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Honors Thesis

The Art of Bias: the New Journalism of Thompson and Wolfe

by

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Introduction

Writing Our Bias: the 'Fake News' of American New Journalism

Tuesday, August 15th, President Donald Trump takes questions from reporters on the ground floor of his mountainous headquarters: Trump Tower. Three days before, on Saturday, August 12th, James Alex Fields Jr. accelerated his black Dodge Challenger, a weighty hunk of metal propelled by an all-American V8, through a crowd of counter-protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, killing one and injuring many. Confused and anxious, the citizens of the United States wait for Trump to make a statement. The terse statement that the forty-fifth president of the United States eventually makes—quoted below—is described by CNN's Chris Cillizza as “incredibly unpresidential”:

We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence, on many sides. On many sides. It's been going on for a long time in our country. Not Donald Trump, not Barack Obama. This has been going on for a long, long time.

Responding to what he sees as Trump's flagrant defacement of the true meaning of the events in Charlottesville, Cillizza reminds readers that “both sides don't scream racist and anti-Semitic things at people with whom they disagree” and “they don't get into fistfights with people who don't see things their way.” Whereas Trump tries to equate the violence of the white nationalists with their leftist critics, Cillizza heaps scorn on Trump's moral equivalency, injecting his own analysis into the news brief of the speech. Feeling a burning necessity to critique Trump's statement, Cillizza departs from the conventions of objective journalism to represent his subjective, moral critique of Trump's statement as an objective truth, stating with certainty that

“these people are bigots. They are hate-filled. This is not just a protest where things, unfortunately, got violent. Violence sits at the heart of their warped belief system.”

Historically, political journalists have criticized politicians who misbehave or who offend their personal sense of decency, writing articles with an ideological bent. Fearful of the onset of tyrannical, immoral government, the journalist muddies the traditional distinction between critique and objective news briefing: writing with an argumentative style that acknowledges the active subjectivity that influences the author’s pen. In *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail of 72*, for instance, Hunter S Thompson does just this, describing Richard Nixon's presidential inauguration as “the only public spectacle I’ve ever dealt with that was a king-hell bummer from start to finish” (71). Narrating the scene, Thompson does not hide his despair as he watches his “New President roll by in his black/armored hearse, surrounded by trotting phalanx of Secret Service men with their hands in the air, batting away the garbage thrown out of the crowd” (71). Like Cillizza, Thompson’s distaste for the President is apparent within the rhetorical choices of the author, but instead Thompson’s writing provides more critical punch. This literary, critical persuasiveness arises from Thompson’s use of novelistic use of figurative language, his ironic tone, and his strong narrative point of view. While Cillizza simply disagrees with the interpretations communicated in Trump’s statement, and lacks Thompson’s wit and style, the latter’s writing is unabashedly influenced by his political ideology and his psychological quirkiness, portraying Nixon as an archetypal evil, riding on a chariot of death. By developing a style of journalism that is heavy on satire, subjective impressions, and that employs novelistic narrative techniques, Thompson paradoxically achieves a more nuanced critical distance than earnest political commentators like Cillizza. In short, Thompson seems to be suggesting that an

overtly aesthetic approach to journalistic commentary has more epistemological and ethical authority than presumably “objective” journalistic critique.

In Thompson’s time and now, the media has utilized critique to question the motives, actions, and integrity of public figures who take actions seen as antithetical to their system of moral values. However, because “journalism,” to quote John Hellmann, “is necessarily an extension of all human perception and communication in its fictional (that is, shaping) quality,” journalists are desirous to escape these subjective chains, donning a mask of objectivity, elevating their criticism beyond disagreement and subjective analysis to the Socratic idea of truth (4). Hence, while modern journalism necessitates itself to be fair and unbiased, many writers often fall short of that unrealistic goal, consciously or unconsciously, contributing to growing anxiety about and distrust of the media. To contrast with the creative discourse created by the divisive split between the plainly objective and the overtly political, Thompson employs a highly impressionistic style of political critique, supplemented with intensely descriptive in-field reporting, which allows his subjective prose to bridge the divide between self and story.

In practice, the modern press has not always been as objective as it pretends to be, and—according to some media historians—it never was. Throughout American history, the press has been far from unbiased, and bias was actually an essential feature of journalism from the colonial era to the end of the nineteenth century, oftentimes working as a catalyst for change. Responding to the futile task of writing unbiased journalism in our culturally fractured and increasingly relativistic society, the New Journalists of the mid twentieth-century devised a creative form of reportage that countered, satirized, and dismantled the journalism of objectivity. Writing during the Johnson and Nixon administrations, at the height of the Vietnam War, when the public lost faith in its political and moral authority figures, immortalized within the refrain of Bob Dylan’s

“The Times They Are A-Changin’,” the New Journalists responded to the country’s fractured cultural and ideological landscape by openly politicizing American journalism, debunking the myth of journalistic objectivity. Using the colorful figure of the cynical journalist as its central protagonist, New Journalism embraces the self as a refractive lens to approach the production of journalism, narrating the experiences of body and projecting critique within that narration. This form of counter-journalism hybridizes fiction and nonfiction, dissolving the distinction between fact and falsity, self and story. Developing a flexible approach to the incongruity of self and story, the work of Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe—the leading lights of the New Journalism movement—presents a salve to the crackup of modern media. By “erasing all pretense of objectivity” and “all distinctions between participant and observer,” the New Journalism achieves comfort in the confines of ideological confusion (Stiles and Harris 315). The following examination of the New Journalist movement will reveal that overtly subjective journalism is not necessarily a step towards the nihilistic abandonment of truth in the classical binary of objective fact and creative fiction; rather, New Journalism’s embrace of a more subjective understanding of truth—as opposed to a truth defined by concrete objectivity—has profound literary and critical value. It is a rhetorically evocative and creatively influenced alternative to the facile opposition between authentic and so-called “fake news.”

In order to put Wolfe and Thompson's radical approach in context, this thesis provides a brief historical examination of the history of objectivity in American journalism. The polemical journalism of colonial America will show how journalists used political rhetoric to encourage revolution, rallying the colonial masses with a blatant ideological appeal to their political and economic grievances with the British government. Following that, a brief analysis of nineteenth-century journalism, specifically of the famous Detroit “newspaper wars,” reveals that overt

political bias was accepted and valued by newspaper consumers, despite some abuse of that trust. This will set the stage for an analysis of stories written by New Journalists, focused on an analysis of Thompson's *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail of 72'*, elucidating the creative, the cathartic, and the literary value of consciously acknowledged bias. Collectively, this examination of American journalism will show that bias—as counterintuitive as this might sound—is actually integral to the production of journalistic content: sometimes for the immersion of the reader in a subjectively concocted world, other times for the production of rhetorically induced political subversion.

Through my exploration of the evolving role of the American press, it becomes clear that journalism does not have a monolithic approach or a singular purpose; each era of journalism sprouts from a multiplicity of authorial, ideological perspectives. Even modern journalists, with their desire to encourage truth through an unbiased dialogue with the public, are guilty of falling prey to ideology. Truly, to expect the achievement of aesthetic perfection through objectivity is a fool's errand, for creative output is influenced by one's socio-historical context and personal perspective. The conscious acknowledgement of bias, once taken as granted, can be countered by increased media literacy; on the part of consumers; and by the open embrace of epistemological pluralism; on the part of journalists: an expansion in the diversity of ideological consumption and production. This would dissuade dualistic thinking in our highly polarized society, a society ripped asunder by perceived difference—elevated and exacerbated by the politicization of the modern media.

Polity and the Press: A History

Since the advent of the printing press in the fifteenth century, the printed word has become a platform to disseminate new ideas, to spread knowledge, and to inform the public. As

with most new technologies, the printing press was not created with nefarious ideological intent in mind; it was merely a physical means to streamline the process of copying, which was, until then, handled by scribes: manually and ineffectively. However, the press quickly became a paradigm-shifting device, creating the mechanical means to revolutionize the dissemination of information with rapidity and efficiency. As Carlos Castaneda reminds us, “no force or influence in the development of our present culture is greater than that of the printing press” (671). This new force and influence was quickly capitalized upon by businessmen, and the intrepid settlers of British North America were no different. Responding to the economic growth of the printing industry in the colonies, the British Parliament imposed the Stamp Act. At the time of the Stamp Act, “there were twenty-two newspapers printed in British North America,” a sizable pool of writers, commentators and humorists that had sizeable readership in the British colonies (Vaughn 109). Around the time of the Stamp Act, “over one-half of the adult men in the colonies could read,” and even those who could not read would gather at the local taverns “to hear the newspapers read out loud” (109). At this point in colonial history, newspapers were considered a common good, and this tax was an unexpected financial burden on the printers of the British colonies, the group most capable of swaying public opinion.

The Stamp Act “required that a stamp be placed on all legal documents, including loans, bills of sale, court briefs, college degrees, appointments to office, and indentures of apprenticeship, as well as on all dice, cards, almanacs, and newspapers” (405). This bill was so comprehensive that it taxed all paper-related goods: a financial ball-and-chain that affected the private luxury and the professional livelihood of the colonists. While some colonists were willing to accept the new tax, Philadelphia politician Charles Thompson worried that prosecutions for violations of the Stamp Act would lead to “a press ‘so restricted that [they] cannot complain’”

(Frasca 406). As Charles Thompson predicted, “colonists were incensed [by the Stamp Act], contending they should not be taxed by a political body to which they did not send representatives” (406). This created a firm fissure in the firmament of British political support within the North American colonies, as “the colonists began to think of themselves as Americans” through the discourse of the colonial press. Consequently, the Stamp Act can be seen an attack on the industry which produced an American nationalist sentiment, and an attack on American ideology, belief, and cultural cohesion.

Incited by the Stamp Act, journalists decided to stir discontent in the pages of colonial pamphlets and papers. One such author was “Philopatrinae,” who “blamed Parliament for the tax and the lawlessness it incited” (Frasca 413). His writing, which conjures a fire and fury only seconded by the revolutionary war that was soon to follow, charges that “the authors and abettors of the Stamp Act... endeavour[ed] to destroy the foundations of the English constitution... in order to let in a torrent of tyranny and oppression upon their fellow-subjects” (413). The subjective ruminations of “Philopatrinae” are reflective of the greater goals of journalistic and polemical writing from colonial times to the present. Motivated by the financial attack on his livelihood by way of the Stamp Act, “Philopatrinae” seeks to project and identify his personal indignation as the truth. Grievances against the Stamp Act, seen as a symbolic and economic attack on colonial identity, were aired in the pages of colonial newspapers, causing a groundswell of public support for a grassroots insurrection that would eventually become the Revolutionary War. While, on the outset, the Stamp Act seemed to be a simple and effective means of gathering capital to pay for the debt of military combat, colonial writers were troubled by what they perceived as a tyrannical law, threatening free speech and personal liberty. For the colonists, the trans-Atlantic connection was entwined within their identity, and the writing of the colonial press

was central in creating a rhetoric to server that tie. Although, as Americans, it is tempting to celebrate this use of rhetorical coercion to encourage the overthrowing of the tyrannical British, this force can be used for good or ill depending on the intentions of its wielder.

