

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

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

II. Author (name and contact info)

John Pauly
Saint Louis University
Department of Communication
3733 W. Pine
Xavier 300
St. Louis, MO 63108
Office phone: 314-977-3192
Fax: 314-977-3195
E-mail: pauly @ slu.edu
Home:
7651 Carswold Drive
St. Louis, MO 63105
314-725-4327

III. General Description of the Work

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV. Work's Central Argument

A. 25-Word Version:

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

B. 250-Word Version:

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

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

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

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

V. Table of Contents

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

The New Journalism as Discourse

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

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

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

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

Chapter 3. The New Journalism, and the Old

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

The New Journalism as Practice

Chapter 4. The Journalist as Cultural Critic

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

Chapter 5. The Journalist as Entrepreneur

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

Chapter 6. The Journalist as Anti-Hero

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

Chapter 7. The Journalist as Ethnographer

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

The New Journalism as Memory

Chapter 8. The Invention of Literary Journalism and Creative Nonfiction

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

Conclusion

Chapter 9. Whatever Became of the New Journalism?

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