

PROPOSAL FOR MEDILL SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM SERIES: VISIONS OF THE AMERICAN PRESS

I. Title: The New Journalism: The Unexpected Triumph of the Long-Form Narrative

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III. General Description of the Work

The New Journalism was born in controversy. Tom Wolfe's first manifesto on its behalf was written in retrospect in 1970, after almost a decade of work by talented nonfiction writers such as Joan Didion, Norman Mailer, Hunter Thompson, and Michael Herr. The original inspiration for Wolfe's defense may have been an insult by the writer Dwight MacDonal. Reviewing Wolfe's 1965 book *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, MacDonal labeled the new style "parajournalism"—an unreliable bastard form, full of cheap trickery, the product of a veritable writing machine. A year later Renata Adler skewered Wolfe for his savagely irreverent satire of the *New Yorker*, which spoke of the "tiny mummies" who haunted the magazine's hallowed corridors. A decade later, cloaking himself in the authority of the past, John Hersey would condemn any contemporary journalist who blurred the line dividing fact and fiction. Hersey (who himself had used composite characters in his World War II reporting) declared that the legend on the journalist's license simply read, "None of this was made up."

Newspaper reporters and editors, for their part, often complained that the New Journalism violated long-held principles. They expressed outrage over its apparent indifference to the profession's canons of objectivity. Even worse, Wolfe—ever the lightning rod for such

controversies—proposed to reverse the moral polarities of the craft. What newspaper journalists revered—the serious work of political reporting—Wolfe mocked as dull, self-important, and out of touch with the times. What newspaper journalists had neglected and trivialized—the feature story—Wolfe glorified as the highest form of reporting.

Even now, decades later, editorialists continue to reference the New Journalism as a parable about what becomes of reporters who abandon their faith in objectivity. For example, some commentators on the Jayson Blair controversy at the *New York Times* have cited the New Journalism as a familiar example of journalists losing their bearings. Nor have friends of the form done it a great service. Academic critics have often collapsed the work of writers like Wolfe, Didion, and Mailer into a more polite tale about the grand tradition of literary journalism. What such accounts miss is the historical specificity of the New Journalism experiment—how social trends, market forces, and writerly ambitions converged in the 1960s, and how the New Journalism emerged from that moment as a sensibility that would, over three decades, subtly fold itself into Americans' discourse about journalism, politics, business, and culture.

I want to tell this story about the legacy of the New Journalism. I will argue that we should understand the New Journalism as something more than the literary inventions of gifted individual writers, and more than an idiosyncratic chapter in the larger history of literary journalism. The New Journalism emerged during the 1960s and 1970s as a cultural practice enabled and constrained by social trends, market forces, changes in publishing venues, and debates over professional values. Though I will pay close attention to writers' narrative strategies, I am particularly interested in how the changing market for magazine and book-length nonfiction created a home for New Journalism, and how the social turmoil of that era made its narratives intellectually plausible and emotionally compelling, for both writers and readers. Journalistic style came to signify a larger politics of revolution.

My opening chapters show how a wide range of groups came to consider the New Journalism a site of symbolic conflict, a place where they might usefully gather to debate the meaning of their historical moment, and the role that journalists ought to play as professional interpreters of that moment. The middle chapters trace the effects of the New Journalism through the 1980s and 1990s, showing how it subtly influenced Americans' practices of social commentary, business reporting, journalism criticism, and ethnography. The final chapters describe the ways in which the New Journalism has been remembered and memorialized in the work of literary theorists, journalists, media historians, and social critics. My conclusion refuses the now obvious genealogy, which positions the New Journalism as a stylistic invention within a longer tradition of literary journalism, in order to reclaim a denser, more historically particular interpretation of the movement. I want to reinterpret the 1960s and 1970s as a crucial moment in the larger history of the journalism profession, and a tipping point in the discourse of the society it chronicled.