This historical perspective should illuminate why the freedom of the press is such a fiercely protected foundation of contemporary American discourse. The colonial journalists tasked themselves with speaking truth to power, informing the public, and using language to sway readers to their way of thinking, but a sense of objectivity—which might be defined as the contemporary motif of journalistic integrity—is was never an essential requirement. The irony of this realization is that integrity, truth and objectivity are not canonical elements of the journalistic task; rather, they are tropes that have been used as a veneer to obfuscate the true power of journalistic prose, coercion and substantiation of ideology.

While modern media companies like Fox News use the slogan “Fair and Balanced” to convince their audience of their patented objective and bipartisan leanings, the press of the nineteenth century was far from fair or balanced. Richard Lee Kaplan recounts how “political culture in the second half of the nineteenth century was pervasively partisan,” and the newspaper “was the organ of the partisan political community” (33). There was no subtlety to the partisanship of the press either, as journals regularly carried endorsements “for entire party slates without exception” (33). While the opinion editorials of today are expressions of specific political and philosophical worldviews, the editorials of the nineteenth century “naturally rung with the rhetoric of forthright political stands” and even “news reports too were hardly exempt from partisanship” (33). Like the political coercion exercised by Philopatriae in his polemic writing, nineteenth-century newspapers were organs of political factions. This style of journalism was both a bane and a boon, as the writers “enhanced the public’s attention to social issues and

people's sense of political involvement," yet, simultaneously, "journals ruthlessly suppressed and distorted the news, letting the interests of politicians ride roughshod over any open reporting of vital issues" (33).

While the press can be expected to disseminate information about current events, the classification of "news" signifies a particular epistemology of truth. Whereas, in modern media, the "epistemological status of the news text changed from that of a collection of raw information" into "a form of knowledge in *itself*," the media of the late nineteenth century was pervasively partisan, projecting an epistemology that was compatible with the hindrances of ideological influence (Matheson 559). In an advertisement for the *Weekly Post*, a circulated journal in the Detroit area, the *Post* outlined its cohesive political mission, amidst the election season of 1872:

To meet the demands of the Republicans of Michigan and to advance their cause, the WEEKLY POST will be sent to all subscribers until after the election at the rates given below.

The Post has no sympathy with the sickly inanity that the Republican Party has accomplished its mission. No party has ceased to be useful while it retained the vitality which initiates all the practical reforms of its age and it is the crowning glory of the organization which has done so much for the country. (quoted in Kaplan 318)

In the above passage, the writer from the *Weekly Post* announces that the journal is composed to "meet the demands of the Republicans of Michigan." However, the writer creates a sense of urgency within the reader, magnifying the "sickly inanity" with which "the Republican Party has

accomplished its [political] mission.” In this editorial, the writer is not merely delivering news to Republicans; they are projecting the commentary of the *Weekly Post* as the therapeutic solution to this “sickly inanity.” In effect, the newspapers were not merely partisan; the papers of the political press presented themselves as the public emissary between the polity and the people, a mouthpiece of the Republican party speaking directly to the voter base.

Likewise, the *Free Press* provided for Democrats what the *Weekly Post* did for Republicans in the Detroit area:

The Free Press alone in this State is able to combine a Democratic point of view of our state politics and local issues with those of national importance... [It] will combine political news with a cool and dispassionate discussion of principles and men in such a manner as will afford to the people means of the best judgements as to the truth” (quoted in Kaplan 318).

This guarantee that truth will be disseminated through the perspective of political partisanship raises ethical questions with regards to what type of truth is being expressed as reality. “A cool and dispassionate discussion of principles” appears as an oxymoron when explicit political values are being questioned, interrogated, and hoisted to the level of truth. This truth is not an objective truth which is mediated by the values of all people, but it is a necessarily biased truth which is perpetuated through a framework of belief structured by ideology.

One might anticipate that this idea of politicized truth—projected through the lens of ideology—would be a politically dissuasive feature of the nineteenth century press. However, political and civic engagement was at its peak during the nineteenth century, as there was “an average of 78.5 percent [electoral participation] among eligible voters in presidential elections, [up to 84 percent if one excludes the South]” (Kaplan 346). Through the platform of partisan

media journalism in a pervasively partisan world, both the media and the politicians encouraged citizens to care about and value their role as democratic actors. Although civic engagement in politics was at an all time high, the stratification of American political life was divided and acrimonious, where two parties held the ultimate power and “political independents were likened to some impossible third sex, a hermaphrodite species” (346). This skepticism towards political intermediacy necessarily led to powerful political parties projecting an authoritative control of the moral issues within the hearts and minds of American citizens, and cohesive ideological groupthink and oppositional alienation in the nineteenth century was the logical result of this political dividedness. To add to this, racial and gendered oppression restricted the voter base to elite, white landowners, creating a voting voice that was demonstrably homogeneous in spite of the age-old divide between right and left.

In twentieth- and twenty-first century America, the media machine redefined its civic role as an “impartial supplier of authoritative news accounts to readers for their private scrutiny and use” (355). This establishment objectivity, “as an explicit professional ethic of journalism,” did not enter the profession until after the First World War, and this mandate “went hand in hand with a concerted and conscious effort to ‘manage’ a volatile and dangerous public opinion” (Calcutt and Hammond 108). Following the polemical journalism of the eighteenth century, the explicitly political journalism of the nineteenth century, and the propaganda campaigns of the earlier twentieth century, the public anticipated the post-war American newspapers to continue to be an organ of the state; they certainly did not expect them to become an individual class of writers that would impel themselves to write objectively. In reality, this call to objectivity was merely “a tool for managing public opinion,” a means of urging the masses to see this nouveau objectivity as business as usual (109). So, this radically significant, entirely essential part of

contemporary journalism is equally as propagandistic as the emblematic poster of Uncle Sam. The journalistic objectivity is rooted in a desire to handle “an unruly and unpredictable mass public,” another tool for “‘engineering’ or ‘manufacturing’ consent,” rather than a lofty goal to realign the path of modern journalism (109).

This brief overview of American journalism reveals that all forms of journalism—whether they present themselves as objective or otherwise—are a product of an ideological struggle between the writer and the reader. Even though journalism remains an important platform to receive information about the ever-changing world, the structure of the news media is an ideological one, working to coerce the public mass. In the twentieth century, the New Journalists expose this objective mandate as merely creative inhibition: creating a hybrid style of literary journalism, a natural embrace of subjectivity within detailed reporting. Additionally, this literary journalism “involves immersion reporting for a year or longer, the active presence of the author in the narrative, and tools long associated only with fiction such as elaborate structures, characterization, and even symbolism, but with the added requirement of accuracy” (Sims 33). With the emergence of this hybrid literary-journalistic genre, the self naturally becomes the window through which to view contemporary reality, discarding the cult of objectivity as a farce. Appearing on the same page as breaking news in world events, the New Journalists blur the lines of fiction and nonfiction as the writers submerge themselves in the story, becoming its frame of reference, focal point, and anti-establishment protagonist.

Developing New Journalism: a Countercultural Aesthetics of Journalism

A hard-and-fast dedication to journalistic ethics is not a necessary quality of all forms of journalism, and an important categorization which reveals this fact is the distinction between the commentator, or pundit, and the reporter. The commentator, someone with rapport as a public intellectual, is frequently brought onto television news to speak his/her mind on a current event. The pundits rely heavily on subjective thought, determined by an intellectual, political, or social background which validates their opinion in a public arena of ideas. Reporters, on the other hand, rely on presented fact, inquiry, or in-field reporting to elucidate a coherent narrative of current events, a laborious task which acts as a stamp of veracious approval on the information being presented.

However, this clear split between the pundit and the reporter is not set in stone, and facts gathered while doing in-field reporting are often influenced through the perspective of the journalist doing the leg-work. One of the most compelling examples of the reporter doing the work of the pundit and vice-versa is the work of the New Journalists, a term coined by Tom Wolfe in his anthology of journalism spanning the early sixties to the late seventies. While New Journalism was not the only style of journalism being produced in the sixties, its practitioners distinguished themselves from the mainstream press by infusing in-field reporting with intrusive narration and diegetic frame shift: blurring the lines between fact and fiction. In New Journalism, authors of long-form pieces—based on facts and details formed in gathered reporting—focused on aesthetics, constructed narratives around first-hand experience, and valued literary motifs, such as characterization and narrational stylization, over a presentation of a resolute truth. From its genesis, New Journalism was challenged from both sides: derided by mainstream journalists

for its inaccuracy and aggressively critiqued by the literati who perceived New Journalism as encroaching on their aesthetic territory.

In his introductory piece to *The New Journalism* titled “Like a novel,” Wolfe explains his confusion in his first encounter with the hybrid style of writing: “in the fall of 1962 I happened to pick up a copy of *Esquire* and read a story called ‘Joe Louis: the King as a Middle-aged Man.’ The piece didn’t open like an ordinary magazine article at all. It opened with the tone and mood of a short story.” (23). Wolfe explains that the story “featured several scenes... showing the private life of a sports hero growing older, balder, sadder” (23). Drawn in by both perplexity and intrigue, Wolfe exclaims “*What the hell is going on?* [his emphasis] With a little reworking the whole article could have read like a short story” (24). A life-long career journalist, Wolfe “couldn’t comprehend it at first,” saying that he “really didn’t understand how anyone could manage to do reporting on things like the personal by-play” (24). Initially skeptical, Wolfe’s first “defensive reaction was that the man had piped it, as the saying went... winged it, made up the dialogue” (24). Confused, fascinated, and offended, Wolfe hurls ad-hominem in the face of this new style of journalistic storytelling: “Christ, maybe he made up whole scenes, the unscrupulous geek...” (24). After Wolfe’s indignation fades, he marvels at the potential to be tapped in the new aesthetics of New Journalism, a style and flare unknown and unwelcome in the calcified heart of the media machine. According to Wolfe, this “stylish reporting was something no one knew how to deal with, since no one was used to thinking of reporting as having an esthetic dimension” (24).

