Taken together, these considerations will demonstrate how Didion becomes an embodiment of the figural, and in the last section of this chapter that follows, Didion's figurality will serve as the foundation for what I argue is the presence of the visual in her journalism.

Lyotard argues that deictics are words that cannot be wholly integrated into language. The semantic value of these words cannot be determined by knowing their relationship to other words in a sentence. Deictics do not derive their meaning as a result of their invariable difference from other words because deictics do not have a meaning known in advance of their articulation. Lyotard writes "the interesting and mysterious aspect of such words as *I, this, here*, which expect their 'content' to come from their actualization in a discursive act, is specifically that they open language to an experience language cannot take in, since this experience is one of a *hic et nunc* [here and now]" (*Discourse, Figure* 37). The meaning of a deictic awaits it in the moment in which it is spoken. Because these words do not operate in the language system like any other word, they are capable of transgressing the flatness of opposition which constitutes language. [34]

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[34] Lyotard writes that these words cannot be given a definition as we would give any other word a definition: "for we cannot produce a definition of *I* or *here* while remaining at the semantic level in which they are placed, without performing from and upon them a metalinguistic operation that amount to a change in level—as for example, in the

Deictics can open up the language system to the physical depth of the sensory field.

These words gain more meaning depending on one's physical position in the world than

they do as operators in a language system based solely on signification. Deictics thus

demonstrate the imbrication of discourse and figure forgotten in ordinary language use.

Significantly, poetic language, or the transgression of discursive boundaries on the part of

the artist, has the capacity to bear witness to this. Geoffrey Bennington writes that

"artistic practice can in some sense reveal or bear witness to this [a piercing of the

flatness assumed to constitute the language system] through its manifestation of 'figures'

which do a certain violence to the invariant spacings of the *langue"* (68). Our ordinary

use of language is based on the immobile distance between certain words and sounds;

poetic language awakens us to language's figural dimension by transgressing the

boundaries that constitute our language system.[35] Poetic language always offers the

possibility for access to new forms of knowledge. That is, if language is used only in

service of signification and this language functions as a channel for the communication of

knowledge, the knowledge garnered from this process is problematic. It allows for a

perpetuation of the illusion that one can have inside knowledge about an external object,

i.e. that language and meaning are always working together in an effort to clearly express

grammarian's definition 'I is the first person pronoun,' which consists in transferring the term to the level of its syntactical function, thus apprehending it on an altogether other level than the lexical one that I occupy when I define, say, whale as a marine animal" (*Discourse, Figure* 38).

[35]Of Mallarme's *Un coup de des*, Lyotard writes "the fact that the other of signification —the figural—can come to dwell in discourse endows the latter with a thickness that will make reflection possible" (*Discourse, Figure* 71).

and define phenomenal forms. The function of poetic language, also referred to by

Lyotard as "expressive language," is to dismantle this illusion:

> the expressive function [of language] contains it [the thickness of difference]...it imports this death within discourse itself, since in the violence of the tearing-apart it is not a question of having a perfectly pure object on one side, and, on the other, a pristine subject, this setup permitting those cherished mind-games about the possibility of truth. No, this violence...adds depth, erects a stage in the articulation and limpidity of signification, at the same time carving, on the side of the object, its other face, the wings of its stage (*Discourse, Figure 9*).

Didion's "I" can be understood as a manifestation of poetic language that bears witness to

deixis because it reaches beyond its grammatical, semantic function into the space of the

figural. Didion's first person, as I will argue below, invokes a self already informed by

the density and complexity of its historical moment; thus its presence cannot reinforce the

stability of language upon which the conventions of journalism rely. This is why

traditional reporting mandates *against* the expression of the personal. Didion admits "In

many ways writing is the act of saying I, of imposing oneself upon other people…[it] is

an aggressive, even a hostile act." (2). In this case, hostility is directed towards the

aesthetics of standard journalism that reinforce a knowledge scripted in advance by

convention.

The figural in Didion's writing comes not only from her employment of the first

person, but also the conception and presentation of this person to readers. What I argue in

the following section is that Didion becomes embodied figure by emphasizing the

imbrication of her corporeal and cognitive self, an imbrication that functions as an index

to her historical moment. Thus when Didion invokes the personal in her journalism, she

is doubling her efforts to disrupt the conventions of reporting that insist upon a separation

of verifiable fact from subjective impression, conventions that foster an epistemology of the already-known.

Integral to Didion's reporting during the 1960s and 70s is a belief that the boundaries between her physical and mental self are mutable. In "The White Album," elements of Didion's medical history emerge unexpectedly alongside her documentation of major events of the latter part of the 1960s. For instance, a portion of a psychiatric report on Didion appears within the first few pages of "The White Album," forcing the reader to confront Didion before any of the events and people about which she will write. The report describes Didion as follows: "a personality in process of deterioration with abundant signs of failing defenses and increasing inability of the ego to mediate the world of reality…[Didion's] basic reality contact is obviously and seriously impaired at times" (14). The language of this report is particularly relevant in that it emphasizes Didion's struggle to mediate "the world of reality," a task central to her job as a reporter where the boundaries between reality and fantasy are expected to be upheld. Later, Didion includes the results of physical tests she has undergone and divulges that she's been given an "exclusionary diagnosis" of multiple sclerosis. She goes on to note that her diagnosis means she "might or might not experience symptoms of neural damage her whole life" (46). The conclusion drawn by Didion regarding the status of her mental and physical health is that her "body was offering a precise physiological equivalent to what had been going on in [her] mind" (47). In other words, Didion's psychological struggle to navigate reality is reflected in the deterioration of her body. Mental and physical boundaries have been breached, and Didion's corporeal self has become a manifestation of her psyche.

Importantly, Didion's particular cognitive struggle, as noted above, involves moving fluidly, healthily between what is real and what is not. In her preface to *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, Didion explains what inspired the title of her essay collection:

> The book is called *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* because for several years now certain lines from the Yeats poem...have reverberated in my inner ear as if they were surgically implanted there. The widening gyre, the falcon which does not hear the falconer, the gaze blank and pitiless as the sun; those have been my points of reference, the only images against which much of what I was seeing and hearing seemed to make any pattern (xi).

Didion makes an explicit connection here between the mental images Yeats' poem evokes and the manner in which these images become real points of reference for her, images that seem to correspond to her sensory experience of the world. What grounds Didion's perception of the world is Yeats' fictionalized exploration of the world's atomization. This has, in turn, caused the feeling of bodily atomization. However, Didion does not attempt to overcome the imbrication of her bodily and cognitive self that has made more difficult her ability to navigate reality; instead, she insists upon it. Thomas Reinert points out the following: "To illustrate the 'reality' and 'difficulties of adult life'... [Didion invokes] the density of bodiliness...it 'stalls thought in the personal," making experience...disjointed. Narrative, abstraction, and theory, by contrast, promote fluid motion; they open onto vast panoramas of *continued* comprehension" (122, emphasis mine). Didion's expression of the personal is rooted in this "density of bodiliness," its irreducible complexity. This is what frustrates the progress of "continued

98

comprehension" whose vistas cannot offer a view onto the unknown.[36] Didion's "I,"

grounded as it is in the thickness of imbrication, forces one to confront the disjointed

nature of experience, a disjointedness one attempts to overcome through the imposition

of narrative and convention that make comprehension easy, "fluid." Like Cezanne's

employment of the periphery in constructing a vision of Mont Saint-Victoire that incites

reflection on the origins of perception itself, Didion's application of the personal in her

journalism heightens a reader's awareness of how journalistic truth is constructed.

Importantly, this is done within the confines of journalism; that is, Didion does not

abandon journalism through her innovations. Instead, she participates in the development

of an avant-garde journalism through the voice of radical particularity.

Didion's Visual Journalism

The particular conception and employment of Didion's first-person journalism

outlined above lays the foundation from which Didion will build a style of reporting

capable of accommodating the irreconcilable differences of experience. As a result of

employing a perspective already open to imbrication, the language of Didion's journalism

can make more serious concessions to the figural. What I argue in the next section is that

Didion's reporting actively engages with the visual. Didion employs imagery as a form of

intervention into the explanatory narratives of conventional journalism. Moreover, she

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[36] One of Didion's critiques of the Women's Movement in the 1970s is that the
movement denies or attempts to circumvent the "irreconcilable difference of it [being a
woman]—that sense of living one's life deepest life under water, that dark involvement
with blood and birth and death" (117). Here again Didion expresses a commitment to the
"density of bodiliness."

employs the white space of the page, and gaps in her writing, to further challenge the

ordinary reading processes that adhere to standard journalism.

Didion admits she is preoccupied with the "pictures in her mind" ("Why I Write"

2) and continues by noting that her writing undertakes the task of exploring them, using

them to shape her language choices:

> I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and
> what it means...The arrangement of the words matters, and the arrangement you
> want can be found in the picture in your mind. The picture dictates the
> arrangement. The picture dictates whether this will be a sentence with or without
> clauses, a sentence that ends hard or a dying-fall sentence, long or short, active or
> passive. The picture tells you how to arrange the words and the arrangement of
> the words tells you, or tells me, what's going on in the picture. Nota bene. It tells
> you. You don't tell it (98).

The pictures in Didion's mind dictate the grammar of her writing, but the pictures,

importantly, are not defined by their representational clarity. Consequently, they lend

Didion's writing an exploratory bent. Indeed, Didion suggests that images in her mind are

accompanied by a kind of distortion through which her writing must work:

> When I talk about pictures in my mind I am talking, quite specifically, about
> images that shimmer around the edges. There used to be an illustration in every
> elementary psychology book showing a cat drawn by a patient in varying stages
> of schizophrenia. This cat had a shimmer around it. You could see the molecular
> structure breaking down at the very edges of the cat: the cat became the
> background and the background the cat, everything interacting, exchanging
> ions...certain images do shimmer for me. Look hard enough, and you can't miss
> the shimmer. It's there. You can't think too much about these pictures that
> shimmer. You just lie low and let them develop. You stay quiet. You don't talk to
> many people and you keep your nervous system from shorting out and you try to
> locate the cat in the shimmer, the grammar in the picture. ("Why I Write" 98).

The images in Didion's mind are compared here to an image with shifting edges: as the

molecular structure of the cat breaks down, the cat begins to blend in with its

background. But the background is also blending in with the cat. The difficulty in

100

discerning the image stems not only from the image itself, but also from the image's

framework lacking stability, a framework that might provide an opportunity for cognition

to come to terms with whatever distortions are present in the image itself. Writing

informed by this type of imagery must be a record of the mind at work rather than a

representation of the mind's capacity for mere discernment. As Didion notes, "you *try to*

locate the cat in the shimmer, the grammar in the picture." What Didion dramatizes in her

journalism is this very process, "the mind in the act of thought" (Anderson 161). As such,

she invites back into journalism the density of experience that conditions journalism but

that its institutional demands continually tame through convention. Phyllis Frus suggests

that the expectation of journalism to present "news as information—as top-down

communication, rather than as the exchange of ideas in an ongoing conversation"

weakens "public discussion and argument," the "vital habits" of democracy that can be

supported through a journalism resistant to critical closure (91). Didion's resistance

comes through a journalistic practice that seeks the imbrication of discourse and figure,

the "grammar in the picture," and encourages the kind of reflection necessary for a

democratically-minded politics. Didion's journalism is as much about the process of

writing, a process normally concealed by the conventions of standard reporting, as it is

about her particular subject matter. What follows is an examination of how this is

operationalized through her employment of the visual.

Two of Didion's most celebrated pieces of reporting "The White Album" and

"Slouching Towards Bethlehem," demonstrate her investment in a visual journalism.

These essays work through the cultural upheavals and dislocations of the 1960s and 70s

not through the application of a familiar journalistic framework to the phenomenal world but through the application of Didion's mind in the process of coming to terms with what it perceives. This manifests in Didion's writing as both a powerful commitment to the presentation of images that make her thinking nuanced and complex, and a more literal engagement with the visual elements of the page upon which she writes. This latter element of Didion's writing explicitly engages the figural and was employed by other New Journalists in the pursuit of a journalism that could more honestly countenance reality. Dan Wakefield, a journalist who wrote for *The Atlantic* and *The New York Times*, published *Between the Lines* in 1965. The book was a combination of Wakefield's reporting, which was steeped in the practice of impersonal writing and objectivity, and personal reflection. Wakefield intended to "hold those official coded reports [the previously printed pieces] over a flame and allow the warmth to bring out the other, more interesting words that were there in the white space, written in the invisible ink of personal experience" (qtd. in Weber, "Some Sort" 19). Wakefield suggests here that a journalist's personal impressions are confined to the "white space" of the page, written in "invisible ink." By explicitly engaging these otherwise invisible features of journalistic texts, New Journalists could disrupt the "official, coded reports" they were expected to produce and that the conventions of journalism implicitly demanded. The arrangement of both "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" and "The White Album" is designed to support an engagement with the visual that subsequently reveals the personal. In fact, Didion frequently employs the blank space of the page as an integral part of the stories she tells. When discussing some of what inspired her second novel *Play It As It Lays*, Didion notes

102

the following: "I began *Play It As It Lays* [with] only two pictures in my mind...the first

was of white space. Empty space. This was clearly the picture that dictated the narrative

intention of the book—a book in which anything that happened would happen off the

page, a 'white' book to which the reader would have to bring his or her own bad dreams"

(3). While Didion is speaking here of one of her few fictional novels, the principle of

employing the visual as integral to her writing is present in her reporting. Chris Anderson

notes that Didion's literary journalism "uses more obvious sections of blank space to

separate deliberately fragmentary and unrelated scenes, portraits, dialogues, and stories,

creating a verbal collage" (137). The blankness of the page employed by Didion,

however, is not meant to signify the absence of commentary. There is work happening

here—the construction of a space where the labor of thought otherwise elided through

journalistic convention might be engaged.

Didion's reporting on San Francisco in 1967 exemplifies her commitment to a

visual journalism. What is first apparent to Didion is the way media outlets uncritically

document the activity of the youths in San Francisco: "The observers [from *Life* and *Look*

and CBS] believed roughly what the children had told them: that they were a generation

dropped out of political action, beyond power games, that the New Left was just another

ego trip" ("Slouching Towards Bethlehem" 122). The press reported what they saw; they

believed what they were told by those whom they interviewed. In other words, they only

presented what was immediately visible to them, the surface reality of events I argued

earlier informs most conventional journalistic practice. Consequently, San Francisco is

problematically portrayed for Didion as "immaculate of political possibilities"

("Slouching Towards Bethlehem" 122). What Didion perceives while she is in San

Francisco, however, does not conform to these accounts, and her task becomes honoring

the particularity of her experience while resisting the impulse to collapse what she sees

into a familiar journalistic narrative. In presenting only the surface reality of events and

by believing "roughly what the children had told them," the press creates no space for a

consideration of anything other than what is immediately apparent to them. In the same

way that the film and architecture of her moment too completely satisfies imaginative

possibilities, the journalism of her time presents all that seems to be true and thus

forecloses the possibility that something other than what is might be the case. Didion's

task is now to present what is unpresentable: the often invisible point at which idealism

turns to totalitarianism.

In "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," scenes of reportage are arranged in order for

implicit commentary to emerge. While the press reports that San Francisco is just the

scene of an artistic movement with familiar faces like Allen Ginsberg, Didion reveals a

space wherein artistic movements take on a particularly sinister meaning. This emerges in

her essay through her repeated attempts to contact Chester Anderson, who was then "a

legacy of the Beat Generation" (100), and who published all the literature for the

Diggers.[37] After asking around for a while, Didion finally receives an address for Chester

Anderson, but comes to find the address does not exist. When she talks to the wife of the

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[37] In his book *Sixties Radicals, Then and Now*: *Conversations with Those Who Shapes the Era*, Ron Chepesiuk describes the Diggers as follows: "an informal group dedicated to nonviolent anarchy" who were "Described as the conscience of the Haight" (118). It is this reputation of the Diggers that Didion shapes as misleading.

man who gave her the address, the woman gives Didion the correct address, but then the

following conversation occurs:

> "But don't go up there," she says.
> I say I'll telephone.
> "There's no number," she says. "I can't give it to you."
> "742 Arguello," I say.
> "No," she says. "I don't know. And don't go there. And don't use either my name or my husband's name if you do" (101).

Didion comments on the dialogue only by saying "She [the woman who gave her

Anderson's address] is the wife of a full professor of English at San Francisco State

College" (101). This commentary is not explicit; what Didion writes is merely a record

of what occurred. But the placement of this fact after the transcription of her conversation

begins to make visible a kind of persecution complex that Didion senses growing in the

District and affecting all walks of life. This complex is made even more visible when at

the end of the above section Didion cites two lines from the Buffalo Springfield:

"*Paranoia strikes deep/Into your life it will creep*" (101). Between her conversation about

Anderson and the lyrics to the Buffalo Springfield is a small section of blank, white

space. This space in "Slouching towards Bethlehem" is one wherein the growing

paranoia and fear that surrounds Anderson, a person whose legacy in the district is that he

"will print [on his mimeograph machine] anything anybody has to say" (100), is revealed.

There is a gap between the level of paranoia displayed by the woman with whom Didion

speaks and Anderson's reputation as a member of the Beat generation and someone for

whom freedom of speech is essential; this gap becomes literal in Didion's arrangement of

the essay. What the press reports as an "extended pantry raid" or an "artistic avant-garde"

takes on a different meaning in the space opened up by Didion: something sinister is at

work in the District and though Didion does not state it explicitly, it emerges through her composition of the essay.

This is further demonstrated when Didion recounts a scene she witnesses in the Pan Handle. Peter Berg, one of the founders of the Diggers, enters the park with several people, one of whom is an "associate" of Chester Anderson. Didion immediately notices that they are in blackface and mentions this to two of the young people she is with. They respond by saying, "It's street theatre"... "It's supposed to be really groovy" (125). Didion also notices that the Diggers are not only "tapping people on the head with dime-store plastic night sticks" but they are wearing signs that read "How many times have you been raped, love freaks?" and "Who stole Chuck Berry's music?" (125). What is presented to Didion as just "groovy" street theatre becomes progressively violent. Didion writes that "Peter Berg is saying if anybody asks that this is street theater...what they are doing now is jabbing [a] Negro with the nightsticks. They jab, they bare their teeth, and the rock on the balls of their feet... 'What'd America ever do for you?' the girl in blackface jeers. 'White kids here, they sit in the Park all summer long, listening to music they stole, because their bigshot parents keep sending them money. Whoever sends you money?'" (126). When Didion asks another girl what she thinks of this scene, the girl responds by saying, "It's something groovy called street theatre;" Didion then asks the girl "whether or not it might have political overtones" and though the girl "worked it around in her mind a while" she only says "Maybe it's some John Birch thing" (127). The comment ends this section but functions as implicit commentary on the entire scene witnessed by Didion. The space between street theater, the John Birch Society, and the

militant, violent behavior displayed by Peter Berg and the Diggers is felt to be vast here. The irony absent in the commentary by the onlookers that what is happening in the park may be something related to the John Birch society becomes rich in Didion's presentation of the comment. The political potential in the district was not clear to the press because they, according to Didion, "continued to report the 'hippie phenomenon as...a thoughtful protest, not unlike joining the Peace Corps, against the culture which had produced Saran Wrap and the Vietnam War. This last, or they're-trying-to-tell-us-something approach reached its apogee in a *Time* cover story which revealed that hippies 'scorn money—they call it bread'" (122). Didion's presentation of her experiences radically challenges what the press reports. Marc Weingarten argues that the "traditional just-the-facts reporter dared to provide a neat and symmetrical order" to the cultural upheaval of the 1960s and 70s; as a result, periodicals like *Time* and *Newsweek* ended up "clumsily mishandling the hippie movement" (6). In the arrangement of her essay, however, Didion makes visible what was elided in the press, that the "thoughtful" protesters were ready to take the youth in San Francisco on a militant trip. John Hartsock writes, "Didion cultivates...incongruities in her writing precisely because they demonstrate how impossible it is to reduce phenomenal experience to a tidy package, in other words, critical closure" (199). The incongruities here are between what the press reports and what Didion experiences, and they emerge through Didion's scenic arrangement. This movement, as Hartsock notes, refuses critical closure. The space opened up by Didion's work is one where previously unforeseen possibilities become possible; in this case that

107

what was reported to be an innocuous gathering of hippies in San Francisco was perhaps the beginning of a fanaticism rooted in paranoia and violence.

Didion's coverage of San Francisco continues in "The White Album" but features an additional element that works to make more emphatic her first-person journalism. Didion includes details in her coverage of the shutdown of San Francisco State College that are, at best, peripheral to the main action of the story. They are details otherwise excluded from mainstream reporting because they do not work towards the development of a coherent narrative. This element of Didion's writing distinguishes her work from more standard journalistic practices. Dennis and Rivers write that "...it is remarkable how many of them [the New Journalists] choose subjects that seem, to the conventional journalist, to be peripheral" (17). Didion's work, out of all the New Journalists, showcases this aspect of the New Journalism most profoundly and it is one of the most remarked upon features of her writing. Chris Anderson argues that Didion's style is marked by a "grammar of radical particularity" (133-4); Sandra Braman describes Didion's writing as "insistently concrete" (354). It is the particularity of Didion's peripheral details that makes them difficult to envelop within a broader, consistent narrative. Thus when Didion employs them, she creates a journalism resistant to the efforts of mainstream media to create narratives free of contradiction or paradox. Didion's impressions of the shutdown differ greatly from the majority of the media's coverage of this event. *Time* magazine:

> Long one of the outstanding members of California's 18-campus state-college system, San Francisco State has lately been foundering in disorder. Violence began last November when Black Students Union members wrecked the offices of the student paper and beat several staffers for printing what the blacks called

racial slurs. Tension increased when demands for immediate reinstatement of five B.S.U. rioters were refused. Students held a sit-in at the administration building. In an embarrassing televised inquisition, the trustees interrogated the college's president, John Summerskill. Not long afterwards Summerskill resigned in disgust, forced out after just 21 months in office ("Shutdown" 65).

Life magazine's Jack Fincher begins his "Unmaking of a President" by describing the situation at San Francisco State College as a "guerilla war between California campus radicals and the politics-dominated system of higher education" (41). For Didion, though, there is something less visible at work on the campus. She focuses her attention on peripheral details: signs posted by student radicals, conversations she overhears in the Administration Building, the architecture of the college. Didion's inclusion of these almost negligible details about the shutdown of a major college alters the narrative perpetuated by both the media covering the events at San Francisco State and the students participating in the shutdown. The mass media's coverage of San Francisco State College, exemplified by the excerpts above, speaks to a use of language designed so the reader can discern a narrative and glean knowledge, i.e. ordinary language, a language constituted by oppositions. There was "disorder," "guerilla war;" students were "radicals" fighting against the evil-minded bureaucracy of higher education. In an uncritical presentation of these terms, one takes them at face value and comes up with a digestible, reasonable image of San Francisco State College as it was described by both students and newspapers alike: a warzone. Yet Didion's description of the campus offers another picture, one which is informed by details entirely overlooked by most media outlets: "'Adjet-prop committee meeting in the Redwood Room' read a scrawled note on the cafeteria door one morning; only someone who needed very badly to be alarmed could

109

respond with force to a guerilla band that not only announced its meetings on the enemy's [the college's] bulletin board but seemed innocent of the spelling, and so the meaning, of the words it used" (38). In noticing that someone from the "guerilla band" misspelled the word "agitprop" as "Adjet-prop," Didion begins to dismantle the familiar associations evoked by the term guerilla. If the term invoked by the image is one of oppositional forces, one must now reconcile it with an image of collusion: students using the property (a bulletin board) of a college they are attempting to dismantle to advertise a meeting intended to cover ways to further dismantle the college. Moreover, Didion notes that both students and faculty had been referring to S.I. Hayakawa, one of the presidents of San Francisco State College at the time of its shut down, as "Hitler Hayakawa" and "Eichmann" (38). This characterization of the president becomes significant when Didion later describes a meeting of the Students for a Democratic Society. She is struck by their discussion of the press conference they intend to hold: "'This has to be on our terms' someone warned. 'Because they'll [the press] ask very leading questions, they'll ask *questions*'" (40). Later, Didion wonders about the "illusion of aim to be gained by holding a press conference, the only problem with press conferences being that the press ask questions" (41). If for the SDS the press asking questions is problematic, then the characterization of Hayakawa as Hitler or Eichmann must be re-thought. The violent oppression engaged in by Hitler and Eichmann involved the same censuring of the press, the same concern with controlling narrative that occupies the conversation of SDS members. Didion continually presents readers with these moments of incongruity. In so doing, her writing disrupts the reader's impulse to see the conflict between the students

110

and administration at San Francisco State College as one that has discernable enemies or heroes. For Didion, however, all the details matter. By focusing on details not reconcilable with a broader narrative, Didion denies one access to a narrative about the shutdown at San Francisco State College that is free of complication. Instead, her journalism is grounded in complication, in the density of experience she sees as central not only to her mental and bodily existence but also to her historical moment.