An important theme of my book is that the literary accomplishments of talented writers often grow out of specific social, political, and economic circumstances. By carefully attending to such contexts, we come to appreciate the role that contingency plays in bringing works of great artistry into existence. For example, *Esquire*'s sponsorship of provocative nonfiction

was inspired by unforeseen necessity (heavy competition from *Playboy*), individual genius (the deft editorial hand of Harold Hayes), wider social changes (the emergence of an educated, leisured mass audience), and political unrest (a profusion of social controversies on which to report). *Esquire*'s sponsorship of long magazine articles, in turn, helped New Journalists like Wolfe, Mailer, Herr, John Sack, and Gay Talese win contracts for nonfiction books, changing the career paths that journalists might imagine for themselves.

Archival records play a crucial role in my study. Only Carol Polsgrove's book on *Esquire* in the 1960s has made significant use of these materials thus far. The *Esquire* records, for example, demonstrate that Arnold Gingrich, the publisher, and Harold Hayes, the editor, worked closely with the advertising and sales staff, coordinating issue themes, covers, public speeches, and editorial decisions. The files document the magazine's practices of paying authors and of soliciting and killing, fact-checking, and editing manuscripts. Letters to the editor document reader responses to the New Journalism, including those of a surprisingly large number of women readers. The Gingrich collection includes dozens of speeches given to advertising clubs and universities. I also plan to use the Harold Hayes collection at Wake Forest University; the contemporary writers' collection at Boston University, which includes the papers of George Goodman, John Sack, David Halberstam, and others; the *New Yorker* collection at the New York Public Library; and journalism school archives at the University of Missouri and the University of Illinois.

IV. Work's Central Argument

A. 25-Word Version:

The New Journalism represents more than a series of individual literary inventions. It symbolized dramatic changes in readers' mores, authors' career paths, and magazine and book markets.

B. 250-Word Version:

Most commentators use the term *New Journalism* to refer to the long-form magazine narratives being created in the 1960s by writers such as Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, Joan Didion, Michael Herr, and Hunter Thompson. More recently, critics have treated the New Journalism as an early version of what they now call *literary journalism* or *creative nonfiction*. Their approach to the New Journalism typically emphasizes the literary inventiveness of the form's individual practitioners.

I propose a more deeply social account of the origins and meaning of the New Journalism. My account will attend closely to changes in the education and sensibilities of middle-class readers, magazines' efforts to market the social tumult of the 1960s, crises in newspaper journalists' conception of their profession, the emergence of friendly venues in *New York*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Esquire*, widening opportunities in the nonfiction book market, the alternative career paths being opened to journalists, and the reformist ambitions of journalism

school graduates. These were the social conditions that made the narrative inventions of the New Journalism plausible and marketable.

I also want to assess the legacy of the New Journalism. My book will trace the New Journalism's influence not just on our narrative forms, but also on our practices of business journalism, social criticism, ethnography, and media criticism. I conclude that the New Journalism signified a new moment in the history of American journalism, and that it continues to shape the forms of public discourse that journalists have committed themselves to guard.

V. Table of Contents

My book will contain nine chapters. The early chapters focus on how the New Journalism was understood in its own era; the middle chapters explore the ways in which New Journalism sensibilities inflected American social commentary, business reporting, media criticism, and ethnography in the 1980s and 1990s. The final chapters consider the ways in which the New Journalism continues to be remembered and memorialized, and its impact on the practice of journalism in the United States.

The New Journalism as Discourse

Chapter 1. The New Journalism as a Sign of the Times

Analyzes the reasons why the New Journalism came to be identified, disputed, and defended as a new form of writing and an icon of social change. Uses popular press and alternative press coverage, writings of and interviews with practitioners, and early scholarly discussions of New Journalism as a literary form. Theme: even when the discourse about the New Journalism focused on writers' intentions and narrative strategies, it also acknowledged its significance as a sign of cultural and political change.