Wolfe’s first case study is Jimmy Breslin, a columnist who works at Wolfe’s own journal the *Herald Tribune*. Commentating on the unorthodoxy of Breslin’s pen, Wolfe marvels at the aesthetic style harnessed by Breslin in his weekly column. Wolfe facetiously comments that

Breslin made the revolutionary discovery that “it was feasible for a columnist to actually leave the building, go outside and do reporting on his own, genuine legwork” (25). Like an artist absorbing sensory detail to inform his creative decisions, Breslin would “arrive on the scene long before the main event in order to gather the off-camera material, the by-play in the make-up room, that would enable him to create the character” (27). His goal was to “gather ‘novelistic’ details, the rings, the perspiration, the jabs on the shoulder, and he did it more skillfully than most novelists” (27). The hybrid quality of Breslin’s work marked a sea-change in the way that certain journalists conceived the craft. It was no longer enough to merely muse upon the issues of the day from a distance: coolly and objectively. The journalist as an author, novelist, and narrator had to insert themselves into the context, into the moment that the story is unravelling. The author is not merely the channel by which the reader comes to comprehend new information or experience new stimulus; in New Journalism, the journalist becomes the apparatus of comprehending perceived reality, what narratologists describes as a focalizer. The story is not a loose, ephemeral jumble of moments, utterances, and feelings, but is irrevocably tied to the perception of the human subject.

As this new aesthetic frontier emerged in journalism, questions of validity, honesty, and integrity bubbled to the surface. The New Journalism, enraptured with the desire to captivate the reader, necessarily betrayed its roots in non-fiction. Creative embellishment, psychological analysis, and scrupulous detail was privileged over an intense fixation on objectivity and factuality. For Wolfe and his fellow New Journalists, the plain, bland restraints of a hegemonic objectivity—a narrator which “assume[d] a calm, cultivated and in fact, genteel voice”—was more of a hinderance than a standard of excellence (31). The reader, peeling back the page of the Sunday press, would traditionally find a “pale beige tone, it began to signal to them,

unconsciously, that a well-known bore was here again, ‘the journalist,’ a pedestrian mind, a phlegmatic spirit, a faded personality” (31). Enter the New Journalism, the hybrid genre which captured the best qualities of fiction and non-fiction: an intense vibrancy and coloration of the prose and a stark sense of truth and meaning only found within the chaotic arena of ‘current events.’ Unfailingly entertaining, New Journalism evolved the expectations of journalistic content, but a sacrifice was made. Honesty, integrity, and objectivity were lost in the fray: “this had nothing to do with objectivity and subjectivity or taking a stand or ‘commitment’—it was a matter of personality, energy, drive, bravura... style in a word,” Wolfe quips, presenting an aestheticized third option to the binary of untenable objectivity or politicized subjectivity (31). Evolving from the previous attempts at journalistic prose, the New Journalism becomes more concerned with how the story is told than presenting an archetypal sense of truth, projecting a political message, or attending to an imprisoning sense of journalistic ethics.

By combining the commentator with the reporter, the New Journalist becomes the center of the story, a story which takes a back seat to the thoughts, emotions, and actions occurring within the frame of reference presented by the writer as a protagonist. A selection which Wolfe pulls from Terry Southern’s *Red Dirt Marijuana and Other Tastes* highlights this creative fascination with the subjective and the literary. Southern opens his story, “Twirling at Ole Miss,” with a bit of esoteric rumination, criticizing the modern depravity of “an age gone stale through the complex of bureaucratic interdependencies, with its tedious labyrinth of technical specialization, each contingent upon the next, and all aimed to converge into a single totality of meaning” (Wolfe 184). Before even setting the stage of setting, place, perspective, or time, Southern enters the story with the metaphorical or symbolic meaning typically garnered by the story’s close. Southern continues, remarking at the aesthetic majesty of an event not even

described: “it is a refreshing moment indeed when one comes across an area of human endeavor absolutely sufficient unto itself, pure and free, no strings attached—cherished and almost forgotten *l’art pour l’art*” (184). Deprived of social, temporal, or historical context, the aimless dislocation of the reader is finally subsided as Southern reveals the nature of his journey, a travel down to “the Dixie National Baton Twirling Institute” (184). Humorously embellishing the establishment of context within his story with aesthetic critique and philosophical ruminations, Southern plays with the archaic system of expectations solidified within the psyche of the average reader. Floundering in a space of confused intrigue, Southern places his artistic analysis—influenced by his pessimism and nihilism in the face of late-twentieth-century modernity—before the object which guides his creative critique of current events. This disjunctive, headstrong approach to journalism reveals how New Journalism subverts reader expectations, as Southern diverts the attention of the story away from its social, historical or political context into an esoteric lecture on the nature of modernity and art.

Shifting his narrative gaze to the core of the story, Southern begins his reporting by discussing the sights he sees in Oxford, Mississippi: “I stepped off in front of the Old Colonial Hotel and meandered across the sleepy square towards the only sign of life at hand — the proverbial row of shirt-sleeved men sitting on benches in front of the county courthouse” (185). Southern, becoming both the narrator and author of the text, imbues his subjective glance with allegorical meaning, assigning the men in front of the courthouse to a fictive cliché. Continuing, Southern inquires of the men: “‘Howdy.’ I say, striking an easy stance, smiling friendly-like. “‘Whar the school?’” (185). Accentuating his narration with literary characterization, Southern’s first-person perspective and novelistic dialogue combine to give the scene a vibrant texture with a humorous fringe, presenting himself as epistemologically, ethically, and professionally

unreliable. For Southern, the story is not just a dry, factual reportage, but it is the amalgamation of events leading up to the story itself. The focal point of Southern's adaptation of *New Journalism* is the centrality on how the story is told, rather than what the story simply is.

Incredulous with Southern's casual stance and foreign annunciation, one of the men inquires, "'What's that he say, Ed?'" (185). Perspective shifts, jumping from the twangy narration to a sharp description of Ed himself, and Southern focuses the reader's attention on how "Big Ed shifts his wad, sluices a long squirt of juice into the dust, gazes at it reflectively before fixing me again with gun-blue-cold eyes" (185). Building tension like the tense moments before a shootout in a western film, Big Ed chaffs, "'Reckon you mean, 'Whar the school at?' don't you, stranger?'" (185). In this scene, Southern writes the events of the story with subtlety, highlighting everything from the gut-wrenching spit from incredulous Ed to his own physical demeanor approaching the men. Far from the plain writing of objective journalism, Southern approaches the medium with artistic liberties, creative uses of perspective, and a compulsive obsession with detail. Southern is insistent on foregrounding his characters, like the exposition of a novel, lacing his own story-telling with the slang and colloquialisms of the archetypal southern gentlemen resting on the stoop of the county courthouse.

Continuing with his tale, Southern finds his way into a local taxi, immediately asking the driver, "'where can a man get a drink of whisky around here?'" (185). Southern reminds himself "that Mississippi is a dry state," yet the driver informs him that he can get a drink in a "'place over the county line... about eighteen miles; cost you four dollars for the trip, eight for the bottle" (185). Ever the entrepreneur, the taxi driver says, "'Unless, of course, you'd like to try some 'nigger-pot'" (185). At first misunderstanding what the man asked, Southern responds excitedly, replying "'Nigger-Pot? Great God yes, man.... Let's go!'" (185). Enthralled at the

prospect of getting his hands on some southern-style cannabis, Southern goes with the taxi driver to pick up the goods. Here, Southern disregards all semblance of commonality with the mainstream journalistic cohort. Tasked with doing factual reportage on a twirling competition in Mississippi, Southern finds himself searching for intoxicants to spice up his trip through the Bible Belt. When Southern finds out the man is not talking about the aromatic green herb but instead referring to “unaged and uncolored corn whiskey privately made in the region, and also known as ‘white lightning,’” the journalist decides to go along for the ride (186). Rather than simply telling the story as a coherent narrative of linear events, Southern narrates his search for intoxicants, a means of altering his perspective, his understanding, and his comprehension of the events he is supposed to be journaling as a paid professional. This humorous embrace of altered states and counterculture allows Southern to submerge himself safely in the deluge of Dixieland culture, paradoxically providing him with a critical distance that makes him inseparable from the story. Southern is not merely the vehicle for the story at hand, he is the story itself: the window into the chaotic undulations of space, place, and time that are supposed to be taken as given in the typical journalistic story.

Not only does Southern indulge in the acquisition of bootleg liquor along his journey through Mississippi, he purchases this liquor from a young purveyor: a boy of nine years old. Driving over in the taxi to a small house established for the purpose of selling the corn whiskey, the young boy walks up to the window of the vehicle, immediately donning the guise an entrepreneur: “‘this here’s a mighty fine batch,’ he said, digging around in a box of kindling wood and fetching out unlabeled pints of it” (Southern 186). The taxi driver, incredulous, gives “a short laugh, as to show that [Southern and his accomplice] were not so easily put upon” (186). Jokingly scoffing at the young man’s sales pitch, he taxi driver chides: “why, boy,’ he said, ‘I

wouldn't have thought you was a drinkin' man'" (186). The boy responds with confidence, without a hint of irony, saying that "I ain't no drinkin' man, but I sure know how it suppose to taste—that's 'cause times nobody here I have to *watch* it and I have to *taste* it too, see it workin' right.... You see if that ain't a fine batch!" (186). In this passage, Southern does not express fear, concern, or worry regarding the moral and legal implications of a young child selling alcohol to a taxi driver and his client, the journalist; thereby, Southern refuses to present himself as a moral authority by virtue of his profession. Instead, he indulges in the moment, buying the liquor and sharing everything from how he purchased the liquor to how it tastes: "it had a pretty good taste all right—a bitch edgy perhaps, but plenty of warmth and body" (186). More focused on catching a high than moralizing about legal implications about buying liquor from the young alcohol salesman, Southern laments that he has this "job o'work to get on with—dry, factual reportage—mere donkey work, in fact" (186). Spending most of his story accosting the locals and purveying moonshine from children, Southern only devotes a quarter of his pagetime to the actual story he was sent to write about.

