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## **Bloodsport: Thomas Goltz and the Journalist's Diary of War**

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# BLOODSPORT: THOMAS GOLTZ AND THE JOURNALIST'S DIARY OF WAR

KYLIE CARDELL

*How did I really intend to contribute, aside from maybe celebrating my own bravery, cloaked in a story about the well-known horrors of war?*

—Thomas Goltz, *Chechnya Diary* (278)

In a cultural moment that values the production of personal, locally oriented narrative about experience, and that privileges the eyewitness point of view, it is not surprising that journalists should turn to genres of life narrative to represent and negotiate the exigencies of their profession. Moreover, as Barbie Zelizer indicates in *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy*, journalism—and journalists—are now being broadly refigured. The impact of new media technologies (the Internet, podcasting, blogging), new ethical questions (9/11, Iraq, “the war on terror”), and new journalistic identities (as celebrities and “citizen journalists”) on the practice of journalism has become a prominent public concern.<sup>1</sup> Because of a recent turn to life narrative by journalists attempting to negotiate changing perceptions and changing implications of the journalistic “I,” it seems timely to examine certain critical convergences between journalists and life narrative. This article examines a particular nexus of this convergence, between journalism and journaling, and a particularly potent context, that of war correspondence.

Contemporary war journalists use life narratives to focus on their profession, and to make ethical and moral dilemmas visible. They re-construct in public the autobiographical “I” of the journalistic subject as it is formulated in a war zone, and negotiate with an ethics of being there and seeing that is founded in witnessing. This is not a new phenomenon, but a form of journalistic engagement that exists in a tradition of self-reflexive war correspondence over the last century. Ernest Hemingway is perhaps the most prominent precursor, along with Michael Herr, and John Pilger or Ryszard Kapuscinski the best known lately. Discussing Hemingway, Zelizer argues:

Journalism is most often appreciated when it turns into a nonjournalistic phenomenon. When Ernest Hemingway worked as a reporter . . . his journalistic experiences were seen as an “apprenticeship” for his later work, and his writing was dismissed as “just journalism.” But when he turned portions of that same material verbatim into fiction, it was heralded as literature. (1)

For Zelizer, this turn represents a failure to appreciate journalism on its own terms, and is symptomatic of a widespread trivialization of journalistic writing. It may be argued, however, that journalists in more recent times have consciously negotiated with the genre, not as a way of moving past journalism—an indication of its inadequacy as a literary form—but as a means of extending, revealing, and complicating its uses in the representation of certain kinds of journalistic experience. Discussing *Dispatches*, Herr’s autobiographical account of reporting the Vietnam War, Matthew Stewart argues that Herr’s distinctive style, in which he departs from “conventional journalism” by mixing experience and rumor, and supplying only “haphazardly” the “basic facts about Vietnam” (194), is not a parody of journalism, or an attempt to leave it behind, but is instead a practice “intent on breaking the rules of ordinary journalism” as an exigency of reporting in this location (189). Herr “is inventing a new journalism capable of allowing him to cover the war” (195). For Kapuscinski, whom Mark Mordue called the “magical realist of journalism,” self-reflexive reportage is also a symptom of culture:

The contemporary man, living in the world conjured up by the media of illusions and appearances, simulacra and fables, feeling instinctively that he is fed untruth, hypocrisy, falsehood, and virtual manipulation, seeks something that has the power of truth and reality, things authentic, that is. (Kapuscinski)

I am interested in how diary intersects with these things. Melissa Wall notes, “war reporters have often occupied what has been seen as a unique position within journalism, a liminal space within which the rules of reporting could be violated and even re-imagined” (111). Similarly, the diary has often been considered a subversive or troubling genre for life narrative, outside of and disruptive to acts of self-representation and autobiography as it has been canonically conceived. Following Rachael Langford and Russell West, I see the diary as a vibrant site for cultural critique and interrogation:

The diary emerges as a crystallisation of overlapping practices which situate it not on the margins of various domains of social practice, but, in so far as it stands at the intersection of those various cultural cross-roads, place it in the midst of cultural practices, and make it a significant indicator of the contemporary cultural climate. (7)

This article, then, examines how the diary accrues particular rhetorical effects in the production of contemporary war narratives by journalists. For example, life narrative has recently proven a popular mode for journalists reporting in Iraq, and the diary has been a prominent genre of this production.<sup>2</sup> In his published diary *In Baghdad: A Reporter's War* (2003), Australian journalist Paul McGeough represents and negotiates with the practice of journalism in the Baghdad conflict zone. The book's two separate but entwined narratives—each day is divided into two accounts, a “filed report” and a diary entry—represent two distinct spheres: the public and the private aspect of the war correspondent. Juxtaposing these narratives reveals what is “filed” for the public, but also what is otherwise left out of a mass media frame. So McGeough uses his diary to present existing excess material, but also to position this excess as personal: not just leftover journalism but something more, a supplement to the narrow frame of mass news production. Two halves, two zones, of discourse and information are thus brought together to create a whole.