Chapter 2. The Changing Magazine Marketplace of the 1950s and 1960s

Describes how attempts to adapt magazines to a more affluent, better educated middle-class audience created a market for long-form journalism, and opened new possibilities for publishing nonfiction books. Draws upon readings of new magazines like *Rolling Stone* and *New York*, and archival records of *Esquire* and the *New Yorker*. Theme: changes in the economics of publishing made the New Journalism possible and opened a range of plausible career paths for young nonfiction writers.

Chapter 3. The New Journalism, and the Old

Analyzes debates within the journalism profession over the objectivity and personalism of the New Journalism. Draws upon trade magazines such as the *Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, *Editor and Publisher*, *Quill*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, and *[More]*, and upon reviews of New Journalism works in alternative papers and letters and records of journalism schools and educators. Theme: the debate over the New Journalism called attention to an emerging identity crisis in the profession of journalism.

The New Journalism as Practice

Chapter 4. The Journalist as Cultural Critic

Describes how the New Journalism enlivened the style and tone of American cultural criticism and social commentary in the 1980s and 1990s. Uses the popular and political press, the work of Tom Wolfe and his imitators, and the critical discourse on Wolfe. Theme: the New Journalism created new styles of both conservative and liberal criticism.

Chapter 5. The Journalist as Entrepreneur

Shows how the New Journalism challenged staid, older approaches to business journalism, inventing new styles of reporting on business. Examines the explosion of business reporting in the 1970s and 1980s and identifies the career of “Adam Smith” (George Goodman) as an exemplar of that change. Theme: the New Journalism encouraged new ways of writing about business, not only in popular magazines but also in trade publications, nonfiction books, and television programs.

Chapter 6. The Journalist as Anti-Hero

Documents the iconic role played by the New Journalism in ongoing debates about journalists’ professional identity. Draws upon publications such as the *Columbia Journalism Review* and *American Journalism Review*, discussions of journalism education, and popular debates about journalism. Discusses Hunter Thompson as a symbolic figure in such debates. Theme: journalists continued to criticize the failures of the New Journalism even as they were accepting the critiques of writers like Thompson, Mailer, Herr, and Didion.

Chapter 7. The Journalist as Ethnographer

Documents the cultural turn in reporting, and its relation to ethnographic approaches in sociology and anthropology. Uses scholarly discussions of ethnography and cultural studies, and documents the turn to immersion reporting by writers such as Jane Kramer, Ted Conover, Tom French, Tracy Kidder, and others. Theme: recent reporters have formalized the reportorial innovations with which the New Journalists had experimented.

The New Journalism as Memory

Chapter 8. The Invention of Literary Journalism and Creative Nonfiction

Discusses recent attempts to position the New Journalism as an example of a larger genre called literary journalism or creative nonfiction. Uses collections of literary journalism and books and articles by academic critics and proponents of the new forms. Theme: critics’ efforts to frame the New Journalism as literary journalism selectively remembers the New Journalism and neglects the social and economic conditions that gave it life.

Conclusion

Chapter 9. Whatever Became of the New Journalism?

Theme: rather than file away the New Journalism as another failed experiment of the 1960s, or a curious chapter in the history of literary journalism, we should recognize the mark it has left on Americans’ discourse about the media, culture, politics, and business. The New

Journalism also offers a cautionary tale about what Harold Bloom has called the anxiety of influence in literature. The 1960s brought to the fore journalists who remain among the most popular, visible, and successful nonfiction writers in the United States—so much so that younger writers and reviewers now sometimes complain that the old radicals have become the new establishment of nonfiction.

VI. Existing Books on the Subject

There is no shortage of works devoted to praising the literary charms of the New Journalism. During its own time, several books about the new work appeared: Harold Hayes' collection of *Esquire* pieces, *Smiling Through the Apocalypse: Esquire's History of the Sixties* (McCall Publishing, 1969); Michael Johnson, *The New Journalism* (University of Kansas Press, 1971); Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson's canonical anthology *The New Journalism* (Harper and Row, 1973); Charles C. Flippen, *Liberating the Media: The New Journalism* (Acropolis Books, 1974); Everette Dennis and William Rivers, *Other Voices: The New Journalism in America* (Canfield Press, 1974); and Marshall Fishwick, *New Journalism* (Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975).