While, at first blush, this style of journalism may appear to be frivolous and potentially morally corrupted, Southern's intense detail, scatterbrain sidetracking, and artistic ruminations poke holes in the pretensions of objective journalism. If Southern had endeavored to give an account of his attendance at a twirling competition in the Deep South, he most likely would have presented a tedious tale that would lack any artistic sentiment, creative value, or satirical edge. Instead, Southern presents the characters of his narrative with vibrant color: living subjects rather than overly simplistic anthropological types. In this way, New Journalism projects a literary, artistic epistemology of truth, creating a story from the piecemeal bits of his subjective experience: illuminating the seedy, hedonistic underbelly of something seemingly pure and true.

Through Southern's text, the reader is exposed to a narrative which speaks back to a hegemony of objective truth, placing the epicenter of knowledge within the selves that construct the story: the author, the reader, and the selves found within that text.

Politics as Art: Thompson's Unreliable Literary Narration

Southern's jumbled, headstrong approach to reporting on extremely mundane topics is not entirely unlike Hunter S. Thompson's frazzled, inebriated coverage of the campaign of 1972: a campaign which was a divisive and decisive battle between two ideological enemies, George McGovern and Richard Nixon. In his campaign, Richard Nixon represents the 'silent majority' of God-fearing, drug-hating social conservatives hell bent on battling of the Seventies counterculture. McGovern, on the other hand, panders to a diverse electorate which Thompson describes as "that huge & confused coalition of students, freaks, blacks, anti-war activists & dazed dropouts," a diverse, loosely organized group of socially and fiscally liberal outsiders neglected by mainstream politics on both sides of the traditional political binary (20).

In the narrative style of the Thompson's Text, the experience of the narrative—for both the author and the reader—is inseparable from the experiences of the author/journalist, and Thompson's journalism on the campaign of 1972 reveals the critical and literary value of exchanging a reductive objectivity for a subjective relativism that privileges the role of the individual. Given that Thompson describes George McGovern as "the only candidate in either party worth voting for," the reader enters the narrative with a cognisant understanding that the following political analysis of McGovern's opponents will be tied to a clear political, ideological goal: to put George McGovern in the White House (19). As McGovern's chances of becoming the president begin to increase, Thompson writes his excitement into the thread of the story, eventually culminating in his psychological breakdown and fanatical nihilism upon McGovern's catastrophic loss. So, like the journalism of the nineteenth century, Thompson works as a mouthpiece for a campaign, yet, instead, Thompson's uses precise narrative techniques to

advance that agenda, simultaneously revealing the literary, empathetic tools that can be harnessed to appeal to the subjectivity of a reader immersed in the narrative experience.

Given that Thompson's political bias is proclaimed from the outset, the reader can critique the events of the story with the author's bias in mind, consciously acknowledging that the events are being distorted through an ideological lens. In effect, Thompson's proclaimed bias functions in a similar manner to a scholar's announcement of his/her theoretical or critical perspective before entering into critical debate. As viewed through Mikhail Bakhtin's novelic heteroglossia, the languages of New Journalism assert some "specific points of view on the world, [and create linguistic] forms for conceptualizing the world in words," discarding the passive absorption demanded by objective journalism (291-292). Through harnessing the rhetorical and narrative tools of New Journalism, Thompson provides a much richer perspective than Wolfe's humorous caricature of the archetypal objective journalist: the "pedestrian mind, a phlegmatic spirit, a faded personality," a style of writing that utilizes what Bakhtin describes as unitary language: "a system of linguistic norms" (31 and 270). Instead, Thompson characterizes his journalistic objects, such as Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey, with fictive embellishment, donning a narrative style of heteroglossia: utilizing "*another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" (324). By playing with the generic expectations of journalism, Thompson's narration signals to and taunts at the anticipation of unbiased narration, making it "impossible to know just how much of the book is autobiographical and how much is the product of his own frenzied, brilliant imagination," narrating these para-objective experiences to serve a political and rhetorical goal (Stiles and Harris 319). In essence, by using literary and rhetorical tools, as outlined by narratologists,

Thompson's prose develops an aesthetics that is inseparable from the personal and the interpersonal.

This narrational indeterminacy between the authorial voice and the character's voice is explicated by Thompson's encounter with Eugene McCarthy, a congressman from Minnesota. Describing the early drop-out in the race of 1972, Thompson recounts "hav[ing] a peculiar affection for McCarthy" as he stood "outside the 'exit' door of a shoe factory in Manchester, New Hampshire," sent there to greet potential voters (29). Waiting there as the "five o'clock whistle blew... he had to stand there in the midst of those workers rushing out to the parking lot" (29). Thompson describes "the pain in McCarthy's face as he stood there with his hand out, saying over and over again: 'Shake hands with Senator McCarthy... shake hands with Senator McCarthy'... a tense plastic smile on his face, stepping nervously toward anything friendly" (29). In this passage, Thompson predicts McCarthy's eventual failure in the race against Nixon without using facts, figures, or statistics; instead, Thompson develops his narrative to allow himself to have aesthetic power as both the author and the narrator, describing as "most of the crowd ignored [McCarthy], refusing to even acknowledge his outstretched hand, staring straight ahead as they hurried out to their cars" (29). As a narrator, Thompson employs what Bakhtin describes as double-voiced discourse to create an implicit characterological analysis of McCarthy. Rather than relying on lofty generalizations speculative figures to show McCarthy's failure as a presidential candidate, Thompson's narration "serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions:" the first speaker being Thompson's narrative voice and the second being McCarthy's, transmuted through Thompson as a speaker (Bakhtin 324). By entering into an indirect style of narration, blending the narrative perspective of Thompson's apparent political bias with the description McCarthy's futile attempts at social

outreach, Thompson expresses incredulity towards the success of the McCarthy campaign while empathically describing McCarthy's begrudged desire to communicate with his electorate. Revealing the "direct [political] intentions of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author," Thompson's prose carefully walks a tightrope between partisan political assassination and descriptive contextual reporting, utilizing a double voiced discourse in a journalistic fashion (Bakhtin 324).

As Thompson's quick witted analysis often dips into the pool of fiction and creative embellishment, the reader is left questioning what is a real, a product of exhausted, drug-induced paranoia, or simply vengeful, vindictive screed. Denoting the homogeneity of the political process, Thompson asserts that "the prevailing wisdom today is that *any* candidate in a standard brand, two-party election will get about 40 percent of the vote" (34). This wisdom is predicated on the assumption that "neither party would nominate a man more than twenty percent different from the type of person most Americans would consider basically right and acceptable" (34). In essence, Thompson asserts that politics is not about selecting the candidate with the highest moral superiority or empathic tendencies; rather, politics has devolved into "a purely physical-image gig" (35). To solidify this point, Thompson launches into a fictive sketch of what is going on at the campaign headquarters of Hubert Humphrey, a former senator from Minnesota and the vice president to Lyndon B. Johnson:

"Jesus Christ! Where's that sunlamp? We gotta get some more tan on you baby, You look *grey*. (Long pause, no reply from the candidate...) Well, Hube, we might just as well face this thing. We're comin' up fast on what might just be a real nasty problem for you... let's not try to kid ourselves, Hube, he's a really

mean sonofabitch. (Long pause, etc....) You're gonna have to be ready, Hube"
(36-37).

Donning a narrational style of free indirect discourse, Thompson shifts perspective from his own into the eyes of the campaign organizer for Hubert Humphrey. Satirically jabbing at his pale, curmudgeonly appearance, Thompson imagines the staffer trying to tan up the tired, traditional Democrat from the North Star State. By shifting his perspectival narration into the eyes of the campaign organizer in this this fictional vignette, a second, fictionalized voice enters Thompson's political analysis. The contextual application of this style of narration might be explored through Bakhtin's polyphony, which he describes as "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (6). However, while Thompson infuses his narration with lifelike imaginings of campaign organizers, Thompson fails to achieve the crux of Bakhtin's literary polyphony, namely what he describes as "*plurality of consciousnesses*" (6). When analyzed as a strictly literary work, the shortcoming of Thompson's text is found within Thompson's inability to create independent consciousnesses "*with equal rights and each with its own world*" (6). In essence, Thompson's narrative project in the above passage is a *failed* polyphony, where the character of the campaign organizer is not an independent subject, in a sea of autonomous literary consciousnesses, but rather "a simple object of the author's consciousness" (7). Effectually, these fictionalized characters are little more than representational exaggerations, failing to achieve a level of characterization which Bakhtin outlines in the work of Dostoevsky. Rather, Thompson's novelistic characters are merely "*objects of [Thompson's] authorial discourse,*" falling short of Dostoevsky's characters, which Bakhtin finds to be "*subjects of their own directly signifying discourse*" (7). Creating caricatures rather than autonomous characters, Thompson's sketch hyperbolizes the ridiculous, lamentable qualities of

the political process. By employing comedy, exaggeration, and attempts at literary narrativity as the means of making a political point, Thompson's fabricated, novelistic passages become discerning and argumentative if not archetypally literary; instead, Thompson uses literary techniques to isolate the problematic idiosyncrasies of his satirical, political target.

Similarly, Thompson composes a creative vignette for his meeting with Richard Nixon; however, Thompson crafts this scene to show how political journalism can create a compulsion to empathize with political oligarchs, even when their ethics are in question. Describing the scene as he throttles forward in the back seat of “a big yellow sedan with a civvy-clothes cop at the wheel,” Thompson narrates that both he and Nixon “were talking football in a very serious way” (43-44). Interestingly, Thompson does not apply any rhetorical exaggeration to his encounter with the future president, simply stating that “it was a very weird trip; probably one of the weirdest things [he’s] ever done, and especially weird because both Nixon and [Thompson] enjoyed it” (44). After having “a good talk,” Thompson “stood around the Lear Jet with Dick and the others. Chatting in a very relaxed way about how successful his swing through New Hampshire had been” (44). In this passage, Thompson feels to apparently comfortable and welcome while chatting with Richard Nixon that he refers to him in the colloquial, as “Dick” no less. After practically putting Hubert Humphrey in a rhetorical pillory in a previous passage, this passage appears as a strange juxtaposition, and Thompson calmly narrates his chats about the NFL with future subject of the Watergate scandal. This passage works to humanize Nixon, revealing him as an individual with tastes and passions, rather than—as one might expect from Thompson—a red-toothed demon hell bent on sabotaging the political process. As was revealed with Thompson’s use of narrational devices to warp and construe his reporting on political elites, Thompson is adept at maneuvering his gathered information to suit an ideological goal.

Therefore, it appears strange and incongruous that Thompson does not try to narrate this encounter to create discomfort or disgust.