In avoiding the particular, narrative coherence can triumph over the pursuit of the possible. Didion's essays not only point out how the particular is avoided, repressed in the construction of narrative, but also continually uses the particular to shore up disruption. In this way, Didion engages with the figural in a manner akin to the artists and writers Lyotard discusses. What Lyotard values in avant-garde painting is the way in which it frees the eye from restriction; in poetry, it is releasing language from the restrictions of the linguistic field, reaching into the space wherein contradiction and paradox lie. This is what Lyotard termed poetic language, or the work of the figural through discourse. In his analysis of Henri Pichette's *Les épiphanies*, Lyotard argues Pichette's use of language demonstrates the transgressive nature of poetic language. He examines the following line: "*I print you/I swim you/I music you*" (qtd. in *Discourse, Figure* 139). Each of the phrases which make up this line violate, on some level, grammatical norms. Lyotard notes that the verb print "ordinarily does not take for its object to be animate" and the phrase to swim "is an intransitive taken here as transitive" (139). But Lyotard finds the most significant discursive transgression comes from the phrase "I music you." Music is a noun which is here used as a verb; its ordinary function

111

in a sentence is thus displaced. The effects of this displacement are explained through a

comparison Lyotard draws between the phrase "I music you" and the grammatically

correct phrase "I know you." The phrase "I know you" has meaning by virtue of its

opposition with other terms:

> There is an effect of meaning, which I call here signification, that is conveyed
> immediately with [I know you]. If *I know you* is endowed with signification, this
> is because it enters into virtual opposition to *I know him, you know yourself, I
> don't know you*...There terms, or the relations that are in opposition to the stated
> term or relation, are virtually present, virtually co-present (or absent) (*Discourse,
> Figure* 140, emphasis original).

The virtual opposition Lyotard refers to here is akin to the invariable distances between

phonemes we keep intact in order to communicate. That is, we can understand the

sentence "I know you" because we can draw a comparison between it and other phrases

similar to it, even if these phrases are not present. These virtual oppositions, like the

distances we maintain between sounds, words, etc. are not tangible; they are the

concealed workings of our discursive system. "I know you" is not a phrase that startles or

disrupts because it is created out of the rules which dictate ordinary language use.

Geoffrey Bennington writes that "The sentence 'I know you' is not an event in the system

of language...it is simply a possibility which would be predicted by a generative grammar

and simply accounted for in a regular way by a structural model" (76). "I know you" is

predictable and garners meaning by our capacity to place it in opposition to other phrases

which are also predictable based on the rules of discourse. The same is not true with "I

music you." This phrase cannot gain meaning through opposition; there is no other phrase

with which to compare it. Lyotard argues that "*Music* is not in opposition to the terms

that one would expect to find here (*I cradle you, I charm you)*. These terms are not kept

virtually co-present (or co-absent) in their place; they are displaced, or more exactly,

music is a displaced term. The interval separating *music* from its neighbors is not a

measured, coded interval" (140). Because *music* is used here in a way that is not

permitted by the rules of discourse, its meaning cannot be fixed or determined. Instead of

deriving its meaning through opposition or comparison with other, similar

phrases, "I music you" fractures the system by which ordinary language is constituted. Of

this Lyotard writes:

> *Music* is a term actualized through transgression; its presence bears witness to the
> fact that there lies underground not a system but forces, an energetics that disrupts
> the ordering of the system. When you produce a verb with a noun, an event
> happens: the system of the rules of language not only is unable to account for this
> novel use, but opposes it, resists it; the relation that arises between it and the
> statement is one of conflict (*Discourse, Figure* 141).

Instead of participating in the process of meaning-making, "I music you" transgresses the

discursive system to display the unpredictable, energetic use of language which is held at

bay by the rules of grammar and communication. "I music you" opens one up to the

potential of language as it reveals the limitations of the system it transgresses. This is the

figural; it is here the simultaneous disruption of a system which fosters meaning and

communication and the revelation of the potential of language to be startling,

unpredictable. Within the context of my argument about Didion, her emphasis on the

particular, the peripheral, dismantles narratives, specifically journalistic narratives, which

are produced through reliance on generalization and cliché. We can see her use of both

peripheral detail and personal impression as disruptive in the same sense that the phrase

"I music you" is disruptive: both reject the rules by which meaning-making systems

operate and reveal, in Pinchett's case, the energetics of language concealed by discourse, and in Didion's case, the energetics of experience inclusive of contingencies.

Sharing the Responsibility of Journalistic Limits

Didion's journalism presents that which is otherwise concealed by the conventions of standard reporting. Didion does this not only through the arrangement of her texts, which draw explicitly on the blank, white space of the page as integral components of journalism, but also through her emphatic first-person perspective, a perspective rooted in the density of experience and informed by imbrication. Taken together, these elements of Didion's writing create a journalism that can reflect the mind as it works through what it perceives; in reading Didion's work, then, one is forced to think in unfamiliar ways because the conventions of journalism that normally foster comprehension are rejected by Didion. Importantly, Didion's work reflects not only a mind at work but also a mind aware of its limitations. In *Salvador*, the elements of Didion's writing that worked to challenge and extend the epistemological range of journalism seem to falter. Didion visits El Salvador during the height of its brutal civil war and is nearly paralyzed by the fear and violence she both hears about and witnesses. As a result, the tools she has hitherto employed in her journalism are no longer sufficient in countenancing what she perceives. For example, while in El Salvador, Didion visits a shopping center said to represent El Salvador's success; it is the largest shopping mall in Central America at the time. As she walks through the mall, Didion notes all the

114

consumer items that are supposed to foster the notion that El Salvador, as a country, is

making "progress":

> This was a shopping center that embodied the future for which El Salvador was
> presumably being saved, and I wrote it down dutifully, this being the kind of
> 'color' I knew how to interpret, the kind of inductive irony, the detail that was to
> illuminate the story. As I wrote it down I realized I was no longer much interested
> in this kind of irony, that this was a story that would not be illuminated by such
> details, that this was a story that might not be illuminated at all (36).

When Didion leaves the mall, she witnesses a man, with guns to his back, being forced

into a van. Against a backdrop of real terror and violence, the presence of a shopping

mall in a war-torn country cannot be fully countenanced by irony. In some ways, Didion

shores up the limitations of her own techniques here, acknowledging that they do not

always work towards the illumination of the unknown. In *Salvador*, Didion's journalism

reflects a mind coming to terms with the idea that even the most flexible of cognitive

frameworks might not be enough to countenance the darkest of human error. Although

Didion's innovative journalistic techniques may have touched their limit here, Didion is

unrelenting in her presentation of this limit. In other words, though aware that something

more is required of her as a journalist in El Salvador, and that she may not presently be

able to achieve that something more, Didion offers this dilemma as integral to her

experience. As such, it becomes the shared responsibility of both Didion and her readers

to think through the journalistic impasses Didion encounters, and it is this sense of shared

responsibility that gives Didion's reporting a significant cultural function. Indeed, in

pointing out the limitations of her own ways of constructing and presenting the world she

perceives, Didion invites readers into the process of journalistic recreation otherwise

inaccessible through the conventions of standard reporting that conceal the modes and

means of its production. As Jason Mosser argues, "Through the institutionalization of the mass media, dominant power structures discourage us from believing that we can play a significant role in the creation of our world. They ask us to accept their versions of the world around us, and dissuade us from creating alternative versions. By discouraging our participation in the creation of social reality, the mass media promotes not democracy but totalitarianism" ("Four" 19). Didion's journalism preserves that spirit of inquiry I argued earlier is vanquished when predictable, conventional aesthetic practices ground expression. Rather than writing from a place where journalism is responsible for communicating the visible, the verifiable and thus confirming only that which is already known, Didion's journalism is designed to countenance what can still be known. Her journalism, through its engagement with the visual and an emphatic first-person perspective, expressions of the figural, disrupts the familiar narratives derived from standard journalism and encourages a process of complex, open-ended thinking. It is at this point that Didion's journalism and the work of avant-garde artists like Cezanne dovetail. In the case of both Didion and Cezanne, what is revealed through an engagement with their works is not knowledge, of Mont Saint-Victoire in Cezanne's case, or of the "news" in Didion's case. Lyotard argues that the eruption of the figural is productive of truth, not knowledge. Callan and Williams importantly acknowledge that for Lyotard "Truth is not a settled relation between mental and physical items or a fixed and formal logical state. Truth is an unstable transformative process, an unmaking and making, rather than anything made or finalized. Truth is not the result of work. Truth is working at things" (47). In my reading of Didion I have tried to emphasize that her work

not only challenges the conventions of mainstream journalistic practice, but also creates a space wherein the reader must work through the paradox and contradiction that is often concealed by the conventions Didion challenges. Didion makes central to reporting her process of working through experiences without the helpful touchstones of narrative or objectivity. Thus she works on things in a way that resonates with the kind of artistic labor Lyotard values in the avant-garde. As a result of this labor, Didion creates a journalism underwritten by the assumption that there is always something left to learn, something more to countenance. This returns to the profession of reporting an inquiring mind otherwise atrophied by conventions that labor only towards that which is already known.

CHAPTER 4

NORMAN MAILER'S ANAMNESIC LABOR

Introduction

The New Journalism engages conflicts that arise when a reporter's professional

responsibilities are challenged by his or her sense that the material of journalism cannot

be fully expressed through journalistic convention. This conflict stems from more than

one source. On the one hand, reporters became aware of a surfeit of fact unable to find

expression within the bounded territory of traditional reporting. Capote's approach to this

problem came through the use of two irreconcilable narrative perspectives, one that could

present the verifiable evidence of the Clutter murder and the other that could testify to the

unverifiable trauma of Perry Smith's life. Taken together, these perspectives evoke

sympathy for both a murderer and his victims. In her early nonfiction, Didion employs a

radical first-person perspective in direct confrontation of another problem, one related to

the one Capote addresses. Didion takes issue with how the neutral, unbiased perspective

of conventional journalism presents as real that which has been constructed only to

appear as real. When Didion grounds her journalism in a first-person perspective open to

the shifting nature of experience, she evokes an irresolvable tension between lived

experience and the way in which journalism represents these experiences. These tensions

point to the instability of journalistic narrative in ordering and making sense of

experience, a task it is conventionally expected to undertake, through, at least in part, its

stable point of view.

Norman Mailer's literary journalism offers both another lens through which to view the conflicts that stem from journalistic convention and another method of experimentation through which to address such conflicts. Mailer's literary journalism takes up questions regarding how knowledge is garnered and memories created not only from journalistic accounting but also from historical accounting. The limitations of journalistic form, its conventions that frustrate an engagement with the complexities of experience, are often collapsed throughout his work into the parallel limitations of historical narrative. His sense that reporting is limited by convention mirrors his claim in *Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History* (1968) that despite his efforts to recount the historical significance of the March on the Pentagon, "there are places no history can reach" (288). Both journalism and history assume their objects to be representable and communicable through particular stylistic imperatives, and history often leans on journalism for both its material and its authority.[38] However, Mailer consistently suggests in his works that the forms of history and journalism are not designed to countenance all the contingencies of experience for which they should account. This presents as a problem to the reporter charged with recording events in the present which are then evoked through journalistic texts in the future for the purposes of establishing their reality. Barbie Zelizer notes, "Often less interested in the variations and

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[38]Carolyn Kitch notes in her essay "Placing Journalism Inside Memory—and Memory Studies," that "For much if not most of the public, journalism is a primary source of information about the past and shared understandings of the past. It also is a main site for public anticipation of memory: as 'the first draft of history,' journalism is also the first draft of memory, a statement about what should be considered, in the future, as having mattered today" (312).

119

contradictions that arise in the record over time than they have been in securing a durable, accurate and reliable recounting of the past, historians have valued journalists' address to events as a present-oriented treatment. That address has tended to provide... a respect for truth, facts and reality" (81). Yet if the institutional demands of journalism are such that they cannot completely engage the reality they are charged with representing, then journalism's exploitation by historians is problematic. This raises a question: can journalism and history produce texts that bear witness to the limitations of their forms such that audiences come to see memory as predicated on some form of exclusion? It is this question to which Mailer's work in this chapter will offer a reply. Indeed, Mailer confronts the problem of how to preserve for memory that which resists inscription not by abandoning the prospect of either journalism or history but by working on these forms from within through specific stylistic innovations. In other words, Mailer's work is not a rejection of the possibility of history or journalism; instead, by working experimentally within them, he opens up these forms to their own limitations and their own possibilities. Mailer's work is thus not situated temporally in a past or present moment isolated for the purposes of establishing reality; instead, Mailer's writing is given over to futurity.

The future temporality to which Mailer's work is addressed is expressed, in part, through his treatment of perspective. Mailer employs a number of different literary personae through what has been called a "first-person-third technique,"[39] a technique that

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[39] Tom Piazza, of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, uses this term in his article "Citizen Mailer" while J. Michael Lennon, in his biography of Mailer, uses the phrase "first person, third person." I will be using the phrase "first-person-third" throughout this chapter simply because it is more efficient and not because it refers to something different from the phrase "first person, third person."

differentiates his challenge to journalistic form from both Capote and Didion.[40] For

example, in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968), Mailer is simply "the reporter." *Of a

Fire on the Moon* (1970) begins with Mailer referring to himself as Norman then quickly

switching to the rhetorical posture of Aquarius. In his 1975 book *The Fight*, Mailer's

recounting of the Ali-Foreman boxing match in Zaire, Mailer refers to himself by his first

name: Norman. But it was in *Armies of the Night*, a work that won Mailer his first

Pulitzer Prize, where Mailer's most radical use of this first-person-third technique

emerges.[41] Mailer's report on the 1967 March on the Pentagon is presented through

several different literary personae: Mailer the Historian, Mailer the Novelist, Mailer

Prince of Bourbon, Mailer the Nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn, etc. What these personae

foreground in Mailer's journalism is his position as both mediator of reality, creator of

records employed in the reconstruction of history, and his participation in the reality he is

charged with recounting. There is hardly an object for memory that Mailer allows to exist

independently of his multiple personae. What Mailer's first-person-third journalism

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[40]Mailer's technique is reminiscent of James Agee's intense self-examination throughout *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.

[41] While this technique is reminiscent of free-indirect discourse, Mailer's positioning of himself as both character, narrator, and author presents some complications. Given Mailer's recognizable public presence at the time *Armies* was published, it is not easy to distinguish Mailer's personae in *Armies* from its real-life counterpart. This is true of Mailer's other works of literary journalism. In fact, in a critique of Mailer's *Of a Fire on the Moon*, Tom Wolfe wrote that, "Mailer's autobiographical technique never succeeded in taking the reader inside the capsule, much less inside the points of view or central nervous system of the astronaut himself." ("New Journalism" 64). Wolfe felt that Mailer's first-person-third technique was too obstructive to be considered a successful application of free-indirect discourse, a literary technique he felt important to literary journalism.

offers, then, is not a particular memory, but the processes of recollection that constitute memories.

Mailer's emphasis on memory as process can be understood as a form of anamnesis. This term characterizes a particular facet of Lyotard's avant-garde enacted in Mailer's experimentations with standard journalistic and historical narratives. Reading Mailer's work as a form of anamnesis not only highlights the specific contribution his work makes to the New Journalism but also securely positions Mailer within a broader tradition of avant-garde experimentation. Lyotard's theory of anamnesis shapes his argument that postmodern art functions as a site of resistance to grand narratives; these are narratives that claim total explanatory power. Bill Readings notes that grand narratives are stories that claim the "status of universal metanarrative, capable of accounting for all other stories in order to reveal their true meaning" (xxxiii). By drawing on Lyotard's theory of the avant-garde as anamnesic labor, and relating this labor to a form of postmodern artistic experimentation, I argue that Mailer's work actively challenges grand narratives that proceed not only by the abstraction of their authors from the narratives they tell, but also through the silencing of that which does not conform to their narrative modes.

Anamnesis and Art

The term anamnesis does not originate with Lyotard,[42] but it is central to his

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[42] The Greek word for "recollection," anamnesis first appears in Plato's *Meno* and refers to the idea that knowledge is a form of recollection, perhaps from some previous mode of existence. Though the term anamnesis has been employed in a number of different ways throughout the history of critical theory, Lyotard's use of the term evokes its specific use

discussion of avant-garde art. Lyotard opposes anamnesis to history, and his distinctions

between the two provide a useful framework for understanding the particularities of

Mailer's experimental journalism. Lyotard posits that history keeps present what is

forgotten "by trying to be faithful to the past, through its witnesses" ("Anamnesis" 107-

8). In its faithfulness, history produces and examines verifiable evidence; it relies on the

visible, the accountable, in order to recollect in the present a moment from the past. As

noted by Zelizer earlier, journalism is often exploited by historians to this end.

Considered a stable record of past events, journalism is employed for the purposes of

establishing history's faithfulness to the past. Anamnesis is also an attempt to keep

present what is forgotten, but it proceeds without concern for the referential. Instead,

anamnesis honors the potential for the unknown or the unverifiable to be at the very

center of the past it attempts to recollect. The grammar of history reflects its concern for

the verifiable, but it is decidedly different from the "grammar" of anamnesis:

> History's clear role is to express past events in as truthful a language as possible. Truthfulness of expression, historical as much as scientific, is marked...by achievement of provisional consensus of the community of historians. Its referent, the event, is 'real,' if it has a particular meaning, it is because it has been the object of an argument with 'well-formed' sentences, linkages thought to be reasonable, deictic sentences and nominative sentences. The rules of the historical 'genre' are here those of argument and interlocution. Anamnesis is at first sight something completely different. It explores the meaning of the given 'present,' of an expression of the here and now...it does this by means of associations which are said to be 'free'" ("Anamnesis" 108).

What becomes 'real' in historical terms is a result of particular grammatical choices of

which Lyotard names a few: well-formed sentences, clear lines of argument, etc. Stylistic

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within the psychoanalysis. Lyotard uses the term anamnesis in place of Freud's term *Durcharbeitung* (working through).

choices confer upon their subject a validity that can be used to secure that subject's historical significance. This is the case not just for historical narrative but also conventional journalistic narratives. In his review of Stephen Hess' study of Washington correspondents, Theodore Glasser notes that "Hess found that for nearly three-quarters of the stories he studied, reporters relied on no documents – only interviews. And when reporters did use documents, those documents were typically press clippings – stories they had written or stories written by their colleagues. And so what does objectivity mean? It means that sources supply the sense and substance of the day's news" (15). Relying on outside sources in order to preserve the appearance of objectivity means those outside sources drive the day's news and the day's news is driven by the availability of outside sources. This creates a news cycle that is significantly influenced by the conventions of reporting and not by the quality or importance of a particular story. Writing in this way creates a closed loop where, much like with historical narrative, what is written about must be expressed through particular stylistic imperatives, and that which can be expressed through particular stylistic imperatives is what is written about. Anything that resists expression through the stylistic imperatives of either history or journalism risks never being countenanced and thus never afforded the chance for remembrance How can we remember that which resists inscription? Anamnesis is not simply a solution to this problem. Rather, it is a process that fortifies one's capacity to engage with the un-countenanced and thus potentially unknown elements of historical memory.

Anamnesis, as noted in the passage above, is not guided by particular stylistic

imperatives; instead, it explores the present through "free association." The reference to

Freud here is not incidental. Lyotard's understanding of anamnesis is very much

informed by Freud's use of the term as it relates to psychoanalytic therapy. In

psychoanalytic therapy, a patient suffering from neurosis may be asked to talk openly

through his current and past experiences without concern for coherency. Lyotard argues,

"In its clinical function, anamnesis aims to locate through 'free play' of relays the

recurrence of certain signifiers. Starting from this recurrence, a structure of the

unconscious similar to language could be elaborated which would frame the symptoms

describing the clinical profile of the patient" ("Anamnesis" 110). Through free

association, it is possible for the analyst to begin forming a profile that could offer the

patient some insight into his or her particular neurosis. Importantly, because anamnesis

works by free association, and a chain of associations may have no determinate end, there

is no conclusive end to the patient's therapy. While the analyst may be able to identify

what recurs most often in the patient's associations, Lyotard argues that "There remains

the principle of the anamnesic procedure: the 'reason' for the chain is never presentable

in terms of a past event. It is immemorial. Nevertheless, it is ever-present as that which

determines association. Absent from memory, unpresentable, it has 'presence.'"

("Anamnesis" 110). Uncovering the event that inspires the neurosis is not the goal of

anamnesis because the traumatic event may not be recoverable; it is possible the event

was never fully inscribed in memory or that it has been warped through repression. As a

result, it might never be uncovered, though this does not mean the trauma caused by the

event does not exist. Instead of experiencing the revelation of an original trauma, the

patient develops a disposition towards the work of anamnesis. That is, the patient opens

himself up to a labor without determinate end such that he can continue to productively

work through the symptoms of a potentially unrecoverable trauma. The psychoanalyst

listens for repetitions, compulsions, and patterns in his patient's thinking in order to assist

his patient in the process of working through trauma. But when the unrecoverable or

unpresentable trauma is one of history, to whom might its sufferers speak?

The work of the avant-garde artist is to listen for the unheard voices of those

whose trauma cannot be presented through traditional modes of representation. As I

argued above, history and journalism operate according to particular stylistic imperatives

and privilege events and stories that can be expressed through these imperatives. That

which cannot be expressed is often doomed to be forgotten, lost to historical memories

created out of institutional imperatives. Like the analyst whose work is to engage in and

encourage a process of free association and the analysand who must labor to keep open

the possibility of a revelation of meaning that may never come, the avant-garde artist

creates a passageway through which the inexpressible might be expressed by rejecting

formal constraints and experimenting with his artistic medium:

> This is not about researching the past to establish its truth. Stuff gets drawn from
> all periods into the current context without worrying about argumentation, nor
> how it is going to work for the writing. The apparent absence of constraints, this
> 'freedom' to associate and be fearless of the incongruous, the absurd and the
> scandalous, is the opposite of a strong regulatory disposition, and can even be
> violent. It is a disposition to 'work through' the current context of those phrases
> that come to be associated with it: we might refer to this as perlaboration. It is a
> matter of working to reach the disposition one already has, of labouring to prepare
> oneself for the labour in process ("Anamnesis" 110).