Ronald Weber (Ed.), *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy* (Hastings House, 1974), remains the best collection of contemporary pieces about the early controversy. Some of the essays in Norman Sims (Ed.), *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1990) also deal with the New Journalism. One can find biographical and critical profiles of a number of New Journalists in Thomas Connery (Ed.), *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (Greenwood Press, 1992) and Arthur Kaul (Ed.), *American Literary Journalists, 1945-1995* (Gale Research, 1997).

The New Journalism has inspired a long string of literary critical works. The first books tended to focus on the fact/fiction distinction and on claims by writers such as Truman Capote and Norman Mailer to have developed new genre, the "nonfiction novel." The early works typically tried to articulate the relation between fact and fiction (usually by showing the fictiveness of even factual narratives), and to situate the New Journalism in longer traditions of literary craft. The early generation of such studies included Masud Zavarzadeh, *The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel* (University of Illinois Press, 1976); John Hollowell, *Fact and Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel* (University of North Carolina Press, 1977); Ronald Weber, *The Literature of Fact: Literary Nonfiction in American Writing* (Ohio University Press, 1980); John Hellmann, *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as New Fiction* (University of Illinois Press, 1981); and Barbara Foley, *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* (Cornell University Press, 1986). By the late 1980s, literary critics still discussed the fictiveness of factual narratives, but they began to position the New Journalism in other ways as well—as a form of creative nonfiction that shares important connections with other examples of the genre, such as autobiography, the personal essay, travel writing, and nature writing. This later generation of studies includes: Chris Anderson, *Style as Argument: Contemporary American Nonfiction* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), and Anderson (Ed.), *Literary*

Nonfiction: Theory, Criticism, Pedagogy (Southern Illinois University Press, 1989); Barbara Lounsberry, *The Art of Fact: Contemporary Artists of Nonfiction* (Greenwood, 1990); W. Ross Winterrowd, *The Rhetoric of the "Other" Literature* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1990); Phyllis Frus, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative: The Timely and the Timeless* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); Daniel Lehman, *Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction over the Edge* (Ohio State University Press, 1997); and John Russell, *Reciprocities in the Nonfiction Novel* (University of Georgia Press, 2000).

Scholars from journalism and media studies backgrounds have continued to work in and around these issues. The first collections such as Norman Sims (Ed.), *The Literary Journalists* (Ballantine, 1984), and Sims and Mark Kramer (Eds.), *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction* (Ballantine, 1995), situated the New Journalists within a longer tradition of literary journalism that also paid prominent attention to *New Yorker* writers like Joe Mitchell and John McPhee. John Hartsock's *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2000) has extended this line of analysis. Recent anthologies have followed these same principles of collection. They include Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda (Eds.), *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (Scribner, 1997); R. Thomas Berner (Ed.), *The Literature of Journalism: Text and Context* (Strata, 1999); and Jean Chance and William McKeen (Eds.), *Literary Journalism: A Reader* (Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 2001).

I have found much to admire in Carol Polsgrove's *It Wasn't Pretty, Folks, But Didn't We Have Fun: Esquire in the Sixties* (Norton, 1995). Polsgrove was the first to demonstrate the value of using primary sources about the magazine's internal operations. But she focuses only on *Esquire*, and then predominantly on editor-writer relations and the role of Harold Hayes. Polsgrove's account adds depth to more popular histories of magazines that published the New Journalism, such as Robert Sam Anson, *Gone Crazy and Back Again: The Rise and Fall of the Rolling Stone Generation* (Doubleday, 1981), and Robert Draper, *Rolling Stone Magazine: The Uncensored History* (Doubleday, 1990). Here and there one finds acute reflections on the New Journalism in autobiographical works by practitioners, such as Garry Wills, *Lead Time: A Journalist's Education* (Doubleday, 1983), Willie Morris, *New York Days* (Little, Brown, 1993), Arnold Gingrich, *Nothing But People: The Early Days at Esquire, a Personal History 1928-1958* (Crown, 1971), and John Sack, *Fingerprint: The Autobiography of an American Man* (Random House, 1982). A year ago *Publishers Weekly* noted that Crown had contracted with the music writer Marc Weingarten for a collection of interviews with New Journalists like Wolfe, Thompson, and Talese, to be published in 2004 under the title *The Gang Who Couldn't Write Straight*.