In trying to understand this incongruity, it appears that Thompson falls prey to what Suzanne Keen describes as “*empathic inaccuracy*” in her piece “A Theory of Narrative Empathy” (222). After showing the useful effects garnered by an empathetic response to literary characterization, Keen states that “no one narrative technique assures readers that our empathetic reaction” aligns with the “feelings embedded in the fictional characters” (222). While Thompson’s work is generically projected as journalism, Thompson’s work is essentially analogous to fiction, since—as both the narrator and the protagonist—he provides a “journalism [which] is necessarily an extension of all human perception and communication in its fictional... quality” (Hellmann 4). As Thompson’s characterization can be perceived as literary and fictional, his construal of Nixon might be an example of empathic inaccuracy, which occurs “when a reader responds empathetically to a fictional character at cross-purposes with an author’s intentions” or, more likely in this case, the author “sometimes evoke[s] empathy unintentionally” (Keen 222).

This empathic inaccuracy can be seen in Thompson’s farewell to Nixon, where Thompson states that “it seemed only natural to thank him for the ride and shake hands” (44). Suddenly, Thompson is yanked away from Nixon, and somebody yells ““Get the cigarette!,”” snatching the lit cigarette from his mouth as a Nixon staffer yells: ““God damnit, Hunter you almost blew up the plane”” (44). Accidentally endangering the life of Richard Nixon, Thompson recalls: “I shrugged. He was right. I’d been leaning over the fuel tank with a burning butt in my mouth” (44). No worse for wear, Nixon “smiled and reached out to shake hands again,” departing on the plane (44). Thompson later remarks that it was a ““very bad show,”” especially

considering that he ““did about three king-size Marlboros while [they] were standing there. Hell, I was flicking the butts away, lightning new ones... you people are lucky I’m a sane, responsible journalist; otherwise I might have hurled my flaming Zippo into the fuel tank”” (44). hilariously, Thompson’s mild conversation with Nixon about pro-football concludes with Thompson almost engulfing Nixon and himself in a fiery blaze of ignited jet fuel, sparked by his Marlboro cigarette. While this farcical, unexpected encounter allows Thompson to ironically muse about his disposition as a “sane, responsible journalist,” this vignette proves that Thompson’s creative capacities are not limited to harsh indictments of perceived corruption, but that his pen can transmute a candidate who seems the most vile into an affable, sports-loving political working-man, looking to burn off some steam by chatting with a fellow colleague about their recreational pleasure (44). In this passage, Thompson seems to be guilty of the same thing that he laments: “the clubby/cocktail personal relationships that ultimately develop between politicians and journalists” (4). This is not to say that, henceforth, Thompson will commend Nixon’s politics, but that—like any political journalist—Thompson has been caught “falling into the old trap that plagues every writer who gets sucked into this rotten business” (38). As a journalist, Thompson may be excused for simply explaining the events as they happened, developing a quirky, strange anecdote about the infamous president. However, as a narrator, Thompson’s characterization of Nixon is clearly humanizing, creating an empathic style of narration which leaves his potential audience “at cross-purposes with [Thompson’s] intentions” (222).

By diving headfirst into the muck that is political journalism, it is not surprising or unlikely that Thompson becomes ensnared by bias or subjectivity. Rather, as has been shown, the oeuvre of New Journalism thrives in a subjective climate, where the author is liberated to construct the argument and narrative through the subjective lens. This authorial, argumentative

construction appears in the above passage as an application of focalization, which Mieke Bal describes as “the relationship between the ‘vision,’ the agent that sees, and that which is seen” (149). In Thompson’s narrative project, the focalizer, which “is the point by which elements are viewed,” is overwhelmingly situated within his narrational perspective: creating an internal style of focalization (149). In the passage with Nixon, Thompson reveals how fallible journalists truly are when they are encountering and interacting with these towering political behemoths. By getting trapped in the same pitfall that Thompson himself warns about, the problems presented by “the clubby/cocktail personal relationships” between politicians and journalists become doubly significant, as the reader experiences this degradation firsthand (4). As Thompson focalizes his narrative internally, his thoughts and experiences are narrated with every passing moment; therefore, the reader becomes immersed in the psychology of the author as narrator, understanding how the deterioration of moral and journalistic values comes to unfold: at one point calling Nixon a “Born Loser,” the next saying “we had a fine time. I enjoyed it” (45-46). This perspectival vacillation between disgust and comfort in the aura of Richard Nixon epitomizes the subjective quirks of Thompson’s New Journalism, and the focalization of Thompson’s narrative internally allows readers to view the pitfalls of political journalism firsthand.

Since, in New Journalism, the narrative is typically internally focalized within the perspective of the author as protagonist and a speaker, this will henceforth be referred to as ‘*compound narration*.’ As the reader is keyed into the psychology and logic of the compound narrator, Thompson’s fallibility in his journalistic capacity can be analyzed as a narrate, satirical reenactment of corruptibility within the field of professional media reporting, where the speaker narrates and participates in the satire. Frequently, Thompson ironically exaggerates “normal

journalistic kind[s] of procedures,” such as “us[ing] what you have to pry the rest out of” a potential source, and, in his narration of his journalistic research, Thompson readily journals his forays into areas where journalists are strictly not allowed (406). One of the areas where the satire of journalism is most palpable is Thompson’s adventure in the Republican National Convention, which Thompson describes as “a bad pornographic film that you want to walk out on, but simply sit through anyway and then leave the theater feeling depressed and vaguely embarrassed” (328). Thompson juxtaposes the “pervasive sense of gloom among the press/media crowd” around the convention with “the gung-ho, breast-beating arrogance of the Nixon delegates themselves” (329). Thompson then launches into a frenzied description of his wandering through “a maze of hallways in the back reaches of the convention hall,” after he had just come from the convention floor, where “the Secret Service lads chased [him] away from the First Family box where [he] was trying to hear what Charlton Heston was saying to Nelson Rockefeller” (329). Conducting his research like a thief in the night, Thompson centralizes his piece on the Republican National Convention around his hair-brained, covert journalism. First comparing the dread of the journalists with the crooked joy of the GOP delegates, then admitting to eavesdropping on the key figures of the Republican elite, Thompson creates a farcical pantomime of the journalistic profession. Internally focalizing his narrative with compound narration, the experience of the Republican Convention is actively mediated by the perspective of the speaker/author/journalist. Instead of mundanely reporting on the goings on of the convention, Thompson’s internal focalization allows him to both critique and report on the events of his reportage. However, while Thompson’s approach to journalistic research is dubious, bordering on illegal, he provides a first-hand report of the convention, with far more detail and wit than the mainstream media outlets.

In a later scene, after sneaking into an organized protest for Nixon, Thompson is accosted by the Nixon volunteers who suspect him to be a covert journalist, but he reassures them, saying that he “‘he came there as an *observer*’” of “‘what it was like on the inside of a *winning* campaign’” (332). Facetiously gushing for Nixon electorate, the crowd loses focus on Thompson, and he joins in on the demonstration. Thompson then shifts the narrative from his eyes to the perspective of the news cameras, describing as they hone in on the “weird-looking, thirty-five-year-old speed freak with half his hair burned off from overindulgence, wearing a big blue McGovern button on his chest, carrying a tall cup of ‘Old Milwaukee’” (333). As Thompson shifts from character-bound focalization, where the reader is “shown how differently the various characters view the same facts,” to the external focalization, where the perspective of the news cameras acts as “anonymous agent... [which] function[s] as a focalizer,” the focalization of Thompson’s narrative is jarring and uneven, shifting focalization rapidly within the same scene (Bal 152). This narrative technique allows Thompson to show how the vacillation of perspective enables the viewer or reader to experience a different version of the same event simultaneously. When the narrative is focalized externally, from the perspective of the news cameras, the reader sees the “weird-looking, thirty-five-year-old speed freak” and the sprawling scene of the convention, a moment which “appear[s] objective, because the events are not presented from the point of view” of the character/narrator: Thompson (Thompson 333 and Bal 153). However, since the focalization was just previously bound the character, the reader realizes that this external focalization is being actually relayed through the perspective of the “weird-looking, thirty-five-year-old speed freak,” who happens to be the compound narrator (Thompson 333). This leads to a layered style of narration, where the journalist—who frequently functions as the

narrator and focalizer—adjusts the presentation of events to dissuade a hegemonically objective envisioning of the events of the Republican National Convention.

Compared to a political analysis written for the *New York Times*, by John J. O'Connor, the dynamic narrational style of Thompson's prose appears as a much more enduring, descriptive testament to the Republican National Convention than the output of the mainstream media's trusted staple. O'Connor describes the outcome of the convention as a "foregone conclusion" with an "arrangement [that] is more or less normal, the bread of power feeding the circuses of public relations." O'Connor states that those who had the most trouble were not the delegates, but, rather, "television newsmen who are forced to produce live on camera and in front of an audience of millions." O'Connor resolutely states that the "convention provides little or nothing to report," resulting in a "Republican affair [that] is almost militantly tidy." For O'Connor, the Republican National Convention of 1972 speaks for itself, and "little added commentary is needed." Compared to Hunter S. Thompson, O'Connor's coverage of the Republican National Convention misses the mark entirely, providing an abstract, distant narrative of the Republican National Convention. Whereas Thompson narrates his participation in a "spontaneous" Nixon demonstration, where he and the Nixonites were "to rush onto the floor and begin chanting, cheering, waving [their] signs at the TV cameras," O'Connor, as a mouthpiece for the mainstream media establishment, fails to provide notable details or memorable anecdotes to encourage an in-depth analysis (335). While Thompson's narrative focalization enables him to embellish and distort the events of the Republican National Convention, as a narrator, O'Connor provides a boilerplate description of the events which is simplistic: not deigning to focalize the description of events from a variety of perspectives, only focalizing his description externally. While O'Connor might be believed to be the more reliable narrator as an external focalizer, Bal

warns, through external focalization, “the narrative can then appear objective, because the events are not presented from the point of view of the characters” (153). However, even with external focalization, “the focalizer’s bias is, then, not absent, since there is no such thing as ‘objectivity’” (Bal 153). Juxtaposed with O’Connor, the reader is left to question which narrative presents the true experience of the Republican National Convention: through Thompson’s dynamic focalization, which describes a “spectacle that would go down... in history” or, through O’Connor’s external focalization, a “Republican affair [that] is almost militantly tidy” (335).