The concern of avant-garde art is not how the formal qualities of a piece cohere; instead,

avant-garde art, according to Lyotard, proceeds by an openness to labor through the

incongruous, the chain of associations that does not promise a revelation of meaning.

Thus artistic labor informed by anamnesis works by experimentation, exploration. It is

not guided by grammatical principles or particular narrative threads but by the unknown.

Avant-garde art actually becomes, for Lyotard, a privileged realm in which to carry out

the labor of anamnesis. He writes, "to properly understand the work of modern

painters...one should compare their work to an anamnesis in the analytic sense. Just as the

analysand tries to work through her or his current problem by freely associating

apparently inconsistent elements with past situations, allowing her or him to uncover

hidden meanings in her/his life and behavior, so we can understand the work of Cezanne,

Duchamp, Picasso, Kandinsky, etc., as a [working through] undertaken by modernity on

its own meaning" (qtd. in Hudek 5). Lyotard sees in the work of the artists above not a

rejection of modernity but a working through. If grand narratives are produced at the

expense of little narratives that refuse to comply with them, then the work of the avant-

garde artist is to ask what has been excluded or silenced and create a space where the fact

of this exclusion can be presented, to present what is unpresentable. Neal Curtis frames

the work of anamnesis as "a remembering that something is always forgotten"

("Anamnesis"18). That something is always sacrificed such that grand narratives might

be perpetuated is the reminder carried out in the works of the avant-garde. It is also an

enactment of Lyotard's theory of the postmodern.

Though it has often been understood as an effort towards periodization, Lyotard's

theory of postmodernism is not an effort to theorize a time before and after the time of

modernism. Instead, the "post" of Lyotard's postmodernism can be understood, as

127

Antony Hudek argues, as an "*ana-* process, an analytical process, a process of anamnesis...which works through [*élabore*] an 'initial forgetting'" (5). A grand narrative can be maintained only at the cost of suppressing that which does not fit within its narrative mode; postmodern, avant-garde experimentation works within modernism to locate those voices and experiences which have been silenced and bear witness to them. Postmodern experimentation, in working through the meaning of its own moment without foreclosing meaning entirely, leaves itself open to futurity. In this sense, avant-garde painting and writing remain sites of potential and possibility; they are sites of hope and not of mourning. Importantly, though, the forward-looking temporality of postmodern art does not mean it is free from the conditions of the world. Lyotard writes:

> the artwork never gets clear of anything, never exceeds its subjection to the world...Style relentlessly works, undoing and reshaping its material in order to snatch it from the spiral of the sensible, to subvert and offer it up to the call of the unheard-of. Yet style firmly maintains sounds, words, colours, all the timbres from which it composes the artwork within their material element. And the forms that it invents for them and which it imposes on reality will not be emancipated from reality: to it they *promise* escape (*Soundproof Room* 98-100).

Though style allows for avant-garde art to interrogate its present conditions, artwork is not "emancipated" from reality. Instead, it hovers between reality and the promise of an escape from reality— articulated through style—that nonetheless cannot be escaped. This particular condition of avant-garde art is important to note because it highlights the unique position of the writers under study here. Seymour Krim argues there is a "dual responsibility which rides the writer-reporter as it doesn't the totally free 'creative writer,' namely factual justice to his material and yet equal pride in the literary possibilities offered his imagination. He [the writer-reporter] is hemmed in by his awareness of the living characters who make up the cast of each new story. If he takes

128

risks either imaginative or moral he does not do it in a vacuum" (174). Given the way

journalism is often employed as a means to establish reality—within historical narratives,

for instance—moral risk might take the shape of *not* pushing its institutional limits.[43] For

example, in 1945 when William Shawn, then the managing editor of *The New Yorker*,

proposed to John Hersey that he write a piece about the survivors of the atomic bomb, it

was because Shawn felt reporters had actually overlooked the human expense of atomic

warfare. Marc Weingarten notes the following:

> Shawn believed that a report on the aftereffects of the most cataclysmic event in
> the history of warfare might alter readers' perceptions of what had thus far been
> an abstraction: the mushroom cloud that had led to Japan's surrender and
> America's triumph. In all the thousands of words that had been written about the
> bomb, not one had actually considered the human factor, an oversight Shawn
> couldn't fathom and wanted to rectify (21).

To not engage the less verifiable particularities of atomic war—what its aftereffects

might feel like to a survivor—is to leave only for the official record a meaningless

abstraction—the mushroom cloud symbolic of Japan's surrender. This choice would have

marginalized the voices of those directly impacted by the bomb whereas "*Hiroshima*

gave a voice and a sense of the tragic to the enemy, and its powerful imagery resonated

with those who had never given a thought to—or who had even dismissed outright—the

plight of the bomb's victims" (Weingarten 24). Thus to challenge the conventions of

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[43]Of course, there are also risks that adhere to challenging journalistic form. John J. Pauly
notes that "While all reporters make a living interpreting the lives of others, literary
journalists may experience the contradictions of such work with special poignancy. They
must ask themselves what it means to immerse oneself, to tag along in another's life, to
write stories for anonymous readers about subjects that one has come to know personally,
or to make the intimate details of another's life available for public scrutiny" (601).

reporting is to make a decision that often has a significant moral dimension.[44] The

writing of the authors under study here negotiates the particular professional and ethical

responsibilities of the journalist and mirrors the negotiations undertaken by the avant-

garde artist. The experimentations with conventional journalism are not undertaken, as

Krim notes, in a vacuum; their stakes are high. Though Lyotard does not discuss

journalism as a field in which one can see the process of anamnesis at work, it is a

privileged space where the struggle between one's professional responsibility to report

reality and one's sense that he is limited in how he can represent reality is negotiated.

In *Armies of the Night*, Mailer confronts the problem of how to preserve for

memory experiences that resist inscription. His work is an effort to destabilize the

conventional modes of both journalism and history because these modes, like grand

narratives, require the sacrifice of complexities that resist narrativization. Mailer's

experimentation with both journalistic and historical accounting presents itself in

numerous ways. The most prominent is Mailer's manipulation of point of view, enacted

through his use of multiple literary personae. Mailer also challenges the unidirectional,

forward-moving temporality that underwrites both historical and journalistic modes of

accounting. These experimentations are done in service of the unpresentable which, in

Armies of the Night, takes the form of a spiritual transformation during the March on the

Pentagon undergone by both Mailer and those who stood in opposition to the Vietnam

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[44]*Hiroshima* does not reflect the stylistic conventions of standard journalism. As
Weingarten points out, "What makes 'Hiroshima' a crucial New Journalism
antecedent...is the way Hersey assiduously describes his characters' internal reactions, the
thoughts racing through their heads when the 'noiseless flash' makes its appearance over
Hiroshima" (24).

War.

Armies of the Night Part I

After attending the March on the Pentagon in October of 1967, Mailer contracted

with *Harper's* to write an account of his experience. Originally published as "The steps

of the Pentagon," Mailer's essay was the first to require nearly an entire issue of

Harper's. Because "The steps of the Pentagon" was so long, the second part of Mailer's

essay had to be published by another magazine. *Commentary* published "The Battle of

the Pentagon" in April of 1968, a month after the Harper's piece. Later in the year, the

two essays were published together as a book entitled *Armies of the Night: History as a*

Novel, the Novel as History. The first part of *Armies* details Mailer's participation in the

March on the Pentagon and is told entirely through the first-person-third perspective I

briefly discussed earlier. Mailer employs a number of different literary personae in the

first part of the book; the two most prominent being Mailer the Historian and Mailer the

Novelist. The second part of the book is a more objective accounting of the events

leading up to and culminating in the March and is heavily reliant on excerpts about the

March from newspapers and magazines. The multiple literary personae in the first part of

Armies dissolve into a more straightforward third-person narration in the second part of

Armies. The shifting points of view from which Mailer first presents his history of the

March function to lay bare the distortions made invisible through the conventions of both

journalism and history.

In part one of *Armies*, Mailer makes himself central to the object of his

accounting—the March on the Pentagon—rather than abstracting himself from it. In so

doing, Mailer confronts a particular conception of historical narrative, a conception

equally applicable to traditional journalism: "the idea of a diachronic succession of

moments which is known from a position of transcendent subjectivity abstracted from

that sequence" (Readings 56). Positioning themselves as outside their narratives, the

journalist and the historian grant themselves privileged access to the events about which

they write.[45] The promise often implicit in these narrative formations is knowledge. For

instance, the historian creates a temporal binary between the past and the present such

that past events can become illuminated by the historian's present exploration of those

events. The present is a secure space of knowledge production, and the past is the fodder

for this production. Thus the historian becomes not only "a chronicler, a mere appendix

to the story...but the absolutely privileged and secure site grounding the possibility of the

story" (Readings 58). The same can be said of the journalist who presents a story through

the stylistic conventions of his medium, particularly through the use of an objective,

impersonal point of view. Mailer's use of a first-person-third point of view in the first

part of *Armies* undermines the secure ground upon which both history and journalism are

often built.

      Though the following is a long passage, it is central in establishing the

significance of experimental perspective in *Armies*. Early in the first part of Section I,

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[45] As I demonstrate in the next chapter, Tom Wolfe also confronts this problem, though
Wolfe's method of doing so will differ from Mailer's. Moreover, Wolfe is less concerned
with how this position of the journalist as external to his material affects memory and
more concerned with how it affects the relationship between his readers and the subjects
about whom he writes.

Mailer writes:

> To write an intimate history of an event which places its focus on a central figure who is not central to the event, is to inspire immediate questions about the competence of the historian. Or, indeed, his honorable motive. The figure he has selected may be convenient to him rather than critical to the history. Such cynical remarks obviously suggest themselves in the choice of our particular protagonist. It could be said that for this historian, there is no other choice. While that might not be necessarily inaccurate, nonetheless a presentation of good motives had best be offered now. The March on the Pentagon was an ambiguous event whose essential value or absurdity may not be established for ten or twenty years, or indeed ever. So to place the real principals, the founders or designers of the March, men like David Dellinger, or Jerry Rubin, in the center of our portrait could prove misleading. They were serious men, devoted to hard detailed work; their position in these affairs, precisely because it was central, can resolve nothing of the ambiguity. For that, an eyewitness who is participant but not a vested partisan is required, further he must be not only involved, but ambiguous in his own proportions, a comic hero, which is to say, one cannot happily resolve the emphasis of the category—is he finally comic, a ludicrous figure with mock-heroic associations; or is he not unheroic, and therefore embedded somewhat tragically in the comic? Or is he both at once, and all at once? These questions, which probably are not much more answerable than the very ambiguities of the event, at least help to recapture the precise feel of the ambiguity of the event and its monumental disproportions. Mailer is a figure of monumental disproportions and so serves willy-nilly as the bridge, many will say the *pons asinorum*—into the crazy house….Let us then make our comic hero the narrative vehicle for the March on the Pentagon (53-54).

While Mailer acknowledges in this passage that his own role in the March is likely less important than the founders and organizers of the event, he nonetheless makes himself the primary vehicle for a re-telling of the March. What motivates this decision, a decision Mailer acknowledges might force readers to question his competence as a historian, is that the "March on the Pentagon was an ambiguous event whose essential value or absurdity may not be established for ten or twenty years, or indeed ever." In Mailer's present moment of writing, the March's meaning is still ambiguous. This does not mean the March is insignificant or that there is nothing to say about it. Instead, it means the March's current ambiguity might be more fully resolved in some future time. Mailer must

133

then employ a point of view that can recognize this limitation without foreclosing meaning entirely. Because Mailer cannot finally determine his exact role within the March—he is narrator, participant, character, and author—he becomes the best expression for the March's present ambiguities: "is he [Mailer] finally comic, a ludicrous figure with mock-heroic associations; or is he not unheroic, and therefore embedded somewhat tragically in the comic? Or is he both at once, and all at once? These questions, which probably are not much more answerable than the very ambiguities of the event, at least help to recapture the precise feel of the ambiguity of the event and its monumental disproportions." The different versions of himself Mailer employs throughout part I of *Armies* can both testify to what he witnesses and bear witness to his own limitations. They are, in other words, roles Mailer adopts in an effort to tell the story of the March on the Pentagon in a way that can account for not only the factual material of history but also the very processes that constitute history.

By switching between his different literary personae, Mailer can evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of the various forms of writing he employs. As the Novelist, for instance, Mailer is attuned to distortions. He acknowledges what, as a Novelist, he would do if the book he were writing were purely fictional. After a night of drinking in Washington, Mailer writes, "Of course, if this were a novel, Mailer would spend the rest of the night with a lady. But it is history, and so the Novelist is for once blissfully removed from any description of the hump-your-backs of sex. Rather leave such matters to the happy or unhappy imagination of the reader" (53). Mailer shores up the difference in responsibility here between documentation and figuration. As a Novelist, Mailer can

invent, but as a journalist documenting a particular historical event, Mailer's obligation is

not to the purely imaginative. In this instance, Mailer is relieved his duties as a Novelist

are not warranted. At other moments, however, Mailer feels burdened by the journalistic.

When Mailer is thinking about the March on the Pentagon, he acknowledges that the

Novelist in him is dissatisfied with the events: "Under the best of circumstances the

nature of these heroics was too dry, too dignified, too obviously severed from bravura to

make the Novelist happy" (56). The March on the Pentagon is not even, "under the best

of circumstances," a topic that could appeal to the Novelist in Mailer because it is too

dry, too lacking in drama, to serve as the cornerstone of an imaginative work. Mailer is

pulled between his obligations as a documenter of a particular historical event,

obligations which free him from his Novelistic ambitions, and his sense as a Novelist that

his work as a documenter of a particular historical event is unremarkable. He

continuously calls attention to the way each of these identities respond to the phenomenal

stimuli they encounter such that readers become more aware of the otherwise hidden

processes involved in historical and journalistic recreation. What readers experience

through the shifting literary personae in *Armies* is the internal dialogue of the writer

responsible for deciding what becomes or does not become part of a historical record.

Instead of concealing this process through the use of a narrator abstracted from the

history he records, Mailer makes it central to his recreation of the March on the Pentagon.

As a result, readers too are implicated, a part of, the history they read. Jason Mosser, in

his essay "Norman Mailer: Genre Bender," argues the following:

> Mailer's unique contribution to...personal or autobiographical journalism...was to
> blur the lines between the first person and the third...through the reader's

simultaneous interaction with the rhetorical persona on the page and with his or her identification with the famous, even infamous narrator/protagonist, Mailer, whose presence in the mass media as an important voice on the American literary and political scene was prominent...Mailer's journalism deconstructed the binary opposition between observer and observed (271).

The use of a first-person-third point of view forces a reader to labor through the varying perspectives Mailer employs without being certain where the rhetorical persona ends or begins. As a result, one must think more carefully about the merits of what he reads. This essentially turns readers into more active participants in the process of reconstructing the events about which they read.

Mailer claims that what the first-person-third point of view additionally offers is preparation for the transition to the more straightforward third-person narration that characterizes part II of *Armies*. He writes:

> So the Novelist working in secret collaboration with the Historian has tried to build with his novel a tower fully equipped with telescopes to study—at the greatest advantage—our own horizon. Of course, the tower is crooked, and the telescopes warped, but the instruments of all sciences—history so much as physics—are always constructed in small or larger error; what supports the use of them now is that our intimacy with the master builder of the tower, and the lens grinder of the telescopes (yes, even the machinest of the barrels) has given some advantage for correcting the error of the instruments and the imbalance of his tower. May that be claimed of many histories? In fact, how many novels can be put so quickly to use? (219).

The problem with historical narrative is that it fails to account for its own distortions, the particular stylistic imperatives out of which it is constructed. Mailer argues this is a problem shared by journalism: "the mass media which surrounded the March on the Pentagon created a forest of inaccuracy which would blind the efforts of an historian; our novel [Part I of *Armies*] has provided us with the possibility, no, even the instrument to view our facts and conceivably study them in that field of light a labor of lens-grinding

has produced" (219). Both history and journalism create inaccuracies by failing to account for the methods by which their records are produced. What Mailer has done in the first part of *Armies* is introduce the degree to which his documenting of the March is informed by a number of different points of view, each of which is motivated by different interests. In so doing, Mailer gives readers an "intimacy with the master builder" in the hopes that this gives "some advantage for correcting the error of the instruments and the imbalance of his tower." The unstable narrative ground that characterizes part I of *Armies* becomes useful to readers when they begin the more objective rendering of the March in part II. By experiencing the instability of perspective that characterizes part I of *Armies,* readers become attuned to the distortions latent in conventional historical and journalistic accounting, conventions that are present in part II of *Armies* where the multiple perspectives of book I dissolve into a more straight forward and objective point of view. It is this point of view that, as I argued in my chapter on Joan Didion, has the effect of making real that which is actually constructed only to seem real. Mailer's efforts in part I of *Armies* is particularly important because it is in the second part of *Armies* where Mailer's recounting of the March touches directly on that which cannot be accounted for through traditional modes of representation. It is in this part of the book, the more strictly objective, that Mailer must present the unpresentable. I noted earlier this was a task particular to Lyotard's avant-garde. In *Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard posits that "it is our business not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented" (81). While Mailer's account of the March in Book II ostensibly "supplies reality" by remaining more strictly objective, Mailer has already laid bare the illusion of

137

objectivity in Book I. Indeed, Robert Merrill suggests that Mailer's efforts in Book I

work to de-objectify readers for the objective account of the March in Book II (137). By

creating a textual space in part I of *Armies* that accounts for its own distortions, Mailer

has prepared his readers to engage more responsibly with what will be his primary focus

in part II: the efforts of a small group of protestors to change the course of history.

Armies of the Night Part II

Importantly, Mailer's feelings about the protestors are ambiguous. What Mailer

recognizes during the March is that, despite their efforts to distinguish themselves as

fundamentally different from the government they oppose, the protestors and their

opposition have much in common. Mailer focuses in particular on the negotiations made

by the leader of the protestors' Mobilization Committee, David Dellinger, and Harry Van

Cleve, the general counsel for the General Services Administration. He writes:

> No one can of course repress the wit who would point out that any time two
> bodies of men whose names end in Mobilization and Administration get together,
> even a revolution can be negotiated, and for fact Dellinger and Van Cleve had
> similarities in their personal style, since both men were civil, well-spoken, able to
> appreciate the nuances of the opposite view, and could with no difficulty have
> acted as contending parties at an Ivy League faculty meeting (240).

The negotiations between the Mobilization Committee and the government representative

demonstrate to Mailer that revolution has become sterilized. Both sides of this conflict

are enmeshed in bureaucracy, and though the Mobilization Committee want to see its

efforts as radical, they are tolerable to a government with whom they can peacefully

negotiate the details of an anti-war rally. Mailer continues:

> In fact, the meetings [between Dellinger and Van Cleve] could have served as another paradigm of American civilization in this decade of the 20th century, for two groups with absolutely incompatible ends and an irretrievable lack of final resolution between them, were nonetheless adjudicators in effect with one another over the few small items of common ground which were negotiable, and this through its sheer instrumentalism—since it is somewhat more difficult to take militant action after negotiating quietly with one's enemy for weeks—was to work to pacify and finally curtail the more unmanageable aspects of the Anti War March (239).

As deep as Mailer's hatred for the war in Vietnam runs, and as deeply as he distrusts the government, which he calls the "military-industrial complex of super-technology land" (94), Mailer nonetheless sees the efforts of the protestors neutralized through their negotiations: "The compromise said in effect: we, the government, wage the war in Vietnam for our security, but will permit your protest provided it is only a little disorderly. The demonstrators: we still consider the war outrageous and will therefore break the law, but not by very much" (240). On the one hand there is the continuously stalled progress of revolution and on the other the totalitarian might of the government. The options are frighteningly limited. Robert Merrill argues that the clashing armies of Mailer's title, the demonstrators and the government, "are Nihilism and Totalitarianism, respectively" (136). Despite his own hesitation regarding the efforts of the protestors, Mailer does not see the final outcome of the March as one that can be captured by the above categories. There is something that escapes the impasse between Nihilism and Totalitarianism that Mailer seeks to honor in *Armies*. In addition to creating perspectival instability throughout Armies, Mailer deepens his narrative experimentation, and thus his efforts to present the unpresentable, by collapsing the temporal boundaries of his text. This is particularly important to discuss because by tarrying with the conventional operations of time, Mailer can preserve for the future the significance of the protesters'

efforts for which he cannot fully account in the present moment. Throughout *Armies,*

Mailer both recounts the efforts of the protestors and preserves the documentation of their

efforts for the future: time in *Armies* moves both backwards and forwards.[46]

This approach to temporality is adopted by Mailer not just in *Armies* but also in

his thinking about writing more generally. In his explanation of how he organized his

collection of works called *The Time of our Time*, Mailer gestures towards the importance

of challenging temporal boundaries. Mailer felt his work in *Time of our Time* should not

be organized chronologically according to the date he published a particular work.

Instead, Mailer insisted that the works be organized according to the time about which he

was writing. He writes: "If in 1990 I wrote about 1951, why, then, place the piece back in

1951?" (viii). Mailer's suggestion here is that if a piece he wrote in 1990 about 1951

were positioned with works he actually wrote in 1951, it would lend a false sense of

chronological coherence to his work. As his perceptions change with age, so his thinking

about a particular time in history might also change. Challenging chronological

coherence allows for incongruities in Mailer's thinking to be laid bare: "perceptions of a

man no longer young could be posed against insights the writer had once set down

decades earlier" (viii). Mailer's interest is not in creating temporal coherence; rather, he

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[46] Other New Journalists took up similar challenges to the conventions of temporality in journalism. Marc Weingarten notes that in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, for example, Tom Wolfe, in documenting the experiences of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters taking LSD, recognized that "the Pranksters didn't function in conventional narrative time, not with all those drugs, and the book couldn't work if if it was restricted to a linear storyline. So [Wolfe] fractured the story...Instead of an omnipresent third-person voice, Wolfe shifted point of view, using interior monologue when necessary" (112).

looks to honor the ways in which time might radically alter one's thinking. To honor this

potential, Mailer must resist a temporal organization that is unidirectional. Conventional

reporting unfolds chronologically and is organized to support a quick and efficient

reading process. News is designed for consumption and thus needs to be easily

digestible.[47] The inverted pyramid, for instance, presents facts in declining order of

importance so readers can quickly consume the most significant and relevant elements of

a particular story. Moreover, the language of conventional journalism— its lean, terse

prose—makes reading faster. Conventional reporting often confirms the sense that time is

an endless, forward progression and mirrors this to readers through the stylistic

imperatives of its medium. Before moving on to explore Mailer's challenge to this

conception of time in *Armies*, I want to examine a lesser-explored area of Mailer's

writing that lays the groundwork for his vested interest in uprooting conceptions of time

as unidirectional: his boxing journalism.

"10,000 Words a Minute"

The title of Mailer's 1963 article "10,000 Words a Minute," covering the first

boxing match between Floyd Patterson and Sonny Liston in Chicago, immediately

evokes a feeling of disproportion. For what event would 10,000 words a minute be

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[47] Time is of great concern to Lyotard and he argues in *The Inhuman* that conceptions of time as an endless forward progression are a product of late-stage capitalism: "Development imposes the saving of time. To go fast is to forget fast, to retain only the information that is useful afterwards, as in 'rapid reading'" ("Introduction" 3). This is the same sense of time evoked by traditional journalistic texts that, through particular stylistic imperatives, encourage an unimpeded reading process.

appropriate? The subject of Mailer's essay seems to be the answer, yet the fight lasted

only two minutes and six seconds before Patterson was unceremoniously knocked out by

Liston. The need for a twenty-thousand word article thus seems lacking. This is

especially true for the genre of sports journalism where the task of the reporter is often

determined by the structured nature of the event about which he is writing. Thomas P.