This article examines a contemporary war correspondent, Thomas Goltz, who in a body of work detailing his experiences reporting war in the post-Soviet Caucasus during the 1990s, negotiates with the personal narrative mode of the diary. Diary is a particularly important form in this kind of representation—first because of its convergence with journalistic ethos and practice; second because of the discursive implications of the genre as both close to reality and realistic (devoid of artifice); and third because of the popular appeal of the genre as a mode for representing the ordinary, the everyday, and the authentic within the context of extraordinary events like war. An American writing from and about the war-torn Caucasus during the 1990s, Goltz wants to make visible his individual ethical and moral response to reporting war in this zone. He uses the diary strategically to re-insert the body of the journalist, in response to the idea of reporters as “perfectly neutral vessels who only see and record” (*Chechnya Diary* 11). Like Herr and Kapuscinski before him, Goltz wants to find a way to represent his experience, and that of the people he is reporting on, which is both accurate and authentic. He chooses the diary as the form of representation in which he can begin to do justice to lives on the ground in Azerbaijan, Chechnya, and Georgia, while at the same time meeting his obligation to his publisher and accessing a mass market.

Despite the fact that he has published three volumes of diaries, *Azerbaijan Diary: A Rogue Reporter's Adventures in a War-Torn, Oil-Rich, Post-Soviet Republic* (1998), *Chechnya Diary: A War Correspondent's Story of Surviving the War in Chechnya* (2003), and *Georgia Diary: A Chronicle of War and Political Chaos in the Post-Soviet Caucasus* (2006), Goltz is a reluctant diarist. For

him, the diary is a political tool; the problem is that it is also a personal device. This article focuses on the second in Goltz's "Caucasus trilogy," *Chechnya Diary*, to explore the conjunction between journaling and journalism, and to examine a possible location for contemporary use of the diary. Documenting a known but now relatively obscure conflict, the Russo-Chechen war of the mid-1990s, in *Chechnya Diary* Goltz wants to tell a Chechen story—though one in which he has become implicated—that can travel convincingly to an audience in the West whose interests are elsewhere. In his diaries, but explicitly in *Chechnya Diary*, Goltz represents his experience of war journalism as a challenge to the idealization of the foreign correspondent as a necessarily benign witness to conflict. His personal, self-reflexive narrative problematizes the relationship between the war journalist as a just witness and as a war voyeur, or "purveyor of brutality." For Goltz, "The problem arises when one begins to understand that one is risking one's own life—and by extension, the lives of those around one—not so much to edify, or enlighten, but to *entertain*" (*Chechnya Diary* 11). It is a problem he first pins to journalism, but as he becomes increasingly aware, it is equally a problem implicit within his attempts to represent his experience in diary. Goltz uses personal narrative to satisfy the public desire for transparency in journalistic practice, and to represent a conflicted professional "I"—the fractured self of war, the traumatized witness to conflict, the exhilarated eyewitness to history. His diary emerges from these goals, but it is also profoundly complicated by them.

### JOURNALISTS JOURNALING

There is a critical convergence between the profession of journalism and the practice of diary writing. "Originating from the idea of one who 'writes in a journal, or diary,'" says Zelizer, "the term 'journalist' initially connoted someone who systematically kept a record of certain happenings within a specified time frame and who tended to make that record public" (21). Similarly, Rachel Cottam notices that journal is a term often used for diary, but also for newspapers and magazines: "both diary and journal are derived from roots meaning 'day', but only rarely is a diary written daily" (268). Nonetheless, both the diary and the journal invoke an authoritative connection to the daily as a consequence of their immersed perspective and serial, chronological ordering. Journalism, too, is a daily production, though not always written daily—there is a tension between journalism as a process of information gathering, and as a process of information production that is forever "breaking"; that is, tied to the common assumption that news is always somehow novel. Dailiness is therefore a key rhetorical mode of both diaries and journalism, and

this sense of immediacy distinguishes the diary from other genres of autobiography, and journalism from other forms of cultural history.<sup>3</sup>

As familiar, authoritative, cultural figures, journalists organize and make knowable events from elsewhere. “The notion that they do ‘the first draft of history,’” says Ulf Hannerz, “is one that many newspeople seem fond of” (214). Though with less cachet than news-makers, diarists can have a similar objective. The diary allows an individual to bring into perspective the meaning and significance of a life or experience, and then make it knowable and transmissible to an “other”—a future self, or perhaps posterity. Part of this effect is structural. Diary narrative allows for a reader to watch a self unfold and change over time. This effect is authoritative as a mark of authenticity. For example, when discussing the military memoirs of the critic and author Paul Fussell, Alex Vernon is struck by the significance Fussell attaches to diurnal forms as “the most faithful historical record” (23). For Fussell, “the further personal written materials move from the form of the daily diary, the closer they approach the figurative and the fictional” (310–11). In both diary and journalism, the sense of temporal proximity to narrated events creates a particular authority, derived from being closer to the reality of an event, to the “as it happened.” Particularly during times of war, this is a seductive effect.