By comparing the work of these two journalists, we see that there is a gap in the capacity of political reporting for historicity and narrational objectivity. While both Thompson and O’Connor present radically different perspectives on the Republican National Convention of 1972, the choice about which perspective is to be believed is not an objective choice, but a subjective one. As Greg McLaughlin suggests, the “news media [does] not simply report and reflect our social world but ... they more or less play an active part in shaping, even constructing it” (38). The journalist does not present an objective retelling of the story, free from subjective enhancements; rather, the journalist is actively molding the establishment of truth, specifically through narrational techniques. Thus, the reader is left to decide which is author presents the true narrative of the Republican National Convention, deciding to trust the “journalist as the professional, institutionalised reporter [or] the journalist as the partial eyewitness and writer” (39). While these two perspectives on the journalistic craft are somewhat reductive, it shows that journalism is limited in its capacity to narrate objective truths, and every evaluation of the truth is shifted by a subjective bias and narrational perspective. By using narratology as a lens to view journalistic prose, it is revealed that the objects of narration are reshaped by the author’s implicit biases, whether they be focalized externally or internally. Hence, while journalism is supposed to

be the bastion of written truth and objective historicity, the narrational differences between Thompson and O'Connor's description of the same event show that perspective and narration are central elements to the construction of a journalistic piece. While journalism—compared to fiction and literature—is supposed to be the prosaic manifestation of consistent objectivity, the most consistent thing about the reporting of a story is the plurality of its narrational representation.

Through Thompson's active subversion of normative journalism and use of literary narration, he undermines the cult of objectivity within the mainstream media, creating a narrative which feels contemporary and politically relevant to a modern society. By creating an explicitly subjective journalism, Thompson shows, as Wayne C. Booth intuits, that "objectivity is not a supreme goal. It is unattainable, in itself, because the author's voice is always present, regardless of how thoroughly it is disguised" (xix). Hence, the journalism of objectivity is a myth, and a dangerous myth at that: actively trying to reform the reader's system of belief by making them believe that they are simply observing objective fact. Through the explicit announcement of ideological alteration, Thompson leaves everything on the table, leaving readers to critique and create meaning for themselves, putting the agency in the hands of readers rather than subtly guiding them with the veneer of objectivity.

Intersubjective Truth: the Reader and the Narrator's Mimetic Experience

In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Tom Wolfe's famous 1968 quasi-journalistic account of Ken Kesey and Merry Pranksters, his subject is as much the centrality of the reader's experience as it is this band of mischievous hippies. In Wolfe's novel, questions of subjectivity and objectivity are blurred, as the reader becomes exposed to the layers of embedded consciousness within the text. As the reader becomes continually exposed to the interiority of the novel's various characters, it becomes clear that a phenomenological empathy, mediated through the experience of the novel's characters, becomes Wolfe's journalistic and narrative technique. Unlike Thompson, who used a failed polyphony to create humorous psychological deconstructions of political candidates, Wolfe's characters enter the foreground of the text, presented as autonomous and unskewed by Wolfe's authorial lens. By employing a dissociative style of narration, the subjective, conscious experience of the reader—blended with the consciousnesses of the text's various characters—becomes a stylistic platform which is both empathetic and argumentative, becoming a metaphor for literary consumption on the part of the reader and his/her experience with the text.

Summarily, Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* follows the adventures of Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters. Ken Kesey, most popularly known for his novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, acts as the patriarch for the Pranksters: a group of intrepid, youthful creatives and proto-hippies who, together, explore the American landmass in a decrepit, kaleidoscopic bus, named Furthur. Along their journey, they indulge in psychedelic trips, describing their dissociative experiences and their meetings with countercultural superstars, such as Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, and the Grateful Dead. Throughout the text, Kesey and the Pranksters pursue psychedelic experiences as a means of finding intersubjectivity: the “*experience* of the

barrier between the subjective and the objective, the personal and the impersonal, the *I* and the *not-I* disappearing” (Wolfe 45, his emphasis). As a journalist, Wolfe is only physically present for the beginning and end of the text, where he meets the Pranksters and greets Kesey as he is freed upon receiving bail. Therefore, the core narrative of the text is researched indirectly, presumably through interviews with Kesey and the Pranksters themselves, yet the narrative is experienced through the perspective of the Prankster’s themselves, following the linear timeline which explains the group's genesis to its eventual dissolution.

Stylistically, while the content of Wolfe’s novel is produced through after-the-fact journalistic research, Tom Wolfe uses creative linguistics as a means of presenting his researched material, blending the perspectives of the author/narrator with the subjects of the research, frequently presenting the events of the story as if they are being experienced subjectively. Using New Journalist tropes, the “highly stylized and allusive structure of [Wolfe’s] narrative draws attention to itself as a pattern,” presenting Wolfe’s quirky, dissociative style of narration as a metaphor for finding the intersubjective experience (Hellman 110). While this sounds resonantly similar to Thompson’s use of narrative techniques to project political analysis, Wolfe departs from the compound narrational style of Thompson by abstracting himself from the narration of the text. Unlike Thompson. “Wolfe's interpretive consciousness stand[s] outside of the factual events,” and his narration is not consistently mediated by his own consciousness, taking on the fictionalized, embellished consciousness of his characters (Hellman 110). Therefore, while Thompson’s narrative is consistently centered around himself as a narrator, Wolfe’s narrative presents the consciousnesses of a vast swath of the narrative’s characters, blending the conscious experiences of those characters with that of the reader through narrative poetics and dissociative narration. So, while the text is researched and projected by the author, the text gives birth to

multiplicity of active consciousnesses, becoming the formal equivalent to for the psychedelic experiences so central to the narrative of the text, leading to the genesis of the reader within Wolfe's new journalism.

While the ideal reader for a journalist is usually a passive consumer, confident and reassured by the authorial objectivity of his/her journalistic prose, Wolfe's fiction straddles the lines between fact and fiction, using creative narrative and linguistic techniques to present researched fact. Juxtaposed with an archetypal version of objective journalism, where the characters of the typical news story are objects that make up a temporally linear explanation of events, Wolfe's choice of literary stylistics delves into the interiority of the novel's characters, to present the characters of the novel as subjects. In this way, the reader of the Wolfe's journalism experiences the active presence of detailed subjects, rather than the passive objects that make up a traditional front page news piece. In his description of act of reading in his essay "Criticism and the Experience of Interiority," Georges Poulet explains how, when readers engage with a text, they become "aware of a rational being, of a consciousness; the consciousness of another" (42). Reading is not the passive absorption of aesthetics and information, when one engages with a text, "the [text's] consciousness is open to me, welcomes me, lets me look deep inside itself, and even allows me... to think what it thinks and feel what it feels" (Poulet 42). While there still remains objects in the experience of reading, such as "images, ideas, words, [and] objects of [one's] thought," the reader and the text work together in a codependent relationship: where, in the interior world of the text "words, images, and ideas disport themselves, these mental entities, in order to exist, need the shelter which I provide: they are dependent on my consciousness" (43). Poulet's description of active readership, while related particularly to French literature, is essential to understanding how Wolfe's characters function within his novel's aesthetic and

thematic project. This oneness—the melding of two or more consciousnesses—that the reader experiences with the text in the act of reading is echoically similar to Wolfe’s narrational style, to his journalistic process, and to the ideological pursuits of the Merry Pranksters: namely, to attain intersubjectivity. As a narrator, Wolfe does not elect to produce a distant, contemplative narrative voice; instead he submerges his narratorial consciousness within a multitude of characters; projecting his implicit critique, or lack of critique, in the temporal undulations of the story’s progression.

For instance, in a scene where Kesey and the Pranksters journey out on a “test-run” to see the sociocultural effects of their psychedelic fun, they are apprehended by a police cruiser. Wolfe describes the scene, explaining that “the Pranksters were on a test run in the bus going through the woods up north and a forest fire had started” (69). By this point, “everyone on the bus had taken acid and they were zonked,” and the driver, Neal Cassady, was “driving and barreling through the burning woods” (69). Wolfe then switches his perspective from omniscient, detailing the “smoke beginning to pour out of the woods,” to Cassady’s internal metronome, describing as he “wrench[ed] the steering wheel this way and that way to his inner-wired beat, with the siren wailing and sailing through the rhythm” (69). Mimicking the dissociative effects of the psychedelic experience with his energetic, twisted shifting of perspective, Wolfe then narrates as an ad-hoc stand-in for the collective consciousness of the Pranksters: “A siren? It’s a highway patrolman, which immediately seems like the funniest thing in the history of the world. Smoke is pouring out of the woods and they are all sailing through leaf explosions in the sky, but the cop is bugged out about this freaking bus” (69). Immediately, after speaking for the collective whole of the psychedelic posse, Wolfe switches his diegesis from the Pranksters to the incredulous dialogue of the policeman: “Man, the license plate is on wrong and there’s no light over the

licence plate and this turn signal looks bad and how about the brakes, let's see that hand brake there" (69). Narrating the experience as if he were bouncing along in the faux-leather seat of the Day-Glo party bus, Wolfe constructs this scene to present a collision between the separate spheres of social society in spring of '64. In the passage which paraphrases the vehicle inspection by the California highway patrolman, the reader experiences the dialogue of the policeman as one drawn out breath, without pausing for punctuation until the end of the phrase. This stylistic choice, while seemingly inconsequential, upends the presentation of this events with implicit flippancy. Furthermore, the narrator's linguistic choices, which starts with the colloquial, "man," implicitly critiques the authority of the officer of the law.

Throughout the temporal progression of the above passage, the reader experiences the presence of three consciousnesses. The first, the external narrator, comprehends the physical texture of the lived experience, from the "siren" to the "leaf explosions in the sky" (69). This narrator functions omnisciently, melding with the second pair of consciousnesses: both Neal Cassady and the highway patrolman. For Wolfe, this tripling of perceived consciousnesses is an interesting narrative tool for the dissemination of interior thought, but, more importantly, this narrative tool enables the development of intersubjectivity between the novel's various voices and the active consciousness of the novel's reader. When the reader engages with the text itself, the reader becomes "aware of a rational being, of a consciousness; the consciousness of another, no different from the [consciousness one] automatically assume[s exists within] in every other human being" (Poulet 42). For Poulet, the subjective perception of consciousnesses within the novelic world becomes melded to the consciousness of the reader, and the interior universe of the novel "does not seem radically opposed to the *me* who thinks it" (42). Therefore, in the act of reading, the spectator becomes embedded within the spectacle; the reader becomes part of the

genesis of novelic experience itself. While this active, imbedded readership is consistently mediated by the subjective lens, the worlds and objects “glimpse[d] through the words are mental forms not divested of an appearance of objectivity” (43). In other words, the reader’s experience of the novel is a hybridization of the objective and subjective, mediated by the subjective lens in the act of empathy or antipathy with each specific text, while appearing to be innately true and objective because the novel is generated within the reader’s mind’s eye.