Oats and John Pauly make the following claim:

> The work routines of sports journalists, after all, are organized around regularly
> scheduled, carefully managed, and orchestrated contests. The buildup to each
> game is replete with...''insider's gossip'' and the self-conscious creation of a
> ''script'' or ''storyline'' for each event...The storyline-building that suffuses
> sports journalism routines is done so consciously that an unexpected turn during
> the course of a game itself is commonly referred to as a departure from the script
> (337).

In addition to sporting events themselves being highly orchestrated, the journalistic

narratives about these events tend to follow a predictable trajectory, a "script." Yet New

Journalists who tackled sporting events would "undermine older narratives of sports as

either heroic or epic" (Oates and Pauly 342). In Mailer's case, this meant moving beyond

a simple recounting of a disappointing fight that, in part because of its duration, left little

open for speculation. Indeed, *Esquire* framed Mailer's piece as follows: "After the

world's imagination disengaged, this writer [Mailer] asked what happened in those two

miserable minutes and six seconds: to Floyd Patterson, Sonny Liston, the press, the

mob—and to himself." A two-minute boxing match, one which left the imagination

"disengaged," becomes in Mailer's recounting of it an extended meditation on what led

up to, and what happened after, its occurrence. In fact, the heart of Mailer's essay about

the Patterson-Liston fight is not even the Patterson-Liston fight, but another match, one

that occurred earlier in 1962 between Benny Paret and Emile Griffith. Yet this past fight

has immediacy in Mailer's recounting of it. The Paret-Griffith fight thus becomes an event not marked by time, but an event that disrupts the time in which it occurred and subsequently alters the way Mailer can engage with and report the current fight between Patterson and Liston. This particular approach to journalistic temporality is one that will reappear in *Armies of the Night*, but it first appeared in Mailer's sports journalism.[48]

Mailer opens "10,000 Words a Minute" with a discussion of a reporter's duties and responsibilities with respect to time. He acknowledges that the normal pace of sports reporting, which leaves the fight reporter looking like "an old cigar butt" (217), comes from the larger pressures of news reporting:

> There is always urgency to get some quotation which is usable for their story, and afterward, find a telephone: the habitat of a reporter, at its worst, is identical to spending one's morning, afternoon and evening transferring from the rush hour of one subway train to the rush hour of another…[reporters]...scrape up news which can go out to the machine, that enormous machine, that intellectual leviathan which is obliged to eat each day, tidbits, gristle, gravel...that old American goat, our newspaper (217).

To support the high demand for easily digestible news about, in this case, the Patterson-Liston fight, Mailer finds that "The Goat would demand that this fight be reported in a veritable factology of detail" (254). In fact, what was reported about the fight "showed now uncertainty. [Reporters] spoke of critical uppercuts and powerful left hooks and pulverizing rights, Liston talked of dominating Patterson with left hands...some reporters called the punches crunching, other said they were menacing, brutal, demolishing" (254). This kind of information suits not only the swiftness of the boxing match itself but also

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[48]Barry Leeds notes that "10,000 Words a Minute" "prefigure[s] and announce[s] the new mode of Mailer's non-fiction writing in the late 1960s and 1970s" (385).

the institutional demands of sports journalism. The language used in reporting the fight, Liston's "pulverizing" punches, work in conjunction with the heroic, epic narratives I noted earlier are integral to sports reporting. Yet Mailer's concern with this kind of reporting is that it is too conclusive, leaving room only for the expression of a final, determinate outcome, which in this case was Liston's victory at the expense of Patterson's utter defeat. Mailer writes, "The professional witnesses to the collision...were obliged to testify to a barrage of detailed punches, and the fighters reexamining their own history in such a mirror of prose would be forced to remake the event in their mind. Yet so long as one kept one's memory, the event was unclear" (256). Mailer's memory of the fight is at odds with the collective memory reprinted in the papers. His lack of clarity regarding the conclusion of the fight stems from an awareness that also informs his experimentations with point of view in *Armies*: his status as participant in the events about which he reports. Mailer's participation in the fight is not explicit, but in all his boxing journalism Mailer sees his role as an observer as integral to his work as a reporter, and it is the lack of acknowledging this role that creates the distortions of the match Mailer detects in newspapers. In reflecting on the Patterson-Liston match, Mailer includes an extended discussion of the Paret-Griffith fight where his "participant observer" status first becomes clear.

This fight is significant because it forges a connection between Mailer's manipulation of time in "10,000 Words a Minute" and a feeling Mailer has that he is culpable for Patterson's defeat. Mailer writes, "If I had been part of the psychic cadre guarding Patterson, I had certainly done everything to make myself useless to him. I

144

could even wonder at that moment...whether the entire liberal persuasion of America had

rooted for Floyd in the same idle, detached fashion of myself, wanting him to win but

finding Liston secretly more interesting, in fact, and, indeed, demanding of Patterson that

he win only because he was good for liberal ideology" (258). Mailer has spent part of this

essay characterizing Patterson and Liston as fundamentally different from one another.

To Mailer, Patterson is "an artist" (230). He writes:

> Patterson, as a child, would weep when he was unjustly accused..[he] would get
> down and walk along the subways tracks on the Eighth Avenue El at High Street
> and Brooklyn because he had found a cubbyhole for workmen three feet off the
> rails where he could conceal himself from the world by pulling an iron door close
> to over him, lying there in the darkness while the trains blasted by with
> apocalyptic noise…[he] refused to look at his next opponent...sparring...because
> he considered that to be taking unfair advantage (230).

Beyond this, Patterson is a figure who seems to fit a popular liberal ideology: "Patterson

was a churchgoer...Patterson was up tight with the NAACP...he would be photographed

with Eleanor Roosevelt, and was; with Jack Kennedy, and was...he was a liberal's

liberal" (240). To see Patterson win his fight against Liston was, for Mailer, to see good

defeat evil. Liston, unlike Patterson, was a figure symbolic of everything designed to

undermine liberal values. Mailer writes that "Liston had been a strong-arm for the

mob...He represented the shadow of every bully who had run them off the street when

they were children...he was part of the black limousines with four well-dressed men

inside, sliding down the dark streets. One did not try to look into the eye of the men who

rode in those limousines" (240). If Patterson was the "impoverished prince," the

"champion of every adolescent and every man who had been forced to live alone...the

hero of all those unsung romantics who walk the street at night seeing the vision of

Napolean while their feet trip over the curb," then Liston "was looking to be king...Liston

came from that world where a man with a dream was a drink in the gutter….Liston was the secret hero of every man who had ever given mouth to a final curse against the dispositions of the Lord and made a pact with Black Magic" (243). To root for Liston, then, was akin to rooting for one's own destruction.[49] When Mailer wonders what happened to Patterson in the ring, and acknowledges that he has been secretly rooting for Liston, he must come to terms with this desire to see the figure symbolic of a sensitive, kind "artist" defeated.

This leads Mailer to his discussion of the Paret-Griffith fight, particularly the moment when Paret is cornered in the ring by Griffith. Mailer notes, "Paret got trapped in a corner. Trying to duck away, his left arm and his head became tangled on the wrong side of the top rope. Griffith was in a like a cat ready to rip the life out of a huge boxed rat. He hit him eighteen right hands in a row, an act which took perhaps three or four seconds...they were not ten feet away from me, and like everyone else, I was hypnotized" (244). The violence of the fight paralyzes Mailer; he cannot stop watching. He goes on to describe in detail the rest of the round. "Griffith [was] making a pent-up whimpering sound all the while he attacked, the right hand whipping like a piston rod which has broken through the crankcase, or like a baseball bat demolishing a pumpkin" (244). Mailer's language here reflects not only the brutality of what he witnesses but also the speed at which it is carried out. His writing is swift, attempting to capture the violence of eighteen punches delivered in only "three or four seconds." Griffith's right-hand punches

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[49] Robert Merrill suggests that throughout the essay Mailer identifies with Patterson and must share in the humiliation of his defeat. For more see "Norman Mailer's Early Nonfiction: The Art of Self-Revelation." (1974).

are delivered at a speed and force with which Mailer's writing attempts to keep pace.

Readers become hypnotized by the violence expressed through Mailer's writing and this

mirrors Mailer's own reaction to what he witnesses. Startling this hypnosis, however, is a

question Mailer poses as much to himself as to his readers: "And Paret?" (244). What *is*

happening to the man receiving the blows? Mailer answers:

> Paret died on his feet. As he took those eighteen punches something happened to everyone who was in psychic range of the event. Some part of his death reached out to us...He was still standing in the ropes, trapped as he had been before, he gave some little half-smile of regret, as if he were saying, 'I didn't know I was going to die just yet,' and then, his head leaning back but still erect, his death came to breathe about him...As he went down, the sound of Griffith's punches echoed in the mid like a heavy ax in the distance chopping into a wet log (245).

What the reader is reminded of here is the price he has paid for the hypnotic violence of

Griffith's boxing.[50] And the reminder comes directly from Mailer's own sense of

responsibility in Paret's death, a death reconstructed without the traces of heroism that

adhere to conventional sports narratives. Ronald Fried has argued that "[Mailer] never

loses sight of boxing's brutality and the terrible price the fighters pay for all the blows

they take. For Mailer, observing a great champion in action may be a pleasure, but it is

ultimately something of a guilty pleasure—and Mailer does not back away from the

culpability of the boxing fan and the boxing writer who enjoy the sport" (229).

　　　　To enjoy boxing, for Mailer, means one must come to terms with his desire to see

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[50] This is underscored in Mailer's other pieces on boxing. In his 1988 piece for *Spin* magazine about the Tyson-Spitz fight, Mailer focuses on Muhammad Ali's entrance into the arena where he came to watch the match: "Ali now moved with the deliberate, awesome calm of a blind man, sobering all who stared upon him. He looked like the Shade of the boxing world. 'I, who gave you great pleasure for years, now ask you to witness the cost of your pleasure,' he could as well said" ("Understanding" 40).

violence enacted on another person to the point of death. Reflecting on Paret's death, Mailer writes, "I knew that something in boxing was spoiled for me, that there would be a fear in watching a fight now...You knew he [a boxer] would get hurt" (247). This speaks to a larger point Mailer must admit as integral to his own interest in continuing to watch and report boxing matches, particularly since a year after Paret's death Davey Moore, another boxer, would also die as a result of injuries sustained during a fight: "What is more difficult is to enter the plea that violence may be an indispensable element of life" (246). It is this sentiment Mailer implicitly endorses when he admits that some part of him wanted to see Patterson lose the fight to Liston, who represented all the surface-level violence and aggression artfully concealed in Patterson's more likeable character. What Mailer needs 10,000 words a minute for, then, is not a rendering of the boxing match that satisfies his obligation as a "professional witness," where he would be "obliged to testify to a barrage of detailed punches" (256). Instead, Mailer needs words incommensurable with the time of the fight in order to "discover something he did not know he knew in the act of writing itself" (219): his responsibility for, and even participation in, an event that brings suffering. This is important to note because conventional sports narratives that emphasize the heroic or epic make it easier for readers to remember boxing's redeeming features while simultaneously forgetting what is, for Mailer, at the heart of all boxing: death.[51] This is representative of a broader pattern of remembrance to which anamnesis functions as a remedy. For example, Neil Curtis points, in "Spaces of Anamnesis: Art and

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[51] When "10,000 Words a Minute" is reprinted in Mailer's 1963 collection *The Presidential Papers*, Mailer aptly and simply renames it "Death."

the Immemorial," points out that war memorials, though they are "ubiquitous" (305), are also responsible for "converting a trauma that may threaten the (communal) subject into an affirmation of its value and security" (306). This does not mean that war memorials make a memory of war pleasing or gratifying; rather, it means that "something is gleaned from the memory to lessen the pain, a pain that is potentially devastating...through the memorial, trauma is edified to limit the damage" (Curtis 306). A recounting of the Patterson-Liston fight that only documents Liston's actions during the fight, his heroic, powerful domination of Patterson, is one that edifies the trauma of boxing and subsequently encourages readers to forget death as boxing's condition. Thus when Mailer makes Paret's death the cornerstone of his reporting on the Patterson-Liston fight, he offers readers a reminder of what is otherwise forgotten and through this acknowledges not only his own but also the reader's culpability in Paret's death and Patterson's defeat. This is connected to some of the broader critiques taken up by the New Journalism: "The New Journalism offered an uninvited critique of normal journalistic conventions and assumptions. Taking up sports as a serious topic was part of this critique, but shifting the focus from the structure and apparatus of games and events to sports participation, spectatorship, production, and display as culturally complex activity was the other part" (Oates and Pauly 343).

The outcome of the Patterson-Liston fight is presented in Mailer's work as conditioned by a former time, the time of Benny Paret's death. What Mailer evokes in "10,000 Words a Minute" is the sense that time is always disproportionate to one's experiences, that we isolate time as part of an effort to control the meaning of the events.

149

Mailer, though, invites the past into the immediacy of the moment he documents and relinquishes unidirectional time as a tool through which our complicity in the creation of reality can be excised. In this sense, the Paret-Griffith fight recounted in "10,000 Words a Minute" can be read like an anachronism: an instance of recollection that feels out of place, out of time. In Mailer's recounting of the March on the Pentagon, unidirectional time will continue to be interrupted as a device employed for the reconstruction and representation of reality.

Armies of the Night: Part II Continued

In *Armies*, Mailer's manipulation of time works on two levels. There is Mailer's discussion of time within the text and there is the reader's experience of time as he works through the text; there is no attempt by Mailer to bring these two levels of time into a singular, harmonious relationship because the March will be an anachronistic event, like the Paret-Griffith fight. By treating time as not simply forward-moving but unpredictable, Mailer enacts an element of postmodernism central to avant-garde experimentation. Bill Readings posits that "Postmodernity rewrites history as anachronism: a kind of temporal anamorphosis, in which the present event of writing is not eliminated by the past event that is written about, or vice versa. Rather two heterogeneous temporalities are co-present" (58). Mailer's discussion of time throughout *Armies* manifests this co-presence of disparate temporalities and again provides the condition for the possibility that Mailer might "discover something he did not know he knew in the act of writing itself."

Armies opens with an excerpt from *Time* magazine followed by Mailer's claim

that: "Now we may leave *Time* in order to find out what happened" (4). While this is a cue that Mailer's intention is to challenge conventional journalistic accounts of the March, the name of the magazine Mailer chose to excerpt is not a coincidence. Mailer will, throughout *Armies*, leave chronological time to recreate his narrative of the March. Several times throughout *Armies* Mailer spends pages recreating a particular moment of the March and then follows this recounting with the acknowledgement that his narrative has given a disproportionate sense of the time the moment lasted when it actually occurred. In one instance, Mailer reflects on a poem read by Paul Goodman, the M.C. of the rally which takes place the night before the March, and details all the thoughts that run through his mind while Goodman reads. After, he writes, "The revery we have just attended took no more in fact than a second" (35). What Mailer gestures towards here is the incommensurable ways in which we experience time and the way time is recreated in journalistic narratives. There is a gap, in other words, between Mailer's sense of time in the moment and his sense of time when he is recounting that moment. These particular disparities in temporality make it feel as though the past unfolds more slowly in the narrative than it did in Mailer's experience of the moment. At other moments, Mailer's writing seems unable to keep up with the unfolding of the past. Recounting the time he spent on a bus from the Pentagon to Occoquan prison, Mailer spends pages ruminating on the similarities he notices between the Pentagon and the Egyptian pyramids; Mailer leaves this thought unresolved, however, as his recounting of the March begins to catch up to him. The section which immediately follows the above ruminations begins "In fact, the bus is getting ready to leave the Pentagon" (155). Mailer draws readers deep into the

151

recreation of his past thinking only to thrust them immediately forward, creating a feeling that the past may move on without them. In *Armies,* the past bleeds into the present as the present becomes an unstable location from which to understand the past.

Moreover, Mailer senses during the March that any notion of the past as a time now over is beginning to break down. As Mailer surveys the protestors at the March on the Pentagon, he is reminded of historic conflict. This battle, however, is comprised of "middle-class runaways, these Crusaders, going out to attack the hard core of technology land with less training than armies were once offered by a medieval assembly ground" (92). This new child army suffers, though. Mailer argues that the heavy use of LSD has caused them irreparable psychic damage which "had fractured their sense of past and present" (92). The opponents of this child army, the US government and their war in Vietnam, are also operating within a temporality that is unstable: "that tissue of past history, whether traceable in the flesh....was nonetheless being bombed by the use of LSD as outrageously as the atoll of Eniwetok, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the scorched foliage of Vietnam" (93). Just as the protestors' use of LSD fractures temporal boundaries, the present military action in Vietnam explodes the history of the past such that it becomes a part of the present. Taken together, the clashing of the protestors and the US government means that "The history of the past was being exploded right into the present: perhaps there were now lacunae in the firmament of the past, holes where once had been the psychic reality of an era which was gone. Mailer was haunted by the nightmare that the evils of the present not only exploited the present, but consumed the past, and gave every promise of demolishing whole territories of the future" (93). Time is no longer a

safeguard for memory; what Mailer witnesses during the March and communicates

through an unstable narrative temporality is that time can no longer be used as a tool to

order experience. Mailer's invocation of the past as inseparable from his present

experience brings together heterogeneous temporalities and suggests that a new mode of

historical and journalistic accounting is necessary. This is precisely what Lyotard is after

when he suggests that postmodernism is a rewriting of modernism: "The figural form of

anachronism means that History with a capital 'H,' the modernist critical science, is no

longer possible. The end of History opens a demand that we write historically, with an

attention to the temporality of our writing. It is in this sense that Lyotard's account of the

postmodern is an affirmation of the temporality of the event rather than an account of the

simple impossibility of History" (Readings 72). Mailer's accounting of the March is the

new form of historical and journalistic recreation that exposes the limitations of

conventional modes of accounting. There is no temporal stability on which readers can

rely to gain knowledge of the events about which Mailer writes. The March, like the

Paret-Griffith fight, becomes an event disruptive of time that subsequently requires

conventional modes of representation be uprooted. Reading *Armies* thus forces readers to

become unfamiliar with the traditions that characterize conventional journalism and

history and open to the possibility that an appropriate framework for understanding the

complexity of the March is not yet available.

De-familiarization was something Lyotard felt to be central to the project of

avant-garde art. When Lyotard helped curate the 1985 art exhibition *Les Immateriaux* at

the Centre Pompidou in Paris, he argued the show was not intended to display a mastery

of postmodern artistic devices. Instead, the show denied the audience a settled feeling of joy, relief, or understanding as they experienced innovative artistic expression. Lyotard writes that "The exhibition denies it and this is precisely its gambit, to not offer any reassurance, especially and above all by prophesying a new dawn. To make us look at what is deja vu, as Duchamp did with the Readymades, and to make us unlearn what is 'familiar' to us: these are instead the exhibitions concerns" (qtd. in Hudek 5). Instead of walking through the exhibit and feeling a sense of confirmation or assurance in what one is seeing, Lyotard's exhibition forced its audience to re-think what familiar was. This is part of what motivated Lyotard to include Marcel Duchamp's Readymades in *Les Immateriaux*. Duchamp took familiar, everyday objects, like a coat-rack or a typewriter cover, and made them into the objects of his art. Perhaps his most famous Readymade was a urinal Duchamp titled *The Fountain.* The piece was submitted to an exhibition in New York but was rejected. While Duchamp never had the chance to display *The Fountain* in a museum, he included photographs of it, and photographs of many other Readymades, in *Boîte-en-valise,* the collection of portable, miniature reproductions of his work.

Duchamp's Readymades prompted a series of important questions that challenged normative assumptions about what did and did not constitute art. David Hopkins points out that "When Duchamp says 'this is art' he asserts the art principle outside any limiting requirements of taste or morphology" (255). The term "art" becomes disconnected from the traditions with which it is normally associated when it is used in reference to objects "plucked from everyday circulation and given art status via minor

154

adjustments such as titles" (Hopkins 253). Does a urinal given the title *The Fountain* by a

well-known artist become art? The Readymade does not offer an answer but is a prompt

for the question. Peter Burger argues that "Duchamp's provocation not only unmasks the

art market where the signature means more than the quality of the work; it radically

questions the very principle of art in bourgeois society...Duchamp's Ready-Mades are not

works of art but manifestations. Not from the form-content totality of the individual

object can one infer meaning, but only from the contrast between 'mass produced' object

on the one hand, and signature and art exhibit on the other" (52). Duchamp positions

everyday, functional items as art objects; in so doing, he opens up the normally concealed

space wherein decisions are made about what constitutes art (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Marcel Duchamp. Fountain. Photography by Alfred Stieglitz.

155

This is, of course, not a space that is visible; rather, it is a space that can only be presented as the *difference* between a urinal as it exists every day and a urinal positioned as a piece of art. The difference prompts discussion, reflection. Hopkins further notes that "Duchamp effectively sets a kind of structural operation in motion...by which an open-ended dialogue between object and spectator is set up" (258). Duchamp's Readymades open a conversation about what art is rather than making explicit claims to being art and, as Hopkins points out, these works actively elicit the participation of the spectator in this conversation.

Mailer's work in *Armies* participates in a similar process. Mailer gives an account of the March on the Pentagon but in a way that forces readers to ask questions about how we come to account for the preservation and construction of the very events for which Mailer is accounting. Mailer's experimentations with form in *Armies* forces readers to re-think what constitutes a responsible and truthful representation of historical events. In the process of this re-thinking, Mailer demonstrates the importance of accounting for one's own participation in not only the events he is charged with recounting but also the narrative he constructs out of those events. That is, Mailer not only exposes the limits of conventional journalism but also, in positioning himself as both active participant and narrator, demonstrates the necessity for self-reflection in creating a more honest and nuanced form of journalism. Mailer often interrupts his narrative to explore his own process of narrative creation:

> One of the oldest devices of the novelist—some would call it a vice—is to bring his narrative (after man an excursion) to a pitch of excitement where the reader no

matter how cultivated is reduced to a beast who can pant no faster than to ask: "And then what? Then what happens?" At which point the Novelist, consummate cruel lover, introduces a digression, aware that delay at this point helps to deepen the addiction of his audience. This, of course, was Victorian practice. Modern audiences, accustomed to superhighways, put aside their reading at the first annoyance and turn to the television set. So a modern novelist must apologize, even apologize profusely, for daring to leave his narrative, he must in fact absolve himself of the charge of employing a device, he must please necessity (133).

Mailer's overt entry into his history of the March is a fictional technique more reminiscent of, as he notes, Victorian novels than conventional reporting. The presence of literary devices in *Armies* and the often explicit way in which they are referred to *as* devices exposes readers to the processes behind Mailer's recounting of the March. Readers become privy to the modes and methods of reconstruction otherwise concealed through the conventions of both journalism and history. What Mailer ultimately affirms in this process is human agency, both his own and his readers. In making his own process of selection and choice-making an integral part of his representation of the March, Mailer encourages readers to do the same. This process adheres to an experience of Duchamp's work as well. Duchamp's Readymades take familiar, everyday objects and position them such that viewers can no longer comfortably understand them as either familiar, everyday objects *or* artistic creations. Instead, viewers have to think about how these categories are constructed without the trappings of familiar contextual clues. Mailer's work in *Armies* takes the March on the Pentagon as an object of historical and journalistic inquiry and turns its presentation into an inquiry on the nature of historical and journalistic recreation. Like the clashing of Duchamp's urinal and normative artistic conventions, *Armies* is the clashing of experimentation and convention. Mailer forces literary devices and the

157

conventions of history and journalism into the same textual space to open up, like

Duchamp, a discussion over how these spaces come to be constituted. Their subject

matter is not the same, and the stakes of Mailer's journalism are arguably higher since he

is directly confronting pressing political issues, but both Duchamp and Mailer are part of

an artistic tradition that awakens audiences to their own powers of discernment through a

critical presentation of processes of discernment often made invisible through

convention.