Two other works deserve mention, as social histories that demonstrate how the American middle-class of the 1950s and 1960s used consumer culture to remake its sensibilities and sense of itself. Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (University of Chicago Press, 1997) documents the rise of hip approaches in consumer advertising, and David Abrahamson, *Magazine-Made America: The Cultural Transformation of the Postwar Periodical* (Hampton Press, 1996) describes the emergence of new consumer magazines, at a time when old mass magazines like *Life*,

Collier's, and *Saturday Evening Post* were dying. In a sense, publications like *Esquire* sought to recapture a broad, middle-class audience that now thought of itself as educated, hip, and politically aware.

VII. Thoughts on Target Audiences

I imagine my book being used in classes such on journalism history, literary journalism, or mass communication and society; in American studies or history courses that deal with the 1960s and its legacy; and possibly in English classes on literary journalism and creative nonfiction. I also think that this sort of book might find a readership among journalists and generally educated readers with an interest in American culture, as well as among journalism educators.

Below is a partial list of universities that offer courses in the theory and practice of literary journalism. My Google search combining “literary journalism” + “syllabi” turned up dozens of entries—suggesting that there are probably other universities that also offer these courses but whose faculty have not posted the syllabi on the Web. The range of course titles suggests the popularity of the topic.

Partial List of Universities Offering Courses Entitled “Literary Journalism”

Columbia Union College
Columbia University
Fairfield University
Indiana University (also course on Ethnographic Reporting)
Northwestern University
Providence College
Saint Louis University
Towson University
University of Alabama (two courses)
University of Colorado-Boulder
University of Florida
University of Hong Kong
University of Massachusetts-Amherst
University of Minnesota
University of Nebraska-Omaha
University of North Carolina-Pembroke
University of Rochester
University of St. Thomas

Other University Courses Focusing on Literary Journalism

Creative Nonfiction Writing (National University, Pennsylvania State University)
Critical Perspectives on Journalism (University of Pennsylvania)
History and Theory of Literary Journalism (University of California at Irvine)

The Journalist as Novelist (University of Texas)
The Journalist as Storyteller (George Washington University, Southern Oregon University)
Literary Journalism Workshop (George Mason University)
Literary Nonfiction (Armstrong Atlantic State University Francis Marion University, Marian College)
Literature and Journalism (Dublin City University)
The Literature of Literary Journalism (University of Oregon, Washington State University)
Writing Creative Nonfiction (University of Richmond)
Writing Literary Journalism (Bryn Mawr College, Haverford College)

VIII. Schedule and Length

I am planning to complete a draft of the manuscript by February 2005. In spring 2004 I will be working on the manuscript during my sabbatical, and making trips to the archives at Michigan, Wake Forest, Missouri, Illinois, and either Boston or New York. I am one of my campus's two nominees for an NEH Stipend for summer 2004. The 60,000-word limit seems appropriate for the type of book I am writing. I want the argument to be rich and theoretically and historically astute, but the style to be fluid and concise.

IX. Summary Biography

John Pauly is professor of Communication at Saint Louis University, where he teaches courses on literary journalism, journalism history, popular culture, qualitative research methods, and communication theory. His research focuses on the history and sociology of the media, especially the history of debates over journalism as a cultural institution.