Poulet’s perspective on readership has precise implications about the argumentative nature of Wolfe’s journalistic prose. Because—in the scene with the highway patrolman and Neal Cassady—the narrator has an implicit tonal empathy with one of the scene’s characters, the reader feels compelled to agree with the narrator’s tonal bias. This is not only because the reader may empathize with the plight of the Pranksters, or may have correspondence with experiences of police antagonism, but because the objects and consciousnesses of the novel’s characters are given birth within the mind of the reader. Like a mother caring for a child, “these mental entities [of the text], in order to exist, need the shelter which [the reader] provide[s]” (Poulet 43). This demonstrates the aesthetic and argumentative effectiveness of Wolfe’s stylistic choices. Covering a story about the pursuit of cosmic, conscious oneness within an intersubjective experience, Wolfe parrots this stylistically within the novel’s rapid shifting of narrational perspective. However, this aesthetic choice is particularly argumentative, because the tone of the narrational consciousness is intertwined with the consciousness of the active reader. From the perspective of literature, this is without serious ethical or moral consequences, because the aesthetics of the story can be judged independently or dependently depending on the lens of the reader. Yet, since Wolfe is projecting this story as journalism, the mandate of objectivity clouds this aesthetic pursuit.

So, while Wolfe's narrative structure is aesthetically relevant to the matter of discussion, what follows is a complete dissolution of the generic expectations of journalism. In *Fables of Fact*, John Hellmann explains that Tom Wolfe "has been... adamant in his attacks on conventional journalism" (122). Throughout the novel, Wolfe thematically reasserts "the comic inability of the media to capture even part of the truth of the subject on which it reports" (Hellmann 122). One passage which exemplifies this skepticism is Wolfe's description of the coverage of the destruction of Perry Lane: a place described as the incubator of the psychedelic revolution within academic circles. Wolfe satirizes the journalistic coverage:

"The papers turned up to write about the last night on Perry Lane, noble old Perry Lane, and had the old cliché at the reader, End of an Era, expecting to find some deep-thinking latter-day Thorstein Velben intellectuals on and with sonorous bitter statements about this machine civilization devouring its own past" (53).

The disdain that Wolfe feels for normative journalism is perceivable by the word choices which comprise this passage. Wolfe accuses normative journalism of lapsing into grandiose clichés, imagining they would apply the adage "End of an Era" to the demolishing of Perry Lane. Wolfe characterizes normative journalism as being esoteric and abstract, expecting that the journalists would trot out "Thorstein Velben intellectuals" to dryly analyze current events with a oeuvre of pertinent intellectualism and distant contemplation. For the normative journalists, the destruction of Perry Lane is symbolic, begging a statement "about this machine civilization devouring its own past." Wolfe then abruptly switches narrational frame from the imagined journalist to "this big guy Kesey dragg[ing] a piano out of his house," describing as the Pranksters "all set about axing the haell out of it and burning it up, calling it the 'oldest living thing on Perry lane,' only they were giggling and yahooing about it" (53). The juxtaposition between the "phlegmatic

spirit [and] faded personality” of the presupposed journalist with jovial immediacy of Kesey’s symbolic actions clearly shows Wolfe’s inherent biases in constructing this narrative scene. As Wolfe’s new journalism demonstrates aesthetic attempts to subvert normative journalism, it is not entirely surprising that the narrator feels a powerful antipathy towards the journalists. In this passage, there is an aura of wonder projected onto the subversive symbolism of Kesey’s piano destruction, undermining the journalists attempts at intellectually ruminating on the destruction of Perry Lane. Clearly, this antipathy towards the “reporters and photographers” can be traced back to aesthetic and moral grievances about the consumptive distance of normative journalism. For Wolfe, “the mass media fail[s] because they impose formulas and close themselves off from experience,” and, as a narrator and a journalist, Wolfe uses literary stylistics—such as intersubjective narration—as a means to not merely to comprehend, but to empathize with and mirror the experience of the literary or journalistic subject (Wolfe 53 and Hellmann 124). Using a style of narration thought only passable within strictly literary works, Wolfe argues that the only way to understand the truth of another’s experience is to experience intersubjectivity, something which is attainable when consciousnesses meld between the author, the reader, and the novel’s characters.

While this style of literary news writing perpetuated by New Journalism presents a more cohesive effort towards understanding the truth of a particular matter, Wolfe’s creative methodology might also have ethical or moral implications. In Wolfe’s intersubjective prose, the reader becomes empathically intertwined with the character projected by the narration, experiencing their thoughts, feelings, and ideas as if they are inherent within themselves. When the consciousness of the text melds with the mind of the reader, there is no violent act of possession: “the annexation of [the reader’s] consciousness by another (the other which is the

work), in no way implies that [the reader] is the victim of any deprivation of consciousness” (Poulet 47). To the contrary, the reader experiences an empathic link between their consciousness and that of the text. Empathy, which is considered “a key element of our human social nature and an essential prerequisite for our moral development” by “the neuroscientific discipline of behavioral science,” is a necessary part of Wolfe’s aesthetic project (Severino and Morrison 140). Traditional journalism, which Wolfe parodies in the above passage, is unable to experience the intersubjective or the empathetic due to the hegemonic constraints of generic traditionalism. Through the stylistic liberation of New Journalism, Wolfe is able to project the lived experience of Kesey and the Pranksters—and their pursuit of the intersubjective—by creating an intersubjective literary experience.

To concretize the ethical and aesthetic implications of Wolfe’s intersubjective stylistics, it is pertinent to look at the passages where the form, stylistics, and content overlap to create this psychedelic, dissociative experience. While Wolfe sometimes expresses incredulity at his own task, he dons the voice of the psychonaut for his own self-doubt: “But these are *words*, man! *And you couldn’t put it into words*” (44, Wolfe’s emphasis). The medical community, nicknamed “The White Smocks” tried to put the intersubjective into words, “like *hallucination* and *dissociative phenomena*” (44). Rather than trying to coolly and dispassionately describing the intersubjective, Wolfe uses a stream of consciousness style of narration to blend the dissolution of separate selves.

Describing a psychedelic frenzy on the DayGlo bus, rumbling through the open roads of Arizona in 1964, the narrator first presents the interior mindscape of “Gretchen Fetchin the Slime Queen” (Wolfe 78). Diving into her interior conscious thought, the narrator announces that “she looks at—Babbs—who tripped over her shadow?—HMMMMMMMMM?” (78-79). Encountering

a separate self, Babbs, the interior frame becomes kaleidoscopic, shifting from Babbs to Gretchen and back again: “So many shadows and shafts of the Southwest sun bouncing in and through the windows and all over the floor, over the benches over the bunk uprights bouncing out of the freaking road of the engine bouncing” (79). Suddenly, the reader is unable to trace the centrality of this tactile stimuli. The alliterative quality of the prose, highlighting the “shadows and shafts of the Southwest sun” creates an internal rhythm, “bouncing in” and “over the benches [and] over the bunk” (79). While literature emancipates the reader from simply sensing through a single skin, Wolfe’s interior frame shifts rapidly, vacillating through “two sets of Gretch eyes two sets of Babbs eyes, four sets of Gretch eyes four sets of Babbs... all grinning vibrating bouncing in among one another” (79). As Gretchen and Babbs experience the intersubjective, the “*synch[ing]* in,” the reader is also taken along for the ride (78). In this passage, the consciousness of the reader, the writer, and the characters is melded, and the critical distance between these separate entities is nonexistent. The sentence, which is composed without a comma or period to individualize the conscious thoughts, ends with “you understand” (79). Pertinently, this is not a question of comprehension posed to the reader, but a declarative statement. In this sentence, the narrator assumes that the reader fully empathizes with the experience of Gretchen and Babbs because their interior experience is inseparable from them. The reader, the narrator, and the characters are not differentiated entities; rather, they are open selves: mimetically experiencing their conscious world.

Unlike the narration of Thompson, who rigorously embeds his narrative voice in all of his characters and experiences, Wolfe’s narrative voice is patently absent, only functioning as the arranger of separate selves. As the reader’s experience of the characters is mimetic, the consciousness of the novel’s characters is mimed by the narrator as well. The idea of mimesis

can be traced back to *The Republic*, where Socrates and Adeimantus argue about whether or not poetry has a place in the ideal city. In their discussion, they argue about the poet who “gives as a speech as though he were someone else” (393c). This discussion of mimetic imitation, referred to in the original Greek as *mimesthai*, is “conclude[d] with the condemnation of one particular kind of imitation” (Belfiore 122). Both men agree, with regards to mimetic imitation, that “there [will be] no such man among us in the [ideal] city, nor [will it be] lawful for such a man to be born there” (398a). However, in one logical aside, Socrates proposes that “when as sensible man comes in his narrative to some speech or deed of a good man,” he will have no trouble “report[ing] it as though he himself were that man and won’t be ashamed of such an imitation” (396c).

For Wolfe’s narrative, this raises ethical concerns about the intersubjectivity and mimesis between the journalist/the characters and the characters/the reader. While the reader has essential agency in his/her right to put down the book, textually constructed mimesis between the journalist and the characters completely disintegrates any shred of journalistic credibility. When the journalist and the subject of analysis are projected through a blended consciousness, the critical distance one expects from the traditional relationship between journalist and subject is entirely nonexistent. This contextualizes the argumentative need for Wolfe’s consistent denigration of the archetypal journalist, and, also, it brings about questions about where the author’s voice is actually present. As the passages of Wolfe and Thompson show, the writers of New Journalism are more concerned with how the story is projected than the explicit veracity of the story itself. However, Wolfe seems to be desirous of achieving journalistic truth while donning the mimetic voice of the novel’s characters, a mimetic voice that Socrates wants banished from the ideal city. In effect, Wolfe wants to maintain narrative objectivity while using

a mimetic voice, trying to find what John Hellmann refers to as “a dynamic balance between the fictive nature of its created form and the factual nature of its content” (110). So, as the literary quirks of Wolfe’s prose have been thoroughly extrapolated, a look at the objective claims of the prose must be evaluated as well.