Significantly, it is not only Mailer's explicit discussion of time throughout *Armies*

that is challenging, but also one's experience of time in working through Mailer's

writing. *Armies* purposefully disrupts the ease with which one can consume conventional

journalism and therefore challenges the idea of time as progress. Mailer's writing in

Armies is often impenetrably difficult. For example, Mailer's metaphors in *Armies*

change and shift as they grow from simple comparisons between two unlike things into

complex and irresolvable comparisons between multiple things. Describing the

atmosphere of Washington D.C. the night before the March, Mailer initially suggests that

"The air was violent, yet full of amusement....there was a hint of hurricane calm, then

wind-bursts, gut-roars from the hogs" (82). While the atmosphere is initially compared to

the violence of an impending hurricane, it changes when Mailer hears motorcycles. The

aural registration of the motorcycles leads Mailer into an extended comparison between

the smell of gasoline they emit and the river Styx. Mailer then ponders an "unresolved

image of a man as Charon on that river of gasoline Styx wandering between earth and the

holy hills of the machine" (82). Mailer acknowledges that this is a "cloudy metaphor,"

158

and immediately moves on to a comparison between the river Styx and the whiskey he drank the night before. This writing characterizes much of Mailer's work in *Armies*. Figurative language is not used to make clearer Mailer's subject matter. This slows the reader's progress through his text. It forces one to read and read again. Mailer's readers must account for time in ways that are otherwise elided through the stylistic conventions of a traditional newspaper or magazine article. Chris Anderson suggests Mailer's inclusion of excerpts from magazines like *Time* demonstrate the ease with which one can read conventional journalism: "The phrases do not trouble us or invite us to dwell on them as phrases. Rather, they serve the ends of easy readability: the sentences are short and punchy, the phrases droll, mildly satiric. We are never checked in our progress to the end of the blurb" (113). Compared to this kind of undisturbed reading process, Mailer's method is "repeatedly to check, slow down through reflection, digression, association, musing, the progress of the plot, the development of action" (Anderson 112). To read *Armies* is to join Mailer in the process of slowing down, checking one's own progress through a narrative that does not seem to progress in familiar ways. One is then afforded the opportunity to experience time not as an uninterrupted movement forward but as unstable, subject to change. This experience is an example of what I earlier noted was a driving force behind Lyotard's conception of postmodernism: "to think time figurally rather than as an ordered sequence of moments" (Readings 53). This experience lends itself to the broader significance of Mailer's experimentation with conventional journalism. The difficulty in coming to a determinate conclusion about the meaning of the March on the Pentagon is underscored by the temporal instability one experiences

159

through both the explicit evocation of time throughout the text and the labored experience of time in reading the text. The difficulty of reading Mailer's work is not designed to foreclose possibility; instead, it opens up historical recreation to the unknown. Consequently, the significance of Mailer's subject of inquiry, the March on the Pentagon, becomes expressible only indirectly.

The End of the March

I introduced earlier the idea that Mailer's ambiguous feelings towards the protestors and his hostility towards the government against which they protest leads to an impasse between Nihilism and Totalitarianism. Yet Mailer's experimentation with conventional modes of representation challenges the finality of this impasse. Mailer leaves the final significance of the March open to futurity; this is his most significant enactment of anamnesic labor. The March, he suggests, resists traditional forms of representation because it has dimensions that are largely symbolic. The protest was "that historic moment when a mass of citizenry—not much more than a mob—marched on a bastion which symbolized the military might of the Republic, marching not to capture it, but to wound it *symbolically*" (54, emphasis mine). The nature of protest, particularly the March on the Pentagon, is that it is a symbolic form of resistance, one that cannot be easily captured and one whose success is difficult to define. Mailer's own motivations for participating in the March mirror the complicated nature of protest. As he sits with his fellow protestors the morning of the March he thinks:

One did not march on the Pentagon and look to get arrested as a link in a master scheme to take over the bastions of the Republic step by step, no, that sort of sound-as-brickwork-logic was left to the FBI. Rather, one marched on the Pentagon because...because...and here the reasons became so many and so curious and so vague, so political and so primitive, that there was no need, or perhaps no possibility to talk about it yet, one could only ruminate over the morning coffee. What possibly they shared now between them at the morning table of the Hay-Adams was the unspoken happy confidence that politics had again become mysterious, had begun to partake of Mystery; that gave life to a thought the gods were back in human affairs (86).

As evidenced by the literal use of ellipsis and the stuttering repetition of "because," Mailer's own reasons for participating in the March are elliptical. Moreover, the inexpressible reasons Mailer has for marching seem to unite him with his fellow protesters. There is something spiritual in the seemingly implicit understanding that the motivations each person has for participating in the March are connected to a larger and deeper optimism that the March could actually change the nature of American politics— bring the gods back to human affairs. This is not a communicable rationale for protest; rather, it is, as Mailer notes, a feeling one can only "ruminate" over. Mailer does his best in this passage to express the inexpressible, his reasons for marching. Though these reasons are presently, in the above passage, elliptical. Their realization is also promised to the future—"there was no possibility of talking about it *yet*" (86, emphasis mine). Mailer acknowledges the cursory nature of his own rationale for protesting while also holding out the possibility that there could be a more concrete way to talk about such rationale that escapes the "sound-as-brickwork-logic" he cannot currently use as a model for expression. Readers are continuously exposed to Mailer's effort to express the inexpressible, to position his motivations for participating in the March somewhere between the presently communicable and the as-yet-to-come.

161

This is the same approach Mailer takes at the end of *Armies* when he begins to

calculate the final success of the March. Since the goal of the March on the Pentagon was

never to actually capture the Pentagon, by what standards does one measure its success?

Mailer argues that the press, unable to confront the March's symbolic dimension, is

generally hostile to the March and considers it unsuccessful. He notes that "The press

was, in the aftermath, antagonistic to the March...emphasis was placed on every rock

thrown, and a count was made of every window broken" (285). What the press focuses

on, and what drives their hostility, are the elements of the March that are quantifiable: the

damage done to property, the number of marchers arrested. In combination these facts

point to the marchers being violent, disorderly. Mailer's work in *Armies* is to elicit the

feeling that there is some significance to the March other than what the press reported.

I noted in my opening to this chapter that Mailer acknowledges "there are places

no history can reach." Those places become, in *Armies*, the parts of the March that evade

the mechanics of representation. Mailer suggests that the end of the March came not with

the final tally of rocks thrown or protesters arrested, but with the actions of Quaker

pacifists who were the last of the protestors at Occoquan prison. The following passage is

long but significant:

> A group from the Quaker Farm in Voluntown, Connecticut, practiced
> noncooperation in Prison. Among them were veterans of a sleep-in of twenty
> pacifics at the Pentagon in the spring before. Now, led by Gary Rader, Erica
> Enzer, Irene Johnson, and Suzanne Moore, some of them refused to eat or drink
> and were fed intravenously. Several men at the D.C. jail would not wear prison
> clothing. Stipped of their own, naked, they were thrown in the Hole...For a day
> they lay naked on the floor, for many days naked with blankets and mattress on
> the floor. For many days they did not eat nor drink water. Dehydration brought
> them near to madness...Did they pray, these Quakers, for forgiveness of the
> nation? Did they pray with tears in their eyes in those blind cells with visions of

> Vietnamese dead...no one will know if the they [the prayers] were ever made, for the men who might have made them were perhaps too far out on fever and shivering and thirst to recollect, and there are places no history can reach. But if the end of the March took place in isolation in which these pacifists suffered naked in freezing cells, and gave up prayers for penance, then who was to say they were not saints? And who to say that the sins of America were not by their witness a tithe remitted? (287).

The question central to this passage is one of knowledge: how do we know? Mailer

acknowledges here that we can never know if the prayers of the Quakers were ever made;

the prayers are not only by nature unverifiable, but also those who might have said them

were physically and mentally broken by their refusal to eat or to drink water and could

not provide verification for their actions. Thus the inscription on memory of their labor to

resist a war in which they did not believe could not happen; their transformation is, like

Mailer's own reasoning for participating in the March, of a spiritual nature and thus

resistant to representation.

This is reinforced by Mailer's accounting of those protestors who stayed outside

the Pentagon after the protest was to end. After midnight on the first day, the protesters

were to disband. However, many protesters stayed and formed a tight-knit human wall by

linking arms. In response, paratroopers, using a "wedge" formation, violently forced their

way through the "wall" in an effort to divide the group in two and thus more easily make

arrests. Mailer was not present for this because he was still detained at Occoquan prison.

However, much like his treatment of the Quaker pacifists, Mailer still attempts to recreate

the experience such that the efforts of those people who stayed to protest the war do not

go un-countenanced in his narrative; Mailer uses a mixture of excerpts from daily

newspapers and his own speculation to do this. From the Washington *Free Press*, he

quotes Margie Stamberg's eyewitness account: "Slowly the wedge began to move in on

163

people. With bayonets and rifle butts, they moved first on the girls in the front line,

kicking them, jabbing at them again and again with the guns, busting their heads and

arms to break the chain of locked arms....One hundred people were methodically beaten

and carried away to paddy wagons" (272-273). Mailer's earlier characterization of the

protestors was one that highlighted their complicity in the very systems they were

protesting against—hence the knot of Nihilism and Totalitarianism. However, when

Mailer considers the violence many protesters endured alongside their willingness to

remain at the Pentagon despite this violence, his position shifts. He writes that the

protesters who stayed were "now engaged in that spiritual test so painful to all—the rite

of passage. Let us ruminate with them and contemplate the dawn" (278). Mailer's

rumination is an addendum to the conventional journalistic accounting of the violence

visited upon the protesters. The newspapers capture what happened, but Mailer presents

what might be the significance of these events. The framework here is one beyond the

scope of journalistic representation and Mailer connects it with his earlier thoughts about

the prisoners at Occoquan:

> How many of these demonstrators, certain the beginning of the night by the firm
> conviction of their ego that they would not leave until morning, must have been
> obliged to pass through layers and dimensions and busting cysts of cowardice
> they never knew to exist in themselves, as if each hour they remained extracted
> from them a new demand, a further extension of their moral resolve, another rung
> up that moral which Mailer had glimpsed at Occoquan and had made haste to
> refuse. Yes, the passage through the night against every temptation to leave—the
> cold, the possibility of new, more brutal, and more overwhelming attacks, the
> boredom...yes, the passage through the night brought the temptation to
> leave….except if they left, and no one was at the Pentagon then but the soldiers
> through the night, well what unseen burning torch of which unknown but still
> palpably felt spirit might expire? (279).

In the same way Mailer honors the possibility that the un-recollected actions of a few

pacifists could be enough to remit America's sins of war, to undo, even momentarily, the impasse between Nihilism and Totalitarianism that has thus far characterized the interaction between the protestors and the government, Mailer gives the efforts of the protesters here a moral character that lends importance to their presence through the night at the Pentagon. What their presence during the night keeps alive is the "unseen burning torch" of an "unknown but still palpably felt spirit" of resistance. The willingness of the protesters, despite violence, tiredness, boredom, to keep the presence of something intangible alive at the Pentagon, whose symbolic force *was* made tangible not only in Vietnam but also in the brutality visited upon the protesters, cannot find expression through the conventions of journalism alone. Instead, Mailer uses both journalistic recreation, excerpts from newspapers that detailed the violence Mailer did not witness first hand, and imaginative speculation to both document the efforts of the protesters and simultaneously give these efforts a spiritual dimension resistant *to* documentation. As Robert Merril notes, "Transcending the count of bodies, the tactical success or failure of the demonstration, there is the spiritual renewal attested to by the now impersonal narrative voice of *Armies*" (137). By framing the end of the March as occurring beyond the scope of representation, Mailer challenges the idea that history or journalism can ever fully capture the significant moments of the events they cover.

Underscoring this idea is the closing image of *Armies* which pictures America as pregnant with possibility. Mailer writes that "She [America] is heavy with child...Now the first contractions of her fearful labor begin—it will go on: no doctor exists to tell the hour...she will probably give birth, and to what?—the most fearsome totalitarianism the

165

world has ever known? Or can she...deliver a babe of a new world brave and tender, artful and wild?" (288). This scene follows immediately after Mailer's rumination on the prayers of the Quakers and thus positions the final effectiveness of the protesters, their impact on history, the answering of their possible prayers, as open to futurity. Jason Mosser suggests that "Mailer made no attempt to resolve the political conflicts presented in his journalistic narratives because the history his texts reflected was still in progress, the conflicts unresolved" ("Genre" 272). Mailer's experimentations with conventional journalistic and historical narrative thus ensure that the means and significance of the conflicts about which he writes are not also foreclosed by his narrative.

This final image in *Armies*, of America pregnant with possibility, explicitly connects Mailer's work with the anamnesic labor of the avant-garde painter. Lyotard argues that "The painter, like the woman...has to labour to keep open the passage through which may come what has not yet come: the child, the past, the phrasing of colour in the present case...The subject who is aware works upon herself, with and against herself, to keep them all open to eventuality" ("Anamnesis" 109). *Armies of the Night* is a work wherein Mailer, writing in the first-person-third, works on himself, opens himself to the instability of historical and journalistic recreation such that his work can honor the potential for protest to create meaningful and profound changes to the American political landscape. Mailer writes within instability. His history of the March is not aimed at the past he records or the present moment which could draw knowledge from it. Rather, his work is aimed at a future moment that could more fully honor those efforts which presently elide familiar modes of representation.

Conclusion

Indeed, in Mailer's 1968 *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, the protesters from

Armies of the Night return, but they now have a dimension not apparent to Mailer during

the March on the Pentagon. The return of the protestors in this later work testifies to

Mailer's conception of history as evolving and thus in need of modes of expression that

can accommodate change; Mailer's journalism manifests this accommodation. *Miami and*

the Siege of Chicago documents Mailer's experiences during the 1968 Republican

convention in Miami and the Democratic convention in Chicago. The Democratic

convention in Chicago is of particular interest to Mailer because it is accompanied by

massive protests. The protesters, however, are met with a greater violence than what was

visited upon them in D.C. Mailer notes an occasion where a stationary group of

protesters, surrounded on all sides by police, were "abruptly attacked. The police attacked

with tear gas, with Mace, and with clubs...the police cut one way through the crowd one

way, then cut through them another. They chased people into the park, ran them down,

beat them up" (169). This time, though, Mailer sees the protesters "taking beatings and

going back, taking beatings, going back" (194). They were, he notes, "no longer the same

people who had gone to the Pentagon at all. They were soldiers" (194). Mailer sees in the

protesters in Chicago a growing willingness to make serious sacrifices for their beliefs;

there is, as he notes, an honor in this: "The children were crazy, but they had developed

honor every year, they had a vision not devoid of beauty" (214). This honor is one he

witnessed in its nascent stages in D.C. but that has become more persuasive in its

167

manifestation in Chicago. Thus Mailer adjusts his view of the protesters as time

progresses, changing the framework used to understand the significance of their efforts as

their own efforts change. This makes Mailer's journalism, as Chris Anderson notes, a

form of "progressive revision" (90). That is, the events and people documented by Mailer

are not pinned to a temporality or perspective that would fix their meaning or significance

in history. Instead, Mailer's writing leaves open the possibility for what he wrote in the

past to be changed by what he may yet write. The problem of memory that opened this

chapter—that memory is predicated on some form of forgetting—is remedied in Mailer's

work through an effort to manifest memory as a process rather than an isolated,

unchanging phenomenon.

Importantly, Mailer's experimentations with journalism underwent their own

change with the 1979 publication of *Executioner's Song*. By the 1970s, Mailer's

experimentations in journalism were becoming familiar. Philip Bufithis notes that critics

felt "[Mailer] was slipping; he kept writing in the same key" (77). Thus when Mailer's

true-crime novel *The Executioner's Song* was published, it seemed an offering from an

entirely different author. *Executioner* chronicles the last year of Gary Gilmore's life

before he is executed by the State of Utah for the shooting deaths of two men.[52] Where

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[52] Gary Gilmore was the first person executed in the United States after the brief
moratorium on the death penalty was lifted in 1976. Given that Capote's *In Cold Blood*
was considered a contributing force to the temporary ban, *Executioner* and *In Cold Blood*
interestingly serve as bookends to debates about the death penalty during this time.
Moreover, there are overlaps in the stylistic qualities of both texts that make these works
bookends to the New Journalism as well. Capote believed that Mailer had ripped off his
innovative approach to reporting in *In Cold Blood,* saying "I do something truly
innovative, and who gets the prizes? Norman Mailer." (qtd. in Burn 34).

the Mailer persona is overly present in his early works of nonfiction, Mailer is virtually absent in *Executioner*, as is his stylistic bravura. Mark Edmundson argues that in *Executioner* "He [Mailer] had achieved something like...an 'extinction of personality,' in which he suppressed his own voice to become the medium for a variety of others" (435). If Mailer's early literary journalism testifies to the necessity of challenging the stylistic conventions of traditional reporting, namely the centrality of an omniscient, objective perspective, his work in *Executioner's Song* suggests that one mode of literary experimentation is not sufficient to tackle the problem of journalistic recreation; this problem instead requires continuous reinvention. Of the differences between *Executioner's Song* and his other works of literary journalism, Mailer said "One of my basic notions for a long, long time is that there is this mysterious mountain out there called reality...Different faces [of the mountain] call for different approaches, and some demand a knotty and convoluted interior style. Others demand great simplicity...The point is that style is an attack on the nature of reality" (Mailer 2007). For Mailer, that reality is a given, that the world is perceived and recorded in ways that cement meaning, is a troublesome assumption that requires of the artist a spirit of experimentation. The stylistic variances between *Armies* and *Executioner* testify to Mailer's awareness that his own methods of accounting for reality must change if they are to evoke the feeling that reality can only be fully countenanced in its complexity if it remains in disproportion to the forms which manifest it. Mailer's body of work enacts the continuous labor necessary for seeing meaning and memories not as byproducts of a stable temporality, but as momentary articulations subject to revisiting and revision.

169

CHAPTER FIVE

TOM WOLFE: PROLIFERATING SUBJECTIVITIES AND ENGAGING

DIFFERENCE IN *THE ELECTRIC KOOL-AID ACID TEST*

Introduction

Thus far my chapters have demonstrated how journalistic norms are in conflict

with, and thus incapable of fully countenancing, lived experience. The works of Capote,

Didion, and Mailer, albeit through different stylistic innovations, evoke feelings of

incommensurability that make readers aware of material otherwise excluded in service of

the professional and institutional expectations of journalism. What I have yet to address

explicitly is what effect the challenges to journalistic norms have on the reporter himself.

That is, if the norms of standard journalism are displaced, what does this indicate about

the centrality and authority of the reporter within his profession?

In order to address this question, I will examine the work of Tom Wolfe. Of all

the New Journalists, Wolfe was the most traditionally trained. He began his journalism

career as a newspaper reporter in 1956 working for the *Springfield Union* in

Massachusetts. In 1959, he left the *Springfield Union* for the *Washington Post* to work as

a metro reporter. He stayed at the *Post* until 1962 when he left for the *New York Herald

Tribune*, where, within just a couple years, he would become one of the leading figures of

the New Journalism. Wolfe's career thus most clearly embodies the movement between

"institutionalized, regimented approach[es] to news gathering" (Weingarten 85) and the

complex, self-consciously experimental methods of reporting developed and employed

170

by the New Journalists. When he worked as a reporter for both the *Springfield Union* and the *Washington Post*, much of his work was defined by the standards of the profession. Michael Lewis argues that while working for the *Post*, Wolfe's work is "nothing special... The *Post* sends him to be the Latin America correspondent, and from Havana he sends dispatches that read just like the dispatches of the guy he replaced...There are limits to what a reporter can say about people in a daily newspaper; there is the need to at least seem objective" (133). As I have argued in the previous chapters, objectivity creates the appearance of authority and reliability. In light of professional norms, then, that Wolfe's early journalism read like the work of another reporter's can be seen as advantageous to the profession. Frank Harbers and Marcel Broersma note that "the objectivity regime...functions to legitimize journalism as a valuable and distinctive social practice, to establish 'ritual solidarity' among the profession, to socialize journalists in the dominant professional ideology" (642). The practice of objectivity creates among journalists a social code and practice that creates consistency across the profession, making it possible for one reporter's work to be identical to another's. However, what is implicitly advanced alongside this particular manifestation of the objectivity norm is a singular view of and voice for the reporter responsible for adhering to and carrying out such norms.

What I argue over the course of this chapter is that by undermining the professional standards of journalism, Wolfe also undermines the centrality and authority of the reporter expected to enact them in his work. In so doing, Wolfe promotes a journalistic space open to a proliferation of voices and points of view. Wolfe manifests this through his approach to perspective which shifts often, and without warning, from

171

the first person to the third person, marking his contribution to the New Journalism as distinct from Capote, Didion, and Mailer.

This shifting perspective is most prominently displayed in Wolfe's 1968 work *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. The book recounts the cross country, acid-fueled road trip of famed novelist Ken Kesey and his devoted followers, the Merry Pranksters. Wolfe's shifting points of view make it difficult to discern Wolfe's voice among the dozens of others he employs throughout the text. For example, at one point in the book, a Prankster named Babbs reflects on news he learned about a person being arrested for drug possession and the rough way in which this person was handled by the cops. Wolfe writes, "Babbs says, 'Yeah! Yeah! Right! Right!—but that's in his movie' *In his movie— right right right*—and they all grok over that. *Grok*—and then it's clear, without anybody having to say it. Everybody...has his own movie going" (130). Initially it is clear that Babbs is speaking, but when Wolfe switches to italics, it is less clear whose voice is represented: Babbs' inner thoughts? Or is it the collective voice of the Pranksters? The word "grok" adds another layer of confusion here. This term stems from the Pranksters' unique lexicon, so when Wolfe includes it first without italics and then in italics, one wonders whether the first instance is merely Wolfe adopting the term and the second another instance of the Pranksters' collective thinking. If the latter is the case, does this mean the first use of italics is also Wolfe writing from inside the collective mind of the Pranksters or was this just an extension of Babbs' thinking? The quickness of these shifts in voice and perspective make it difficult to answer the above questions. This can be perceived as a consequence of Wolfe's writing: "No one switches point of view more

172

rapidly than Wolfe. However, this rapid-fire multiple perspective carries with it certain risks. It tends to frustrate readers seeking to isolate Wolfe's own view of his subjects" (Lounsberry, "Tom Wolfe" 301). This frustration stems from expectations of journalism connected to the principle of objectivity: "Objectivity is intimately linked to the concept that all readers receive the same fixed message from the reporter-transmitter" (Soffer 478). In his role as "reporter-transmitter" a journalist's work communicates a "fixed" message, one not traditionally subject to a multitude of questions regarding point of view and voice. The difficulty in singling out Wolfe's voice in his work is thus not a virtue of his profession but of a challenge to his profession, one that forces readers to listen to a multitude of voices from conflicting, shifting perspectives. As a result, readers are no longer mere consumers of narratives authored by the singular voice of journalistic tradition.