This desire to maintain critical distance is clearly shown within the framing passages of *the Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. In the opening chapter, Wolfe describes his first meeting with the psychedelic patriarch, Kesey, in the San Mateo County jail. In this passage, Wolfe maintains a simple, first person perspective, describing the moment that he spotted Ken Kesey for the first time: “he is standing up with his arms folded over his chest and his eyes focused in the distance, i.e., the wall” (7). In this passage, Wolfe utilizes simple narrative exposition, describing the physical details such as his “pair of sternocleidomastoid muscles that rise up out of the prison workshift like a couple of dock ropes” (7). Kesey then spots Wolfe, and the two crouch down to have a brief chat before Kesey is released. Wolfe narrates, saying “then I pick up my telephone and he picks up his—and this is truly Modern Times. We are all of twenty-four inches apart, but there is a piece of plate glass as thick as a telephone directory between us” (7). This plexiglass divider between Wolfe and Kesey serves as an analogous symbol for the distance that Wolfe hopes to maintain as a narrator. While the physical distance between Kesey and Wolfe is literally two feet, there is a lag in the transmission of Kesey’s ideas to Wolfe’s pen. Wolfe acknowledges this distance: “we might as well be in different continents, talking over Videophone. The telephones are crackly and lo-fi, especially considering that they have a world of two feet to span” (8-9).

This facetious commentary on the transmission of vocal sound in the prison telephone booth can be compared to the mimetic experience in the act of reading. The mimetic experience

that the reader undergoes in the act of reading is not an immediate transmission of a cohesive interiority. Poulet describes this brief disconnect between the reader and the textual content as a lag, “a sort of schizoid disconnection between what [the reader] feel[s] and what the other feels” (47-48). The reader experiences “a confused awareness of delay, so that the works seems first to think by itself, and then to inform me of what it has thought” (Poulet 48). The mimetic experience that the reader has with the text is not entirely complete, and there remains a neural disconnect between the reader and the text itself. This “schizoid disconnection” that Poulet describes is a perfect metaphor for the transmission of Kesey’s ideas through Wolfe’s pen. The Ken Kesey that is transmitted by Wolfe’s narrative is not the embodied, objective Kesey that conducted the acid tests in the pursuit of intersubjectivity; rather, the Ken Kesey of the novel is the figure trapped behind the plexiglass window in the San Mateo county jail.

While this may appear to be a mundane observation on the relationship between the reader/the text and the author/the characters, this disconnect highlights the aesthetic goals of the New Journalism. As Wolfe includes passages that describe him “scribbling like mad, in shorthand, in the notebook” at the opening of the novel, this intrusive narration by the archetypal journalist frames this text as journalistic (8). Generically, this signals to the reader that “distortions and biases, the subjective value judgements of the individual or of particular interests groups, are filtered out,” so that all that remains is an objective transmission of veracious fact (McLaughlin 39). However, Wolfe’s prose effectively counteracts this generic rigidity, narrating the transmission of perceptual, factual information about current events by acknowledging the imperfections in the transmission. Wolfe is not a perfect authorial channel for the voice of Kesey; in reality, “his voice crackled over the telephone like it was coming from Brisbane” while he was in California (Wolfe 8). Even though the reader is exposed to the

interiority of the novel's characters through the mimetic experience, one cannot be sure which is a true representation of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, or what is a product of implicit authorial maneuvering to adjust or embellish the story itself. In other words, when is the transmission from author to reader clear and true, without the influence of any static or interference?

In this case, inquiries into this question may present a self-defeating task, or perhaps the question contains the answer. As Wolfe presents a narrative in which the novel's characters are trying to find truth about the intersubjective experience, the narrator—mirroring the communitarian goal of the novel's characters—pushes back against the idea that he must “get into his role of the Journalist Reporter Observer” (159). When the journalist presents his/herself as “*outside*, sane, detached,” they are just that: removed and disconnected passive observers of the visual, aural, and emotive stimuli, but “sane” (159). While these rigid, objective approaches to journalism are received as being closer to the truth, the passivity of this style of prose for both the writer and the reader makes the text unchanging and lifeless. For traditional print journalism, questions about the reader's response are purposeless and misleading, because the text speaks for itself. As Stanley Fish reveals, some critics believe the “palpable objectivity of the text is immediately available,” so there is no point in delving into the consciousness of others to explore the reader's response (43). However, in actuality, “the objective of the text is an illusion, and moreover, a dangerous illusion because it is so physically convincing” (43). The presentation of an objective work is one “of self-sufficiency and completeness,” and the text is unshifting and unchanging despite the context by which it is received (43). In his prose, Wolfe pushes back against this idea of objective completeness by showing how his understanding of the Prankster's was born by trying to grasp at and effectively represent their true interiority. In order to

understand the experience of another, the reader, the author, and the journalist must strive to empathize with the other's experience: comprehending them mimetically, subjectively, while atoning to the inadequacy of one's ability to do so perfectly.

Therefore, even though there is static and interference in the intersubjective, the prosaic pursuit of objectivity presents an alternative which is distant and incomprehensive. As Wolfe's prose reminds us, to understand the truth of the matter, one must try to find a subjective truth, mediated by personal experience and the experience of others: a truth through the intersubjective.

Conclusion

Throughout the historical and modern attempts at presenting information on current events, historical movements, and political revolutions, the interior truth of journalism is irrevocably present. For the colonial journalists, their polemical journalism spurred on the fight for American independence from British imperialism, yet their initial motivation was driven by a concern for their pocketbooks. Attempts at concocting a journalism of objectivity were not even beginning to simmer, and the American journalism of the eighteenth century was used primarily as a platform for creating political unrest and lodging assassinations of personal character. A hundred years later, the newspaper wars of the nineteenth century presented a journalism which was equally as vitriolic as the screed found within the colonial newspapers. As shown by my account of the battle between the *Free Press* and *Weekly Post* in the Detroit area, newspapers divided themselves into papers for a primary, political purpose, part of a political category: Republican or Democrat. This meant that the news was actively being shaped and contorted by the self-admitted, ideological perspective of each individual paper.

In response to this, modern journalism—a temporally defined period of American journalism from the 1920's to the present—presented itself as presenting reliable news that hinged upon an implicit system of ethics. In response to this rigid system of rules that was loosely defined and imperfectly followed, the New Journalists created a style of journalism that hybridized novelistic aesthetics with a journalistic approach to research: delving into the core of the story and framing the narrative that centered around the personal and the interpersonal. In *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail of 1972*, Thompson acts as an intrusive, faulty narrator who actively mediates, interprets, and transforms the narrative progression. By orchestrating the narrative—and the narrative's actors—around the explicit characterological quirks of

Thompson's subjectivity, the author presents a diegesis which is bumpy and uneven, actively highlighting the failures and obscurantism of his prose. Thompson, projecting himself as entirely untrustworthy, is wholly untrusting of any journalist making claims towards trustworthiness or objectivity. By crafting a political analysis and a narrative on political reporting which wears its bias on its sleeve, Thompson warns readers against putting their faith in the narrators, or journalists, who are presenting objective prose. For Thompson, writing objective prose is a task motivated by bad faith, undermining the participation of the reader and narrator in the construction of each narrative.

Like Thompson, Wolfe creates a journalistic narrative which questions the honesty or utility of presenting a narrative which is free from authorial influence. In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, he explores the philosophies and interiorities of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters: a group of "psychonauts" exploring the possibility of finding intersubjectivity and empathy through the psychedelic experience. Mirroring this spiritual pursuit in a highly stylized narration, Wolfe evokes the psychedelic experience through a dislocation of the narrative voice, presenting a multiplicity of subjective voices which serve as the channels for the story's progression. In contrast to Thompson, Wolfe's narrative allows for a mimetic experience among reader, narrator, and the subjects of the narrative itself. In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, truth and mutual understanding are inseparable from the channel by which they are transmitted, whether that be from the text to the reader or the characters through the author. Like Thompson, Wolfe casts a downward glance on those journalists who try to project an objective narrative, focusing on the journey towards a subjective knowing rather a race towards an objective certainty. Textually, the question of bias is irrelevant and the presence is taken as granted, because the voice of the narrator/journalist is submerged within the interiority of the novel's characters.

For the three so-called “new journalists” discussed above, the quest for objectivity is elusive, misfocused and self-defeating. In their aesthetic choices, both Thompson and Wolfe show that striving for objectivity leaves gaps in the knowledge gathered by the reader. By using novelistic narrative techniques as a means to mitigate against the hegemony of an archetypal, objective journalism, the New Journalists show that literary aesthetics can achieve a truth which does not have to be cold and methodical. As readers rely on the news media for factual information about local, national, and global events, the work of Thompson and Wolfe may seem like a betrayal of modern journalism’s role as an epistemological mediator. Rather, the authors seem to urge readers to actively explore the assumptions of the author, the medium of the text, and the reception of that text by the reader. In essence, passive faith in the veracity of modern media is inadequate, and readers must hold themselves and journalists accountable in order to reestablish confidence in the truth claims of the modern media.

In the epoch of Trumpian politics, the distrust that the American public feels towards the media is justified by the precedent set by polemical, political press of prior American journalism. However, there is an inadequacy and short-sightedness in this distrust and dismissal, an inadequacy fueled by a politicized antipathy between the mainstream media and the White House. This view of the media—resting on an expectation of objectivity—falsely characterizes the generic, creative limitations of journalism. This view also undermines the role of the author in constructing their text, and presents news as dead texts rather than channels for active selves. If journalism were to become more experimental and creatively literary, this may help dissuade the truth claims that make journalism an easy target for critique.

However, I am not arguing that journalism should be entirely literary. The analysis of Thompson and Wolfe through the lens of literary criticism, narratology, and reader-response

theory simply shows that nonfictional representations follow the same formal rules as fiction. By exploring how journalism is received by the audience and revealing how the self constructs the story, I have intended to reveal that the study of journalism does not have to be inhibited by a cognitive myopia centered around objectivity. In the professional and academic circles of journalism, “journalists themselves have internalised” the critique of objectivity “and often seem unwilling or unable to offer a robust defence of what was once a defining ethic of the profession” (Calcutt and Hammond 97). Therefore, it is time to advance the frame of critique from objectivity and its prevalent failures towards analyses of authors who are subverting this stale hegemonic restraint. Whereas Wolfe and Thompson contorted the limitations of their genre to comment on their current historical moment, modern journalists and authors must critically reevaluate their place in the cultural consciousness. For now, readers, authors, critics must seek out a Newer Journalism.

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