This particular challenge posed by Wolfe is one that has an important parallel in Lyotard's work, one that will highlight the stakes of Wolfe's innovations with journalism. Lyotard's theory of postmodernism, introduced in the last chapter, includes a critique of the standard Enlightenment subject. This subject is conceived as a consistent, organized totality who is the central axis around which the knowledge and language of grand narratives gain legitimacy. I noted in the last chapter that grand narratives are maintained often by the suppression of that which does not conform to their narrative modes. This occurs through two related practices: the creation and maintenance of rules designed to legitimate grand narratives. Lyotard argues that for a particular discourse to be valid, it must adhere to the rules of its genre; this was the premise of my argument in the first

chapter regarding the differend. However, what I did not fully address was how generic

rules are designed for the purpose of making a particular discourse legitimate. This means

grand narratives need only look within their own discursive boundaries for their

coherence and validity. Lyotard describes this as the "proclivity to define the conditions

of a discourse in a discourse on those conditions" (*Postmodern Condition* 30). Moreover,

the defining of conditions that govern particular narratives is often carried out by experts

already within those narrative fields. Lyotard argues, for instance,"It is recognized that

the conditions of truth, in other words, the rules of the game of science, are immanent in

that game, that they can only be established within the bonds of a debate that is already

scientific in nature, and that there is no other proof that the rules are good than the expert

consensus sanctioning them" (*Postmodern Condition* 29). The aim of these narratives is

their own legitimation, and this is achieved by the creation of internally-constructed rules

for legitimation. What further insulates explanatory narratives from external challenges is

a universal theory of the subject who "acts as a central point for the organization of

knowledge, eliminating difference and disorderly elements" (Woodward par. 3). In other

words, what underwrites grand narratives is the assumption that there is "'man' that there

is 'language,' [and] that the former makes use of the latter for his own ends'" (*Differend*

viii). The rules designed to legitimate grand narratives presume the subject underwriting

them to be a stable, organized totality who can exploit language to fit the needs of a

particular discourse.

Over the course of this chapter, I demonstrate how Lyotard's critique of the

Enlightenment subject maps onto Wolfe's own critique and subsequent displacement of

174

the singular, omniscient voice of the reporter articulated through the conventions of journalism. Wolfe's effort to invite unfamiliar voices into his journalism makes it difficult, as noted above, for readers to find an orienting point of view within his work; readers thus become obligated to attend equally to all the voices in Wolfe's texts. Importantly, obligation will be a point of overlap between Wolfe's work and Lyotard's theory of the avant-garde. It is a feeling that stems from the displacement of a centered, singular subject, but it is also, as this chapter will demonstrate, a feeling that incites a more flexible subjectivity, one better suited to engage difference.

<p style="text-align:center">Journalism as Grand Narrative and the Problem of Subjectivity</p>

Grand narratives operate according to internally developed rules designed to sanction their authority and coherence. Objectivity, as a significant hallmark of journalistic convention, was developed in part to legitimate journalism as a profession. Yet it also contributes to the singularity of both the figure and voice of the reporter. After the government's propaganda campaigns during WWI, both journalists and the public at large found it difficult to discern fact from fiction. Additionally, the rise of public relations as a profession deepened the challenges journalists faced when attempting to report the news. Michael Schudson argues:

> Early in the 20th century, efforts multiplied by businessmen and government agencies to place favorable stories about themselves in the press. A new 'profession' of public relations emerged and got a great boost from President Woodrow Wilson's attempt in the First World War to use public relations to sell the war to the American public. The war stimulated popular public relations campaigns for war bonds, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and the YMCA. By l920, one journalism critic noted, there were nearly a thousand 'bureaus of propaganda' in Washington modeled on the war experience. Figures circulated among journalists that 50 percent or 60 percent of stories even in *The New York*

Times were inspired by press agents (162).

There developed a need for journalists to distinguish themselves from public relations professionals that contributed to the implementation of objectivity as a professional norm.

Objective reporting was not only felt to be a safeguard against the manipulation of those in the public relations field, but also a hallmark of journalism as an industry distinct from the others around it. As Stephen Ward notes, "the espousal of objectivity was a rhetorical reply to objectivity's "other" – muckrakers, interpretive journalists, and sensational tabloid reporters. Objectivity was a rhetorical weapon by which journalists could articulate and defend their belief in impartial, factual journalism" (278). In this sense, objectivity was developed by journalists for their occupational needs; it provided them with a professional standard that lent their work both distinction and consistency, particularly when compared to the work of press agents and public relations campaigners. Indeed, Schudson goes on to suggest that "Journalists grew self-conscious about the manipulability of information in the propaganda age. They felt a need to *close ranks and assert their collective integrity* in the face of their close encounter with the publicity agents' unembarrassed effort to use information (or misinformation) to promote special interests" (162, emphasis mine). Objectivity was an assertion of a collective journalistic identity useful in making distinctions between reporters and those in the public relations field. The development of objectivity as an occupational norm intended to distinguish journalism from other professions parallels the ways in which grand narratives develop their own rules in order to guarantee the coherency and organization of their particular narratives over and against other narratives that might challenge them. Moreover, the implementation of objectivity as a professional norm led to the same problems of

176

exclusion and prejudice that accompany grand narratives.

In order to retain the appearance of an unbiased perspective, reporters developed

formulaic methods for gathering and reporting the news. Ward further notes that there

"was a list of rules for checking claims, testing facts, attributing comments, and balancing

sources... These rules, both general and specific, operationalized the principle of

objectivity" (218). The term operationalized is here significant for the way it evokes the

mechanistic procedures of conventional reporting, procedures that often prevented a

nuanced engagement with reality and informed the singularity of both the voice and

perspective of the conventional reporter. For instance, journalists relied on stories that

were accompanied by official sources because these sources offered reporters an easy

way to verify the accuracy of what they reported.[53] In so doing, however, reporters

implicitly prevented the voices of those without appropriate credentials from being heard.

Orren Soffer has argued that "News organizations...deflect a dialogical atmosphere by

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[53] Alison Young, in her essay "Appeals to Valuelessness: Objectivity, Authenticity, and The News Discourse," provides a fuller account of this practice: "Since the demand for a news story is a demand for facts...the commitment to appear objective encourages a leaning towards certain institutional sources. The concept of objectivity is therefore woven into the notion of *validation*, the generation of trustworthy claims and comments. The hierarchization of sources leading to a dependence on a few together with the bureaucratic pressures of news production...and therefore productive of a particular style of story-telling. The keynote of this style is that objectivity and institutional sources come to be seen as identical. Thus the concept of objectivity is affected by a pragmatic recourse to easily accessible official voices. Fact-finding is routinized, and the continual reinforcement of the accrediting of standardized sources encourages a simultaneous neglect of alternatives. So journalists return to figures such as the police, government ministers, court officials and so on, and tend to omit the voices of ordinary individuals" (40-41).

encouraging reporters to rely on official sources, thus restricting social dialogue and variety in the opinions presented in the news while at the same time promoting a mainstream monological voice" (474). A reliance on official sources not only restricts the diversity of voices represented in news stories, but also promotes a singular type of journalistic voice. Moreover, the implementation of objectivity meant that reporters often merely recorded what their sources said, writing through a united and authoritative voice stemming from the first principle of objectivity. In this way, reporters became passive transcribers of information. John Fisher, former editor of *Harper's* magazine, said "the narrow conventions of objectivity meant that I was constantly reporting what somebody said, even if I knew that it was untrue, misleading or self-serving" (qtd. in Pauly 598). The objectivity norm created passive reporters and this, in turn, projected an image of the reporter as reliable *because* of his passivity. What grounded the authority of the news was the assumption of a neutral and objective reporter writing it; this assumption led to the marginalization of stories unaccompanied by the official sources that operationalized objectivity. Importantly, these issues also contributed to the presumption that reporters were external to the news they reported, outside observers responsible for merely relaying information. Soffer points out:

> 'objective' reports require a distanced, monologic voice because any dialogical relationship will damage the journalist's outsider and unbiased position. Because the essential ontology behind the concept of objective observer postulates a single fixed and independent reality, it assumes that a keen observation of this reality can produce a single authoritative and true voice. In order to gain information, the reporter should objectify social issues and human beings, treating them as things to be mapped and categorized with an instrumental apathy (474).

Adhering to the conventions of journalism means the reporter is abstracted from the news he reports, positioned outside and in control of the subjectivities he documents. Obscured

by an adherence to objectivity, the reporter risks creating and perpetuating oversimplified stories that fail to countenance the complexities of subjecthood.[54] The reporter in this role is not unlike the unified, coherent subject that gives power and authority to the explanatory narratives Lyotard critiques. Importantly, Lyotard's critique of the Enlightenment subject is driven by a concern for what happens to that which is marginalized when it confronts the totalizing forces of grand narratives. Desiring to remain internally coherent organizations, grand narratives are inclined towards the violent suppression of that which threatens them; there is thus an urgency for intervention into the processes of these narratives.

For its potential to evoke a terroristic repression of that which does not conform to it, Marx's theory of history moving towards the emancipation of the proletariat is one of the grand narratives of modernity Lyotard critiques. In discussing Marx, I want to emphasize the moral component of Lyotard's critique of the Enlightenment subject as well as the ethical imperative driving his theory of the postmodern and the de-centered subject that accompanies it. In so doing, I will be better able to emphasize the ethical and philosophical dimension of Wolfe's enactment of a postmodern subjectivity. For Lyotard, Marx sees history as reducible to a singular conflict between two parties, the proletariat and the bourgeois, that stems from a particular action: labor. While Lyotard spent the early years of his career supporting a Marxist philosophy, his time in Algeria

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[54] David Oh's article "Complementary Objectivity and Ideology: Reifying White Capitalist Hierarchies in Time Magazine's Construction of Michelle Rhee" (2010) illuminates how objectivity can perpetuate dominant ideologies and reinforce racial stereotypes.

during its battle for independence complicated his relationship to Marxism. It was in

Algeria where Lyotard began to feel that a Marxist philosophy was not applicable to all

class conflict because it struggled to countenance cultural difference, both between

countries and between laborers within particular countries. While the socialist National

Liberation Front fought against and won their independence from France in 1962, the

party quickly fractured. In her essay "Lyotard's Algeria: Experiments in Theory," Jane

Hiddleston notes that "local leaders found themselves unable to cope with conflicting

demands from those affected, yet responded by seizing more authority and competing

with each other. At the same time, the differences within the massive peasantry, the

varying conditions and needs of divergent types of workers, became increasingly

manifest in the absence of persistent, long-term traditions" (56). Lyotard was attentive to

what he saw as the increasing gap between FLN leadership and the rural, peasant

population whose countryside was ruined during the war. The representation of these

populations in post-war Algeria was found lacking, and Lyotard saw this as a problem

stemming from the abstract nature of a Marxist philosophy. Eleanor Byrne and Stuart

Sim observe the following:

> There was no successful uprising of the peasant or working class. Instead, a new grand narrative had been instituted and the various little narratives that made up the Algerian population were still being kept in a state of subjection, unable to make their needs known. As a theory, Marxism had been found badly wanting in this instance, with its insistence that a European-oriented metanarrative could be imposed on an underdeveloped nation with a very different kind of cultural history (15).

They go on to cite Lyotard as arguing that "It is in a completely *abstract* way, that is,

exclusively *economistic*, that one can speak of *a* proletariat, *a* middle class, *a* bourgeois

in Algeria" (16). The particular needs of the rural population in Algeria failed to be

countenanced in the post-war years; their experiences could only in the most abstract way fit into a Marxist conception of class conflict. Consequently, they were re-marginalized in a post-independence Algeria. As Richard Smith concisely sums up, "Marxist theory offered, for Lyotard, little purchase on the Algerian situation; his belief in Marxism was being eroded by the unfolding of events in Algeria, events that seemed divorced from the framework of ideas and concepts proposed by Karl Marx and his followers" (182). Following Lyotard's disillusionment with the Marxist narrative is his effort to pursue a philosophy that can ethically countenance difference and do justice to marginalized peoples. This involves dismantling the explanatory power of grand narratives. It also involves decentering the subject, who is often assumed to be universally similar across different cultural landscapes, who grounds these narratives. In the above case, the possibility of radical diversity among laborers cannot be countenanced by a framework of class conflict centered on the figure of a universal proletariat. This is also the case for standard journalism where the principle of objectivity and the methods by which it is implemented lead to the countenancing of only certain kinds of voices: "Radical anti-institutional voices – or those of marginal victimized groups that are not … represented among the official statement makers – are excluded from the news. Objectivity then becomes a tool that ensures the centralist characteristics of news discourse, sterilizes its polyphony, and renders it a unified voice of authority" (Soffer 480).

The Postmodern Subject

The sterilization of news discourse was felt by Wolfe at the beginning of his

181

career, but his ability to challenge it took time to develop. Before *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* was published, an early version of the Kesey/Prankster story was printed as a three-part series in *The New York World-Journal Tribune* in 1967. This version, however, lacked the multiple, shifting perspectives that would appear in its later form. Marc Weingarten suggests that Wolfe's earlier version was "written with a reporter's detachment that came no closer to explaining the Pranksters' reality than the early press coverage Wolfe had dismissed as hopelessly stodgy" (107). In support of this, Weingarten cites a passage about the effects of LSD, a drug frequently used by Kesey and the Pranksters, from Wolfe's earlier article: "So far nobody in or out of the medical profession knows exactly what LSD does in the body, chiefly because so little is known about the workings of the central nervous system as a whole. It is the blackout on this score that has left so much room for mysticism in the LSD life" (108). This passage is written through the neutral, impersonal voice of the conventional reporter. It has, as Weingarten suggests, the "paternalistic tone of an educational film" (107). Wolfe himself was aware of his shortcomings in this earlier piece. What he struggled to articulate was the "weird....fourth dimension [he] kept sensing in the Prankster adventure" ("Author's Story" 2). To capture this, Wolfe would need to take readers inside the Prankster experience; and this could not happen if Wolfe wrote about the Pranksters as an outsider looking in, the more familiar journalistic posture. Instead, Wolfe would have to make more significant concessions to the language and perspectives of his subjects. Wolfe's effort to accommodate the Pranksters meant, as Brian Ragan notes, drawing on "every level of diction, from the most vulgar to the fairly elevated" (90), and employing the

182

language of "every sort of discourse—from Eastern religions to anatomy to popular science fiction" (90). These various fields actually "provide words for [Wolfe]" (Ragan 90), meaning that Wolfe does not just produce the Prankster experience through a disinterested and detached voice but attempts to inhabit their experience, bring the immediacy of their presence into being. What Wolfe gives voice to in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* are the idiosyncrasies of Kesey and the Pranksters previously narrated over by the "stodgy" and "paternalistic" voice of the conventional reporter. In so doing, Wolfe manifests an engagement with what Lyotard calls "little narratives."

Given the problems associated with grand narratives, particularly the assumption of a universal subject, Lyotard advocates for the proliferation of narratives not beset with the burden and dangers of total explanatory power. According to Stuart Sim, "Little narratives exemplify difference, since they represent their own range of interests rather than those set down as the norm by the prevailing metanarrative, and develop independently of the central power base to their culture" (49). What accompany little narratives is a decentralized subject, a subject capable of engaging with alterity because it is not seeking only to confirm and maintain a singular world-view. In other words, the fragmentation of grand narratives involves the fragmentation of the subject of these narratives. Rather than needing a subject who must remain centralized in order to retain the coherency of the epistemological system it grounds, little narratives encourage not the elimination of subjectivity but the flourishing of more forms of subjectivity. Anne Barron importantly notes in her essay "Lyotard and The Problem of Justice" that "Fragmentation leads to the proliferation of many new forms of subjectivity rather than the simple

183

elimination of human identity as such. For Lyotard, resistance consists in the assertion of these subjectivities—often devalued by the dominant political culture—of the fact that they exist" (37). The singular, universal subject through whom the worldview of grand narratives is articulated is displaced in Lyotard's theory. Where grand narratives dominate the voices and communities that do not conform to their worldview, little narratives offer an opportunity for the expression of those identities and voices. Thus when Wolfe revises the "paternalistic" tone of his work, informed by a more standard approach to reporting, he does so in an effort to create a space for the expression of the Prankster community whose experiences are otherwise inarticulable through the dominant language of journalism.

Wolfe's Proliferating Subjectivities in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*

Wolfe's first access to Kesey came through a series of letters Kesey wrote to Larry McMurtry; at the time, Kesey was fleeing drug charges as a fugitive in Mexico. McMurtry gave some of the letters to Wolfe and Wolfe almost immediately developed a headline idea: "Young Novelist Real-Life Fugitive" (5). This preconceived idea suffers, however, when Kesey sneaks back into the country and is arrested by U.S. officials. Wolfe cancels his trip to Mexico, and instead goes to find Kesey in California where he was arrested. Wolfe spends the next month with Kesey and the Pranksters. What he initially thought was going to be "a rather limited subject [Kesey and the Pranksters] got bigger and bigger in its scope because everything that Kesey ever tried went far beyond the whole question of drugs, to this whole matter of self-realization and what you're

184

going to do with yourself on the frontier beyond catastrophe" (qtd. in McKean 59).

Wolfe's sense of how to report the story of Kesey and the Pranksters must change as his

pre-conceived ideas about them are upended by experience. Wolfe's work is thus a record

of how he attempts to journalistically countenance that which resists expression through

the traditions of journalism. This countenancing takes the form, in Wolfe's work, of a

shifting point of view from which the stories he recounts are told. Wolfe relinquishes the

authority of the objective, omniscient reporter and gives much of his reporting over to the

voices of those people normally elided by the conventions of journalism. Barbara

Lounsberry argues that "Wolfe's kinetic style should be seen as his attempt not only to

imitate mental and sensory processes but also to decrease the distances between author,

subject, and reader" ("Tom Wolfe" 300). In *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Wolfe is not just

writing in an untraditional way; he is attempting to narrow the gulf created between

readers of journalism and subjects of journalistic narratives. Soffer suggests that "The

objective position...has a distanced and instrumental attitude towards social phenomenon,

depending on information gathering, categorizing, and mapping of social and political

facts. All these characteristics objectify individuals" (487). In writing from shifting points

of view, Wolfe's work brings both himself and his readers closer to unfamiliar people

and experiences. No longer are the perspectives of those in authority, those "official

sources" that reinforce a reporter's mastery of objectivity, operationalized. Wolfe, in

other words, does not attempt to narrate the experiences of Kesey and the Pranksters

through conventions of journalism that subsequently confer legitimacy on their subjects;

instead, Wolfe writes through the idiosyncrasies of Kesey and the Pranksters, allowing

185

for the expression and valuation of their experiences to be asserted in their own language. This is important to note because for Lyotard, little narratives do not share the totalizing power of grand narratives; instead, they "are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do" (*Postmodern Condition* 23). Wolfe, in giving voice to Kesey and the Pranksters without the conventions of reporting that would normally authorize their presence in journalistic texts, supports an assertion of their identity from the margins of culture. This requires, though, that Wolfe relinquish the monologic voice of the conventional reporter.

From the outset of *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Wolfe exposes the often hidden authority of the objective, omniscient reporter by exposing his own vulnerability as a knower of the cultures about which he writes. In the first pages of the book, Wolfe notes that the Pranksters have an acute awareness of other people's clothing choices. Their awareness helps them determine who is "hip" and who is "unhip." In particular, the Pranksters have an issue with certain kinds of shoes. Wolfe writes "The worst are shiny black shoes with shoelaces in them" (2). The problem with these shoes is that they accompany figures of authority: "black—shiny—laced up—FBI shoes" (2). Almost immediately after noting this, Wolfe recounts a conversation he has with one of the Pranksters nicknamed Black Maria. Black Maria asks Wolfe what his astrological sign is. When he responds that he is a Pisces, Black Maria says "I would never take you for a Pisces, you seem too...*solid* for a Pisces" (3). Wolfe recounts his thinking in this moment, which is initially defensive. He writes, "Back in New York City, Black Maria, I tell you, I am even known as something of a dude" (3). What follows, however, as Wolfe begins

186

to mentally account for what makes him a "dude" in New York, is the realization that the Pranksters see something about Wolfe that he has failed to see himself. Wolfe continues, "But somehow a blue silk blazer and a big tie with clowns on it and...a...pair of the shiny low cut black shoes don't set them all to doing the Varsity Rag in the head world of San Francisco" (3). Wolfe accounts for his attire, assuming it to be unique enough for him to be considered equal among the Pranksters, but his shoes give him pause. The ellipses above register Wolfe's awareness that his shoes, as seen through the eyes of the Pranksters, mark him as other. He is, despite his self-perception, the figure of authority they normally avoid and despise. Wolfe notes only a few pages later that his appearance is once again remarked upon by a Prankster. He is told that he ought to put some more color into his appearance and then defiantly notes "So I kept my necktie on to show that I had pride" (15). Immediately after, though, Wolfe admits, "But nobody gave a damn about that" (15). In the simplest terms, the Pranksters *see* Wolfe. He is no longer merely an outside observer moving unnoticed among a group of people about whom he will then report. On display is Wolfe's vulnerability as an assumed insider. Chris Anderson argues that "The reporters who do come out to Kesey's commune to try and interpret the fantasy for the middle-classers...are humiliated and frustrated" (16). Anderson goes on to suggest that when Wolfe talks about their humiliation in the text—"All right, Film Editor, Article-Writer, Participant-Observer, you're here...on with your editing writing observing" (Wolfe 157)—he is dramatizing his own situation, pointing to his own position as knower as "intrinsically suspect" (16). Wolfe's exposure gives him the opportunity to develop a different kind of position from which to report his time with

187

Kesey and the Pranksters. The "I" at the beginning of *Acid Test*, the "I" of the journalist

through whom the Pranksters can see, must become mutable. Throughout *Acid Test*,

Wolfe writes from a vantage point alien to his own. As his awareness of his position

among the Pranksters becomes clear, Wolfe "quickly retreats from this slick journalist's

pose" (Hollowell 143). To do this, Wolfe drops the first person narration that begins *Acid

Test* and adopts the perspectives of innumerable people throughout the rest of the book.

In so doing, Wolfe enacts a flexibility Lyotard sees as necessary for a responsible

countenancing of difference.

While a majority of *Acid Test* is comprised of voices other than Wolfe's, it is Ken

Kesey's voice that Wolfe slips into most often. One of the most significant passages

written through Kesey's perspective occurs when Kesey is in Mexico, high on dexedrine,

and maybe or maybe not hallucinating the arrival of Federales at his home. The chapter

begins:[55]

> Haul ass, Kesey. Move. *Scram. Split flee hide vanish disintegrate.* Like *run*.
>
> Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrevereverevereverevereverever or are we gonna have just a late
>
> Mexican re-run of the scene on the rooftop in San Francisco and sit here with the motor
>
> spinning and watch with fascination while the cops they climb up one again to *come git*
>
> *you*—
>
> THEY JUST OPENED THE DOOR DOWN BELOW, ROTOR ROOTER, SO YOU
> HAVE MAYBE 45 SECONDS ASSUMING THEY BE SLOW AND SNEAKY AND
> SURE ABOUT IT
>
> Kesey sits in a little room in the last house down the beach, $80 a month, on paradise-
> blue Bandarias Bay, in Puerto Vallarta, on the west coast of Mexico, state of Jalisco, one

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[55] I have preserved the typographic details of Wolfe's text. The text appears here as it
does in *Acid Test*.

step from the floppy green fronds of the jungle… (256).

We begin inside Kesey's head here, and Wolfe primarily uses a second person point of view to signify this. Yet the invocation of the first person plural "we" in the second line could indicate the presence of another voice, though it is not clear to whom this voice belongs. The use of the third person in the last section is sobering, and though it represents a different voice than the one inside Kesey's head, readers are not given enough evidence to locate its exact origin. Moreover, the typographic shifts in this paragraph would seem to correspond to a shift in voice, but the content of these expressions read like an extension of Kesey's thoughts. They could be Kesey's drug-induced paranoia, which has grown throughout the book, but this is difficult to assert with authority.[56] Chris Anderson suggests that it is often difficult to discern "how much of what Wolfe is saying is in his own voice and how much is refashioned from his extensive saturation-reporting interviews with the individuals involved [in the writing of *Acid Test*]. His technique is to 'shift as quickly as possible into the eye sockets, as it were, of the people in the story...to 'shift the point of view in the middle of a paragraph or even a sentence'" (26). These shifts sometimes occur so unexpectedly that the voices within them seem to emanate from nowhere.

For instance, Wolfe describes what happens to Kesey in court after he is caught sneaking back into the U.S. from Mexico: "Kesey is starting to say something and Hallihan and Rohan [Kesey's lawyers] are crouched for the garrote, but again it's over

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[56] John Hollowell notes that the italicized words here actually come from from the letters that Kesey sent McMurty (139), but this is not, in any way, made clear to readers in the text.

189

and Kesey is out on bail in San Francisco, too. It's unbelieveable. He's out after only five days" (333). This is a fairly straight-forward recounting of Kesey's time in court, and the description is punctuated by its short, terse final sentences. Immediately after, though, there is a poem: "In the San Francisco jail/before he got out on bail/Kesey met a kid with magic fingernails/'Take a lick' said the kid/And everybody did/They all licked his nails and blew their lids./Twenty-seven psyches/Going off like Nike/Missiles through the lye-scoured/Concrete skyways of the San Francisco jail/The kid had LSD on his magic fingernails" (333-334). The poem continues for another five stanzas and its language and rhythm are both vastly different from the prose narration that comes before them. Without warning, readers are moved from the language of a court reporter to the language of the Pranksters. As readers, then, we do not always know who is speaking in Wolfe's work. As Brian Ragen writes, "In places Wolfe abandons prose altogether and writes in a loosely rhyming sort of free verse... invoking the Prankster's own raps" (89). This abandonment comes without warning and thrusts readers into different instantiations of language. In placing these different instantiations so near one another without the orienting features of conventional journalism, primarily the objective, balanced perspective of the reporter, one must attend equally to all of them. That is, before readers are given a chance to orient themselves, before we are able to determine whether the voices speaking are credible or not, we come to inhabit their points of view

The abruptness of these shifts in voice and the uncertainty regarding their origin parallel an element of avant-garde art in the work of an artist particularly important to Lyotard: Barnett Newman. Barnett Newman's work was of significance to Lyotard for its

190

capacity to disrupt the feeling of centralization. In his paintings, Newman often

incorporated a vertical band that would cut through his canvasses. These were called

zips.[57] The zips were produced by applying paint with a palette knife over masking tape,

making the line appear embedded in the painting (see figure 4).

Figure 4. Barnett Newman. *Onement.*

Newman's first use of this technique was in his 1948 piece *Onement.*[58] In this work the

entirety of Newman's canvas is deep red except for a jagged, orange-red vertical line

which cuts directly through the center of the piece. The line seems to emanate from

nowhere; this makes its irregularity, which intrudes upon the smooth surface of the paint

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[57]The word "zips" actually stems from a Kabbalistic concept known as "Tzim-tzum"
which, according to Barbara Gilbert, is the "contraction of God to allow room for
creation" (635).

[58] The piece would later be re-titled *Onement, I.*

191

beneath it, particularly disruptive. Different iterations of the zip would appear throughout

Newman's work. In his first works of sculpture, Newman created three dimensional

versions of the zip. *Here I, Here II, and Here III* are steel sculptures that depict dark,

vertical lines that appear to simultaneously rise from the ground and descend from the

sky Like his paintings, the three-dimensional zips appear as if by sudden. Indeed, Lyotard

notes that verticality in Newman's work "does not merely rise up; it descends like a

thunderbolt" ("Newman" 88). This adds to the visually disorienting effect of the lines

seeming to come from both above and below. A viewer of Newman's zips, whether

painted or sculpted, is momentarily arrested: from where do these bands come? For

Lyotard, the evocation of this question is one of the most significant contributions

Newman made to avant-garde art. This question indicates that Newman, creator of the

art, is not also its master. Lyotard argues that "Newman's space is no longer triadic in the

sense of being organized around a sender, a receiver, and a referent. The message

'speaks' of nothing; it emanates from no one. It is not Newman who is speaking, or who

is using painting to show us something" ("Newman" 81). Newman's work does not

participate in conventional modes of artistic representation where the artist offers

something to the viewer for his consumption and understanding. The immediate and

contradictory appearance of the zip displaces Newman as the grounding presence of the

work of art and thus interrupts the processes we could normally engage to uncover a

work's meaning (see figure 5). Newman is "no longer a painter-prince, an 'I' who

displays his glory...to a third party...in accordance with the 'communicative structure'

which founded classical modernity" (*Inhuman* 81). Lyotard's language here is

192

significant. He says Newman is no longer a "painter-prince" who displays his "glory" to emphasize the decentralized subject position Newman occupies as an avant-garde artist.

Figure 5. Barnett Newman. *Here I.*

Were Newman still a painter-prince, his art would convey a particular meaning and Newman would remain the art's master. The danger of this position is that it works in tandem with grand narratives that exploit a universalized version of the subject to ensure the legitimacy of their particular narratives. The artist as painter-prince operates similarly in creating works of art intended to reinforce communicative structures, creating art within the confines of tradition where the artist grounds and remains in control of the interpretive range of his work. The avant-garde artist breaks with this tradition and "ceases to be guided by a culture which made of him the sender and master of a message

of glory" (Lyotard, *Inhuman* 96). Newman's work is thus not motivated by a tradition

that sees the artist as a stabilizing presence. What motivates Newman's work is the same

feeling one has in an experience of Newman's work: obligation. Lyotard writes that

"Newman is concerned with giving colour, line or rhythm the force of an obligation

within a face-to-face relationship, in the second person, and his model cannot be *Look at*

this (over there); it must be be *Look at me* or, to be more accurate, *Listen to me*" (81).

Obligation is the command to listen, but not to a particular mandate. Instead, it is an

obligation to *just* listen. In Lyotard's philosophy, obligation has a significant ethical

dimension:

> [obligation] cannot be reduced to the act of submission to a determinate set of
> rules that leaves no room for doubt as to what might be their meaning and proper
> application in this or that particular case. Instead, obligation imposes itself
> whenever a judgment-more precisely, a reflective, indeterminate judgment-
> operating without recourse to unequivocal criteria or pre-established schemes of
> linkage, is required in a given situation. Obligation entails an "affect," it demands
> a sensitivity with respect to singular "cases" that may or, perhaps, must summon
> us in incomparable ways (De Vries 87).

Obligation is the awareness that we cannot always employ pre-established rules or norms

in decision-making processes. It is the feeling that we must attend to contingency rather

than shape it according to universal principles. The force of obligation shatters the feeling

of mastery that accompanies the Enlightenment subject and instead demands one become

attuned to alterity and incommensurability. It is this feeling Newman's work evokes. The

zips strike the viewer with a suddenness that demands their eye, obligates their attention.

This effect does not derive from artistic efforts aimed toward representation or

communication. Rather, it derives from Newman's own sense of obligation. Instead of

adhering to tradition, the avant-garde artist is compelled to create out of a sense of

obligation to that which is otherwise obscured *by* tradition. Indeed, avant-garde art "imposes an obligation: to respond, to recollect, to open ourselves to see/hear the trace/voice of the unrepresentable, to bear witness" (Slaughter 255). It is Newman's response to this feeling that motivates his painterly experimentations.

Obligation in "The Last American Hero. Yes!"

The emanating voices that compel our attention in *Acid Test* are present in Wolfe's other works of literary journalism. In his piece on stock car racer Junior Johnson, "The Last American Hero," Wolfe uses strategic interjections to compel his audience into recognizing the merit of not only the sport of stock car racing, but also the merit of its culture more generally. Wolfe writes:

> The educated classes in this country [America] as in every country, the people who grow up to control visual and printed communication media, are all plugged into what is, when one gets down to it, an ancient, aristocratic aesthetic. Stock car racing, custom cars...still seem beneath serious consideration, still the preserve of ratty people with ratty hair and dermatitis and corroded thoracic boxes and so forth and a culture it had previously ignored (*Kandy Kolored* xv).

Wolfe's work in "The Last American Hero" has two goals. Wolfe must both introduce his readers to stock car racing while also persuading them of its value, demonstrating that what has been previously ignored by the media deserves attention. One way Wolfe does this is to interrupt his own narrative with interjections that seem to have no origin but that work to confirm the value of the culture about which he writes. Initially, when "The Last American Hero" was published in *Esquire*, its title was "The Last American Hero is Junior Johnson. Yes!" This "Yes," which appears in other places throughout the essay, serves as a confirmation of Junior Johnson's importance. Readers do not know from

195

where this "yes" emanates, but as it comes up throughout the essay, its works to compel

our agreement that stock car racing, and Junior Johnson's status as hero within the sport,

warrant attention. In this way, the "yes" struggles against what Wolfe feels to be the

media's repression of that which fails to conform to its aesthetic.

Junior Johnson was a stock car racer from Wilkes County, North Carolina who

earned his driving skills as a whiskey runner for his father's illegal distillery. This is

important to note because Wolfe links the emergence of stock car racing to the presence

of illegal distilleries in the South. He writes:

> And all over of the rural South, hell, all over the South, the legends of wild-
> driving whiskey running got started. And it wasn't just the plain excitement of it.
> It was something deeper, the symbolism. It brought into a modern focus the whole
> business...of the people's rebellion against the Federals, against the seaboard
> establishment, their independence, their defiance of the outside world. And it was
> like a mythology for that and for something else that was happening, the whole
> wild thing of the car as the symbol of liberation in the postwar South (159-60).

Wolfe argues that Johnson's hometown was considered "Moonshine County" (151) and

that it was not the illegality of the business that was problematic for the elite of Wilke

County. Instead, the problem was that illegal distilleries were "raw and hillbilly. And one

thing thriving modern Industry is not is hillbilly. And one thing the burghers of North

Wilkesboro are not about to be is hillbilly. They have split-level homes that would knock

your eyes out. Also swimming pools, white Buick Snatchwagons, flagstone *terrasse-*

porches enclosed with louvered glass that opens wide in the summertime…" (151). It was

the assertion of stock car racing as anything other than a "hillbilly" ritual that motivates

the impulse to ignore it. Indeed, as Gary Konas argues in "Traveling 'Further' with Tom

Wolfe's Heros," Johnson is "an embarrassment to middle-class Southerners trying to

escape their traditional red-neck image, and much of the nation remains indifferent to

196

stock-car racing" (178). To avoid embarrassment, Wolfe writes that "upper-and middle

class America, even in the South, keep their eyes averted. Who cares! … Eyes averted,

happy burghers" (164). To see stock car racing is to legitimate its cultural value; thus by

keeping it on the margins of culture, the media can confirm the aesthetic of the middle

and upper classes to which it adheres and by which, as noted in the passage from Wolfe

earlier, it is controlled.

Wolfe, however, challenges this. Lyotard writes, "The avant-gardes continually

expose the artifices of presentation that allow thought to be enslaved by the gaze and

diverted from the unpresentable" (*Postmodern Explained* 12). Wolfe's presentation of

that which is normally excluded from media coverage challenges not only the aesthetic of

conventional journalism but also the thinking underwritten by this aesthetic—in this case,

that only particular cultural traditions merit attention. When Wolfe is describing Junior

Johnson's new house, a house situated among Johnson's "three automated chicken-

houses" (164), he writes "Junior Johnson's house is going to be one of the handsomest

homes in Wilkes County. Yes." (150). Later in the essay Wolfe writes, "Junior goes on

down to Atlanta for the Dixie 400 and drops by the Federal penitentiary to see his Daddy.

His Daddy is in on his fifth illegal distillery conviction...and then [Junior] goes on out to

the track and gets his new Ford and sets the qualifying speed record for Atlanta Dixie

400...later on he tools on back up the road to Ingle Hollow to tend to the automatic

chicken houses and the road-grading operation. Yes." (164). These two passages compel

the reader's confirmation that the activities and people described within them are

valuable. Wolfe does this through the inclusion and repetition of the word "yes" that

197

follows immediately after he describes the very things to which middle and upper classes say "no": the beauty of Johnson's home among the chicken coups, his routine of visiting his "Daddy" in prison while he serves time for running an illegal distillery, his stock-car racing career which stemmed from his father's business. Johnson's life, including his house, his career, his family history, stands opposed to the values and standards of the educated middle-class who see Johnson, and the "hillbilly" culture he represents, as an embarrassment. But the appearance of the word "yes," which does not naturally or logically follow any of the passages upon which it comments, encourages readers to see Johnson's life, and the culture he represents, as meriting attention for the same reasons it was previously seen as meriting repression.

Moreover, the use of the word "Daddy," Johnson's term for this father, and the repetition of the phase "go on down," a Southern idiomatic expression,[59] demonstrate Wolfe's attempt to use Johnson's own language to affirm the cultural practices he represents. Wolfe called this a "downstage voice" and it was designed to make readers feel as if "characters downstage from the protagonist himself were talking" ("New Journalism" 32). Wolfe first developed this downstage voice in "The Last American Hero" in a self-conscious attempt to avoid what he called the "calm, cultivated and, in fact, genteel voice" of non-fiction writing (*"New Journalism"* 31). In other words, "The

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[59] Though Wolfe was born in Virginia, his journalism used the language of the South not naturally but strategically. William McKeen has argued that "At an early age, [Wolfe] began listening carefully, storing up idiosyncrasies [from the South] that he would drop into his writing like the key ingredient to a secret recipe" (4). In an interview with Elaine Dundy, Wolfe admitted that not all of his attempts to recreate the speech patterns of the South were acceptable in his journalism: "'Just plain-long tired' is a phrase that's been cut out of every piece I've tried to use it in" (1966).

Last American Hero. Yes!" is not Wolfe attempting to use his status and voice as an East Coast journalist to validate another culture. He writes using a voice more representative of Junior Johnson's than his own; this "downstage voice" is an instantiation of language that is a challenge to, and fundamentally different from, the "pale beige tone...of 'the journalist'" (*New Journalism* 31). Thus the "yes" that punctuates the end of the passages above can be read as a confirmation of the value of those voices marginalized or narrated over by mainstream media.

Wolfe makes the accusation in "The Last American Hero" that the media often ignores cultural practices emanating from lower classes. A similar problem arose in reporting on the drug culture in California. John Holloman suggests that "most ostensibly 'objective' press reports about 'hippies' or the 'youth culture' unconsciously adopted the standards of the law enforcement authorities whose viewpoints implied social pathology: How many people used illegal drugs? How many persons were arrested? What socially and sexually unacceptable practices did the group engage in?" (136). There is no ambiguity in this kind of reporting; it communicates information stemming from those in authority and almost explicitly supports a condemnation of the people about whom it reports. Wolfe's journalism, however, does not communicate information underwritten by well-credentialed sources. Instead, Wolfe obligates the reader to listen to voices normally elided through convention. This is more generally reflective of Wolfe's innovations as a journalist. He does not shape the material according to convention; rather, he is guided by experience, willing to accommodate the unknown. Marc Weingarten importantly notes that in *Acid Test* Wolfe tailors his style to accommodate

Kesey's style (104). In other words, Wolfe makes room for Kesey's voice by relinquishing the detached, impersonal perspective that operationalized journalism's principle of objectivity. In stripping his journalism of its orienting voice while simultaneously engaging with voices otherwise elided through conventional journalistic practice, Wolfe brings the immediacy of otherness into presence.

In *Acid Test*, as Wolfe shifts out of his first person perspective and into the perspectives of the Pranksters, he also employs their language. This is an extension of the downstage voice that appears in "The Last American Hero," although in *Acid Test* the voices employed by Wolfe are far greater in number. One of the most repeated phrases throughout *Acid Test* does not originate with Wolfe. The phrase "you're either on the bus or off the bus" appears countless times throughout the book. The phrase is Kesey's and it references the acid-fueled trip across the country taken by Kesey and the Pranksters in their day-glo painted school bus. If one is "on the bus" he is willing to take acid; if he is not willing to take acid, he is off the bus. The phrase appears throughout *Acid Test* in varying contexts. When one of the Pranksters named Sandy, who often slips into deep states of paranoia around the other Pranksters, begins to become less paranoid, Wolfe writes that Sandy "feels *on the bus again*" (121). Here Wolfe uses the Prankster's lingo despite the fact that they are not speaking it themselves. Moreover, when the Pranksters refuse to allow a young man named Pancho on their bus because he has bad reactions to acid, Wolfe describes Pancho as follows: "A bad-trip freak if there ever was one! A breaker of balls extraordinaire! The human bummer" (240). Again, this is the language of the Pranksters, and Wolfe employs their particular idioms liberally throughout *Acid Test*.

200

John Hollowell goes so far as to suggest that "Wolfe introduces Prankster terms and phrases throughout the narrative and never fully returns to standard English" (134). If the language of conventional journalism is connected to the perspective of conventional journalism, then the colorful language of the Pranksters that Wolfe employs challenges both. Stephen Ward notes that in order to preserve the principle of objectivity in journalism, "editors banned all comment or interpretation, raising questions about almost any adjective or verb in a report. To 'editorialize' was the reporter's mortal sin. Editors detected a lapse in objectivity when they read interpretive paragraphs in news stories. They were suspicious of colourful language because it hinted at the reporter's attitude towards an event" (217). Colorful language undermined the authority of the objective reporter and therefore needed to be policed. Wolfe's employment of the Prankster's lingo destabilizes the field of journalistic language as it also undermines the authority of the objective perspective it was designed to support. The opening of the journalistic field of language, in addition to *Acid Test*'s shifting points of view, offers readers a textual space to engage with a diversity of voices. Without a singular, controlling voice or familiar language, readers cannot easily schematize what they read. Thus the reader's confrontation with the Pranksters through Wolfe's text parallels Wolfe's own: one is unarmed by the unfamiliar and in a position to adopt different perceptual frameworks as he moves through the text. John Hellmann writes that Wolfe's writing works to "break up the reader's usual modes of perception" (106). In so doing, Wolfe also makes readers aware of how they are shaped by language, positioned in what Lyotard refers to as

"language games" brought about by the dissolution of grand narratives.[60] What Lyotard means by this term is that "each of the various categories of utterance can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put—in exactly the same way as the game of chess is defined by a set of rules determining the properties of each of the pieces, in other words, the proper way to move them" (*Postmodern Condition* 10). Importantly, this means that the subject once assumed to be master of language is now "an effect of the language game" (Readings 107). Lyotard argues further that "these are games that we enter into but not to play them; they are games that make us into their players and we know therefore that we are ourselves several beings" (*Just Gaming* 51). The distinct nature of each language game means that one cannot occupy a singular vantage point in relation to them; by emphasizing this, Lyotard highlights the "performativity of language" (Readings 80). Wolfe's adoption of a third person omniscient narrator can thus be read not only as the representation of a mind striving to countenance subjectivities outside his own, but also a critique of grand narratives that proceeds through the enactment of language's performativity by forcing readers to accommodate for the shifts in language that accompany his shifting points of view.

Opening the Field of Language: Wolfe's Innovations with Punctuation and Typography

Wolfe's innovations extend to the less noticeable conventions of journalistic

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[60] The concept of language games Lyotard discusses in *Just Gaming* comes from the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. For more on the similarities and differences between the two see Arabella Lyon's *Intentions: Negotiated, Contested and Ignored* (1998), especially page 182.

language. Indeed, the most visible innovation in Wolfe's work is his use of punctuation

and typography. More than the other writers discussed here, Wolfe took the most liberties

in the presentation of his writing. Wolfe's innovations, though, are not done for the sake

of innovation alone. He employed a freer method of reporting because he was

encountering things uncapturable by convention. Chris Anderson writes that "In the face

of the experience, [Wolfe] forgot the constraints of linear and publically acceptable

journalism" (25). As a result, language became not a vehicle for the expression of pre-

fabricated thoughts, but a field through which the labor of a mind at work could be

articulated. Wolfe writes:

> I found that things like exclamation points, italics, and abrupt shifts (dashes) and
> syncopations (dots) helped to give the illusion not only of a person talking but of
> a person thinking. I used to enjoy using dots where they would be least expected,
> not at the end of a sentence but in the middle, creating the effect . . . of a skipped
> beat. It seemed to me the mind reacted—*first*! . . . in dots, dashes, and
> exclamation points, then rationalized, drew up a brief, with periods" (*"Birth"*
> 45).[61]

Wolfe's use of punctuation is the record of a mind reacting to new experiences. When

Wolfe is writing about the Pranksters, he employs one his most innovative pieces of

punctuation: the double colon. In the passage that follows, Wolfe writes about a

flashback Sandy, one of the Pranksters, has to his first experience of DMT. Wolfe writes:

> The sweet wheatfields and dairy lands of America would be sailing by beauty
> rural green and curving, and Sandy is watching the serene beauty of it...and then

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[61] Wolfe has suggested that the inspiration for his typographic experimentations came
from reading the works of Yevgeny Zamyatin, a Russian writer of both science fiction
and political satire. For more see Jack Shafer's "The Tripster in Wolfe's Clothing: Jack
Shafer on Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, and the Underappreciated Art of
Dissecting Cultural Trends" (2006).

> he happens to look into the big rear-view mirror outside the bus and—the fields
> are—in flames ::::::::: curve and curdle straight up in hideous orange flames :::::
> So he whips his head around and looks back as far as he can see over the horizon
> and it is nothing but flat and sweet and green again, sailing by serene (98).

While the double colons above seem to set off Sandy's flashback, they are not an

expected or familiar piece of punctuation whose function can be clearly delineated. This

is, in part, because what Wolfe is setting off grammatically is an almost incommunicable

experience. In other words, there is an implicit question raised by Wolfe's use of the

double colon. How *does* one report the experience of an hallucinogenic drug? Wolfe does

not definitively answer the question, but the double colon is an attempt, a provisional

answer. Moreover, the feeling of disorientation induced in the reader when he comes

across the double colon puts him in the same position as Wolfe. We are implicated in the

process of coming to terms with an experience that we finally may not be able to come to

terms with. As Chris Anderson notes, "We are...made aware of Wolfe in the act of trying

to make his language more than ordinary. And this effort...is a response to the

inexplicability of Wolfe's project" (23).

Wolfe also experiments with typography. The orientation of Wolfe's work on the

page can vary drastically from the ordinary. Wolfe's text can shift orientation suddenly,

sometimes moving vertically and other times cutting diagonally across the page. In *Acid

Test*, for instance, Wolfe plays with typography in an attempt to recreate the experience

of taking drugs.[62] This is a further example of Wolfe bringing otherness to bear in ways

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[62] As a result of his time with Kesey and the Pranksters, Wolfe took acid himself. He
noted in an interview with Chet Flippo that "I thought, this is one piece of reporting I
haven't done. So I did it; it scared the hell out of me. It was like tying yourself to the
railroad track to see how big the train is. It was pretty big. I would never do it again"

that require artistry. Kesey and his Pranksters, in addition to LSD, take Peyote. In

recreating this experience, Wolfe changes the typographical orientation of his language.

Wolfe writes that when taking Peyote, one "soars" (42):

      Miles

              Miles

                    Miles

                         Miles

                              Miles

                                    Miles

                                        Miles

                                            under all that good vegetation

from Morris Orchids and having visions of

      Faces

           Faces

                Faces

                    Faces

                        Faces

                            Faces

                                Faces (42).

Following this series of repeated words diagonally across the page takes one out of a

familiar reading experience, especially as the visual is invited into the textual here.

(1980).

Where Joan Didion employed the white space of the page to imbricate language and the visual, Wolfe engages the eye by altering the arrangement of his text on the page. This clearly violates the conventions of traditional news where style is minimized to maintain the appearance of objectivity. If previous reporting on the drug culture in California separated readers from the subject of these reports as a result of stylistic convention, then Wolfe's work brings them together through the abandonment of convention. John Hartsock argues that the New Journalists, in "rejecting the alienating gulf created by the objectification of news in the American mainstream press…[open] the way for attempting to engage in an exchange of subjectivities with the Other" (203).

Before returning to Wolfe's work in *Acid Test*, I want to briefly demonstrate how Wolfe's typographic innovations with conventional journalism manifest in another one of his works to reinforce the effort Wolfe makes to bring the presence of people he encounters to bear on his readers. In his 1965 profile of media philosopher Marshall McLuhan for the *New York Herald Tribune*, Wolfe uses experimental typography as means of trying out McLuhan's famous theory that "the medium is the message." The first lines of Wolfe's piece read as follows:

What if he's right. What...if...he....is...right

W-h-a-t-i-f-h-e-i-s-r-i-g-h-t

	W			R	
	H	IF		I	
	A	HE		G	?
	T	IS		H	

T

In playing with the orientation of language on the page, Wolfe is implicitly testing the theories of the very person about whom his language refers. Richard Kallan suggests "Wolfe utilizes typography as a symbolic argument to reflect the essence of [McLuhan's] thesis…[Wolfe] fittingly plays with his medium and experiments with linear form" (77). Wolfe's essay is not simply about McLuhan's theories; it inhabits them, bringing their presence to bear on the reader. Moreover, Wolfe's essay presents two different reactions to McLuhan's theories: the skeptics and the believers. Wolfe's repetition of the phrase "what if he is right?" throughout the essay voices an *inward* doubt that lurks in the minds of those who are outwardly skeptical of McLuhan's theories, particularly the businessmen at GE for whom McLuhan consulted. The phrase occasionally interrupts the proceedings of a normal sentence:

> McLuhan sits in the upper room at the firehouse at a round table with six or eight people, Gossage, Feigen, Mike Robbins of Young & Rubicam, the advertising agency, Herbert Gold, the novelist, Edward Keating, editor of Ramp*arts* magazine, not disciples-But what if he is right-and somebody asks McLuhan what he thinks of the big communications conference going on in San Francisco at that very moment, at the Hilton Hotel, a thousand people, headed by the great semanticist, S. I. Hayakawa

One dutifully follows the flow of Wolfe's writing here, learning that the men at the table are not "disciples" of McLuhan. Then there is the intrusion of doubt. The skepticism expressed through the phrase "But what if he is right?" compels our attention as it disrupts our normal reading process. This arrangement makes readers *feel* both the skepticism and the belief of those who engage with McLuhan. The alteration of familiar reading patterns through repetition and unusual typography makes the content of these experimentations lurk in the reader's mind. Thus over the course of the essay, the

207

question "What if he is right?" comes to not only apply to McLuhan but also to Wolfe. What if *this* is how journalism brings presence to bear on its readers? What if *Wolfe* is right?

<p align="center">Wolfe's Return: Empathizing with the Other</p>

Wolfe's innovations with journalistic form manifest in a number of ways. Wolfe shifts the points of view from which his stories are reported, employs the language of those about whom he writes, and experiments with punctuation and typography. His style is one that accommodates difference and demonstrates a flexibile subjectivity capable of engaging difference. Importantly, though, Wolfe does not fully relinquish his subjecthood. I noted earlier that Lyotard's theory of a postmodern subject does not eliminate subjectivity entirely but reformulates it. The postmodern subject is no longer the axis around which knowledge is legitimated but the recipient of a commandment, an obligation, to listen and respond to marginalized voices. Avant-garde artists enact this commandment by displaying in their work a "sensitivity to that which remains unspoken" (Ross 34). This sensitivity is expressed through a rigorous examination of conventions that govern artistic endeavors, conventions to which representational art adheres. This adherence works only to enact "the logic of realized forms" (Ross 34). That is, it only makes visible what is possible according to its own rules. In so doing, this work perpetuates the subject through whom grand narratives are legitimated: a coherent, centralized, and authoritative one. The importance of the avant-garde experimentation of Barnett Newman is that it interrupts the logic of realized forms and subsequently

displaces the subject positioned as master of these forms. The zips in Newman's work, which cut across his canvas and seemingly emanate from both above and below, reflect Newman's refusal to listen to the voice of convention. The zips are Newman's willingness to listen to the unheard possibilities concealed by realized forms, and this requires of Newman a flexible sense of self.

Similarly, Tom Wolfe's experimentations with journalism do not lead to the wholesale abandonment of subjectivity. Instead, they enact a version of the subject capable of countenancing competing ideologies. This is markedly different from the implicit subject of conventional journalism who, through an adherence to objectivity and traditional stylistic values, often presents only those perspectives that can be articulated through convention. I noted earlier that this type of journalism was often employed in the coverage of the drug culture in California. Consequently, news was focused on the pathology of drug use and led to condemnation. Wolfe, however, manages to evoke a more complex response. This results directly from Wolfe's willingness to make journalistic accommodations for those voices elided through tradition. Though the beginning of *Acid Test* features Wolfe's unarming by the Pranksters and the subsequent dissolution of his first-person perspective, the end of *Acid Test* features Wolfe's return. In the final chapter, entitled "Graduation," Wolfe returns to the first person. However, the "I" that returns at the end of *Acid Test* is not the same as the "I" of the "slick, East coast journalist" that started the narrative. Wolfe is changed at the end of *Acid Test*, displaying a capacity for empathy unavailable to him at the beginning of his time with Kesey and the Pranksters. In "Graduation," Wolfe writes, "All the good-loving heads...They would just

spread out like a wave over the world and end all the bullshit, drown it in love and awareness, and nothing could stop them. I'll have to hand it to the heads. They really want to end the little games. Their hearts are pure. I never found more than one two cynics or hustlers among them" (338). Not only does Wolfe here recognize the purity of the Prankster's efforts, but he continues to employ the idioms of the Pranksters to do so. Some of the phrasing above, "heads," "end all the bullshit," does not originate with Wolfe. The continued use of Prankster language reinforces the effort Wolfe has been undertaking throughout all of *Acid Test*: that readers will come to share the perspective of Kesey and the Prankster's. In sharing their perspective, readers may become more familiar, more open to experiences otherwise alien to them. This means readers might "come to sympathize with the points of view…[they] inhabit" (Anderson 43), and Wolfe maintains a shared point of view with the Pranksters even when he returns to a first person narration.

However, Wolfe's shared understanding of the Prankster perspective does not mean he fully endorses their project or that he has come to relinquish his own perspective entirely. Instead, Wolfe's journalistic experimentations lead to the possibility of both perspectives being countenanced. For all the virtues of Kesey and the Prankster's experimentations with drugs, Wolfe is keenly aware of their failings. Marc Weingarten notes that as the story of Kesey and the Pranksters unfolded, Wolfe was exposed to "a dark side to the Prankster experience for those who weren't as psychologically strong as Kesey and who looked to LSD as a palliative that might make them whole again" (109). The end of *Acid Test* pictures Kesey and the Pranksters in a jam session where everyone

210

wears headsets, plays instruments and sings simultaneously. However, because some of the headsets are wired directly into the instruments, only the Pranksters can hear the full sound of their music: "They harmonize off themselves, break up learned progressions, and only they can hear the full...orchestration, a symphony in their cortices, the music of the Prankster" (365). Though their hearts may be pure and their goals for enlightenment noble, Wolfe hints at the end of *Acid Test* that the failure of the Pranksters' project, a failure they cannot perceive, has to do with the deeply internal nature of their language. The phrase "Only Pranksters can hear" is repeated again in the final pages of the book, underscoring the gulf between Kesey and the Pranksters and the world with which they wish to communicate. The Pranksters are, in the scene above, literally hardwired to hear only themselves, sabotaging their own efforts towards universal enlightenment. In the same way that the Pranksters saw things about Wolfe he was unable to see himself at the beginning of *Acid Test*, Wolfe can see why the Pranksters' project fails in ways that are not always apparent to them. This enacts the *exchange* of subjectivities that, I argued earlier, stemmed directly from his innovations with journalistic form. That is, Wolfe is not just seen and unarmed by the Pranksters, as in the beginning of the book. Instead, by the end of his time with them, he is able to see them and their shortcomings.

The final words of the *Acid Test* seem to confirm this reading. The jam session held by the Pranksters becomes so disconnected from those around them that even the Pranksters abandon it. Only two people remain in the session: Kesey and a Prankster named Babbs. Kesey and Babbs begin trading verses back and forth and eventually a final, resounding chorus develops:

I took some pseulobin and one long diddle

WE BLEW IT

...ten thousand times or more…

WE BLEW IT

...so much we can't keep score

WE BLEW IT

The words "WE BLEW IT" end *Acid Test*, and they speak not only to the failure of

Kesey and the Prankster's project of enlightenment but also to the individual suffering of

those who became dependent on drugs. This is reinforced in the Epilogue where Wolfe

tells readers of the fate of one of the Pranksters in the terse, factual prose that underscores

its sobering effect:

> In February, Neal Cassady's body was found beside a railroad track outside the town of San Miguel de Allende, in Mexico. Some local Americans said he had been going at top speed for two weeks and had headed off down the railroad track one night and his heart just gave out. Others said he had been despondent, and felt that he was growing old, and had been on a long downer and had made the mistake of drinking alcohol on top of barbiturates. His body was cremated (370).

There is a profound sadness in this image with which readers must reckon. For all the joy

and purity of their drug tests, Kesey and the Pranksters also suffered and caused others to

suffer. This is not lost on Wolfe, and when he returns to his first person narration in the

final chapter of the book, he does so to inspire both empathy and caution. John Hollowell

argues that "Finally, Wolfe's attitude towards the Pranksters shows great sympathy for an

experiment that failed...the book's closing chapter conveys a sense of loss and

exhaustion, as well as what was good about the group at its best" (143). Wolfe's capacity

to see two things simultaneously comes from his willingness to make accommodations

for others. These accommodations present themselves to readers in the form of an

experimental journalism that rejects the necessity of a singular, coherent perspective. Yet

this journalism does not reject subjecthood entirely nor does it fully succumb to the

otherness it encounters. Wolfe does not, in other words, merely indulge the irrationalism

often associated with drug use. Robert Scholes importantly points out that the journalistic

innovations of Tom Wolfe, and the New Journalism more generally, do not collapse into

the chaos of the moment they chronicle. He writes of their stylistic innovations:

> [they are] the indispensable equipment they must employ in doing justice to our times. This is not to say that one must himself be hysterical to chronicle hysteria, but to suggest that hysteria cannot be assimilated and conveyed by one who is totally aloof. [New Journalists] are not hysterical but they manage to remain more open to the contemporary scene than most reporters...They are more involved in what they report than a journalist would be, and they bring to their reporting a more efficient intellectual apparatus, a richer framework of ideas and attitudes (37).

In *Acid Test* in particular, Wolfe actively accommodates the voices of others without

fully relinquishing his own. His stylistic innovations support a mutable subjectivity, one

capable of adapting and countenancing difference without dissolving entirely. In this

way, Wolfe enacts the de-centralised subject of postmodernism who is freed from its

former role within grand narratives as the axis around which particular narratives are

authorized and legitimated. What this encourages and develops is a subject capable of

both countenancing *and* critiquing alterity.

CODA

Tom Wolfe was not only a leading practitioner of the New Journalism movement, but also its de facto spokesman. He outlined its principles and collected its exemplary works in his 1973 anthology *The New Journalism*. Yet, only a decade later, the New Journalism had faded in popularity and critics would wonder where it had gone. Despite its flourishing in the U.S. during the 1960s and 70s, by the early 1980s its flame had died out. Robert Boynton writes:

> Has ever a literary movement's demise been more frequently hailed than New Journalism's? "Whatever happened to the New Journalism?" wondered Thomas Powers in a 1975 issue of *Commonweal*. In 1981, Joe Nocera published a post mortem in the *Washington Monthly* blaming its demise on the journalistic liberties taken by Hunter S. Thompson. Regardless of the culprit, less than a decade after Tom Wolfe's 1973 New Journalism anthology, the consensus was that New Journalism was dead (par. 1).

Several factors contributed to the decline of the New Journalism, and a brief overview of these factors will shed some light on its fate. Though there is not a final or single culprit to blame, one of the more significant reasons for the disappearance of the New Journalism involved a series of high-profile journalistic fabrications.

In 1981, for instance, Janet Cooke, a reporter for the *Washington Post*, was stripped of her Pulitzer Prize for a piece she wrote that featured a child heroin addict. The child, as it turned out, was not real a person. Rather, he was a composite figure, something Cooke failed to mention in the piece or to her editors. Cooke not only lost her job, but also "the Pulitzer board withdrew a prize for unethical behavior for the first time in its history" (Borden 157). This is important to note because Cooke's unethical behavior was linked by some to the liberties with reporting taken by New Journalists.

David Shaw, writing for the *Los Angeles Times* about the Cooke case, argues the

following:

> I recognize some of the forces that have turned a few journalists into liars.
> Ambition. Competition. Fear. Laziness. The lure of fame and fortune. But I think
> it all began, in a sense, in the 1960s and early '70s, with the advent of what
> quickly came to be called 'new journalism'...[I]n the hands of less experienced,
> less principled writers, new journalism simply provided temptation and license.
> After all, it's easier to invent a quote that makes the point you want to make —
> and makes it colorfully, even provocatively — than it is to find the five or 10
> people who know something about your subject, go interview them individually
> and hope that at least one will give you a usable (never mind colorful or
> provocative) quote. And it's certainly easier to create a colorful character — or,
> better (?) — a composite character who embodies all the traits necessary to make
> your story come alive than it is to talk to several sources, all of whom may turn
> out to be boring talking heads (par. 2).

For Shaw, the motivation behind the New Journalism's innovative approach to reporting

was to make journalism "more compelling" (par. 3). As such, there was a significant

temptation for reporters to invent material in order to enliven their work. This temptation

would be responsible not only for Janet Cooke's downfall, but also, according to Shaw,

other journalists including "Mike Barnicle, Patricia Smith, Stephen Glass, Jayson Blair"

who have more recently been caught playing "fast and loose with the truth" (par. 1). That

the methods of the New Journalists led to outright fabrications is one of the reasons

critics say it lost its appeal. Particularly for editors and fact-checkers, it was easier to

have reporters stick to more formulaic methods for reporting the news than to deal with

the difficulties of corroborating information that was both gathered and presented in

unconventional ways.[63]

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[63] Norman Sims notes that some techniques employed by New Journalists present
difficulties with regard to fact-checking: "You cannot verify characterization. You
frequently cannot verify dialogue. So forms of literary journalism that depend on those

If not for its potential to inspire fabrications, then perhaps the New Journalism was killed by the financial concerns of magazine publishers and editors. Marc Weingarten argues that "It just got ugly in the 1970s for the New Journalism, a process that was hastened by the decline of general interest magazines...Television...siphoned away readers and ad dollars, turned celebrity culture into a growth industry and ensured the end of the big tent magazines such as *Life*, the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's*" (292). The long, complex works produced by the New Journalists were exchanged for shorter pieces that dealt more explicitly with celebrity and popular culture: "Stories shrank, and so did ideas. Puff pieces were no longer discouraged by scrupulous editors; they were career builders for magazine writers now, and big draws for advertisers" (Weingarten 292). This was not only because the appeal of "puff pieces" was greater than what was written by New Journalists, but also because the methods and techniques employed by New Journalists required more money than editors were willing to pay. The works produced by New Journalists took time, often written over the course of weeks or months. This was due in part to the use of saturation reporting—a practice that involved reporters spending extended periods of time with their subjects in order to acquire the fullest picture possible of their lives. Roger Rappaport suggests that "The biggest problem in New Journalism is that it's a very expensive form of writing. It requires a lot of research and travel and there aren't many publications who can afford to pay writers what it costs to get those stories" (qtd. in English 138). In other words, the New Journalism was not an economically viable form of reporting, and it took only two

kinds of storytelling present more of an unknown factor" (qtd. in Harvey, 40).

216

decades of its practice for this to become apparent. Robert Boynton has noted that "the journalistic form with which writers like Wolfe chronicled postwar consumerism eventually succumbed to it" (par. 8). What diminished the visibility and viability of the New Journalism was a combination of factors. The freedoms with conventional reporting led some to see the New Journalism as a slippery slope, one that ultimately led journalists to invent their material. Additionally, the cost of producing New Journalism texts no longer matched the interest in them, and magazines looked for shorter, more fashionable works of reporting to fill their pages and attract advertisers.

While the New Journalism certainly faded by the 1980s, it did not disappear entirely. In the introduction, I noted that in 1984, with Norman Sims' publication of *The Literary Journalists*, the term "literary journalism" replaced the term "New Journalism." Despite the new name, many of the works collected by Sims shared characteristics with the New Journalism.[64] The difference between them, though, is that there was less zeal for the form and less critical debate surrounding its works: "Once a rear-guard rebellion, its [the New Journalism's] tenets are so accepted now that they've become virtually invisible. The art of narrative storytelling is alive and well; it's just more diffuse now, spread out across books, magazines, newspapers, and the Web" (Weingarten 293). What was once a form of journalism that caused significant controversy became more accepted, more tamed. Though the influence of the New Journalism is still visible, the extent of its

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[64] Chris Harvey points to some stylistic overlaps between the New Journalism and more contemporary practitioners of the form: "their stories are marked by the same characteristics that distinguished Wolfe's work at *Esquire* and the *New York Herald Tribune:* They're written in narrative form, with a heavy emphasis on dialogue, scene setting and slice-of-life details" (40).

experimentations with language, perspective, typography, etc. has been greatly tempered in the practices of more contemporary literary journalists.

Yet just in the past few months, discussions about the need for more visibly innovative journalistic practices have emerged. This is due largely to our current political climate. Lee Siegel, writing for the *Columbia Journalism Review* in December 2016, argues, "If ever there was a time for the speculations, generalizations, and associative leaps of literary journalism, it is now, in this unimaginable moment that has become our everyday reality" (par. 1). Siegel is referring not only to Donald Trump's election as president, but also Trump's constant assault on the news media. Siegel goes on to note the following:

> Unlike other citizens, journalists use two languages when writing or talking about public events. The first is the language of their profession, expressed within still firmly fixed parameters of judgment, taste, and discretion. The second is the language they use in private, filled with everything they know, think, intuit, and feel that they cannot express within the boundaries of their professional discourse. Trump is now bursting the parameters of both the journalist's private and public language (par. 16).

What foregrounded much of the work produced by New Journalists was the exact tension Siegel articulates above: that between what can be expressed within the confines of journalistic convention and that which exists in surfeit of such conventions. The parameters of journalism are being seriously tested by the current White House administration, and it looks to be the case that conventional reporting will no longer suffice in response to such tests. The challenge, as Siegel notes, is "to discover new ways to balance or perhaps integrate journalists' two linguistic worlds" (par. 17). Perhaps, though, this is less a discovery yet to be made than one in need of recovery. In returning to the "rear-guard rebellion" of the New Journalism, and re-examining its work within a

new critical framework, a warrant for the reemergence of experimental journalistic practices can be found.

I have argued over the course of this dissertation that the experimentations with journalistic form undertaken by the New Journalists are an integral part of a longer history of avant-garde experimentation. However, the stakes of my argument are not in giving the New Journalism a status among other works of high art, though this is certainly implied throughout my dissertation. Instead, the stakes of my argument rest with the connections drawn between the particularities of avant-garde experimentation in painting and literature and the way these are enacted through a journalistic medium. Jean-Francois Lyotard's theory of the avant-garde gives artistic experimentation ethical and philosophical dimensions that make urgent the labor of the artist. It is avant-garde artistic experimentation that can upend rigid modes of thinking that work to conceal and cement injustices. It is to these aspects of the avant-garde tradition that the innovations with conventional journalism under discussion here belong. Moreover, it is the relationship of the New Journalism to the avant-garde that clarifies the need, especially today, for a speculative journalism. This is because what unites the seemingly disparate fields of avant-garde art and innovative journalism is an investment in reflective thinking that stems from a rigorous examination of not only their respective traditions and professions, but also what has been excluded from them. Their works, in other words, do not privilege a singular mode of expression or perspective that would serve to communicate a fixed message. Instead, they bring together multiple, often conflicting forms of expression to undermine determinacy and resist critical closure.

In his essay, Siegel suggests that "Literary journalism...does not have to worry about the propriety or ethics of balancing public and private journalistic expression. Its very essence is the fusion of thoughts, feelings, and intuitions that would be unassimilable in a more bounded journalistic context. Plunging into Trump's psyche is, in the context of literary journalism, as appropriate as supporting your conclusions with facts and evidence in a reported piece." (par. 18). What Siegel gestures towards here is an idea made explicit in this dissertation: that speculative journalism can offer insights otherwise inaccessible through the "bounded" conventions of reporting. The urgency of these insights is as critical now as it was during the cultural and political upheaval of the 1960s and 70s that facilitated the New Journalism's emergence.

Importantly, there are issues that, primarily due to space and time, my dissertation has not addressed. My project has focused on the experimental journalism of Truman Capote, Joan Didion, Norman Mailer, and Tom Wolfe. While these four writers represent the more familiar faces of the New Journalism, future versions of this project could extend the range and diversity of authors examined. Since reporters who themselves experience marginalization have more to navigate and negotiate in their works, and more institutional boundaries to confront, a serious consideration of these issues could make my discussion of how reporters undermine conventional modes of representation more nuanced and complex. Additionally, my project only partially touches on the differences between newspaper and magazine reporting. Though Tom Wolfe claimed the origins of the New Journalism could be found in the feature-writing from *The New York Herald Tribune*, most New Journalism was housed in magazines. Furthermore, much of what

first appeared in magazines would go on to be published in book form—including Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Tests* and Mailer's *Armies of the Night*. It would be interesting to examine more thoroughly the boundaries and benefits of each of these institutional spaces, and in so doing perhaps fine-tune the appeal each offered to New Journalists. Finally, though Lyotard has provided a solid foundation for my discussion of avant-garde art, an engagement with alternative or complementary theories of the avant-garde would add depth to my coverage of art in this dissertation. Moreover, though this dissertation has focused primarily on the visual arts, a sustained discussion of the relationship between the history of the New Journalism and the history of the novel would create a more cohesive narrative of the New Journalism's place in literary history. My choice to focus on the visual arts was one designed to expand the scholarly and institutional boundaries of literary journalism, but there is room here for an explicit comparison of literary devices and their presence and function in journalism.

My hope is that future versions of this project continue to deepen the connections between journalism and the arts, and in so doing, continue to advance an argument for the value and importance of speculative reporting. What the writers under discussion here offer is not just journalism informed by an artistic impulse, but journalism informed by a moral imperative to countenance the unknown, the marginalized, that motivates the artistry and experimentation in their reporting. In emphasizing this aspect of their work, I ultimately want to reinvigorate discussions about the role and responsibility of the reporter both within and outside his profession.

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222

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