A journalist, however, is expected to provide transparent discourse about public events, while a diarist is usually assumed to offer something similar about private life. A journalist is assumed to write for and be accountable to the public, while a diarist writes primarily in private, and for the self. Diarists thus assume a certain privilege. Because they seem to avoid the kind of circumspection public representation is assumed to enforce, they appear to offer a more faithful representation, devoid of “affectation or restraint.”<sup>4</sup> For journalists in the field, the diaries they keep may function as *aides-mémoires* for inscribing news, as data banks from which stories are drawn, or even as therapeutic practice. But when journalists publish diaries, they make a different use of the genre, one that invokes the discursive connection of the form with private experience. In short, they use the diary as a place for representing a self-conscious journalistic “I.” Indeed, publishing a diary can in itself be a rhetorical act. As a supplement to what has already been articulated through news media and by Goltz himself as a correspondent, a work like *Chechnya Diary* builds on popular assumptions of news media as duplicitous, but in a way that proffers an authoritative alternative. Journalists’ diaries affirm the popular logic that only certain kinds of stories are admissible in the mass media frame. Diaries also speak to a cultural discourse that privileges individual, ordinary, and private experience as the location for what is authentic and

real. The diary is assumed to be less constructed, less censored, and therefore more authentic as a mode for representation. Langford and West capture the drama of this effect, which is also a desire: “the diarist is swept up in events which deprive him of all power of self-determination, except that of writing from the immediacy of events” (12).

Diaries are embedded in a cultural rhetoric that privileges non-artistry, and considers the lack—or the appearance of the lack—of deliberation and construction as a sign of authenticity. Whenever information is feared as propaganda, and particularly in times of war, this is a seductive effect. Since the diary obscures the origins of its production, even when published, it is regarded as less artificial—though it may use artifice—than other autobiographical modes. Journalism performs a similar rhetorical move. In both modes, the urgency to record is seen to impair considerably aesthetic intent. In her entry on “War Diaries and Journals” in *The Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, Andrea Peterson notes that “it would seem likely that war diaries might eschew both literary creativity and style simply because they are often written hastily by exhausted, traumatised and terrified people” (926). Diaries are not expected to possess an inherent transcendent aesthetic value. They are regarded as cultural documents rather than as self-consciously artistic pursuits: useful for the representation of *other* kinds of experience and knowledge, such as the domestic or the day-to-day, and that are passed over in the history of grand ideas or public progress. Journalists’ diaries of war confound this perception.

That the diary is any less susceptible to the application of artistry or technique—even during a time of urgency or crisis—is a myth of the genre, and even an inherent contradiction. Diarists are often skilled writers and recorders of the moment-to-moment. Indeed, where the journal is being taught as a method—an increasingly common pedagogy—Philippe Lejeune notes the author is often “warned against the temptation to overwrite, which is harmful to sincerity” (*On Autobiography* 227). Likewise, we may note that journalists are encouraged and trained to adopt a simple writing style and to avoid elaborate phrasing, for a similar reason to the diarist: to produce a sincere effect (which is to not say they are not sincere). Because it appears to contest what a diary should be (naive and non-literary) and should do (confess private experience), a journalist’s use of the diary points to one location of the contemporary diary, but also throws into relief larger questions and assumptions about the use of personal narrative in the telling of public history. Examining how a journalist like Goltz uses diary, and for what ends, draws some of these concerns into view, making visible those “materially-determined fault lines between—and thus within—categories habitually regarded as stable and



unproblematic” (Langford and West 9). Diaries, particularly by prominent public figures like journalists, show the tensions between public and private, self and experience, fact and fiction that attend to acts of self-representation.

### **BEING THERE AND SEEING: GOLTZ, DIARY, AND “CONTACT JOURNALISM”**

Thomas Goltz is a documentary filmmaker, an author, and a war correspondent. He is a North American, and he refers frequently to his farm in Montana—but only rarely to his wife. He has spent a decade reporting in Turkey, and nearly as long again in and out of neighboring regions. *Azerbaijan Diary* is a lengthy and detailed account following Azerbaijan’s declaration of independence from the Soviet Union. Living in the capital Baku, speaking Turkish and immersion-learning Azeri, he attracts a “strange collection of hosts . . . that most tourists could never be privy to” (9), and in doing so, he fulfills an ethic that is also a methodology. Goltz calls this “History as Contact Journalism,” and it is a corporeal claim to authority: “If you don’t get bumped around a bit (as in blood sports like football and ice hockey), you have no business talking (or writing) about a place” (xi). Against a mass of misinformation elsewhere, this account, he asserts, is “definitive,” and his method of being on the ground when it matters and reporting only what he sees is his basis for that claim (xi). Immersion, then, is a tactic Goltz sees as necessary for faithful representation; it is also a method connected to generic assumptions about diaries. “This is a very complex book,” warns one reviewer, “because of the countless details that a diary contains” (Laska 82).

Discussing personal writing in general, Susanna Egan notes that in acquiring the sense of a life, it is diary entries—or conversations, poems, and letters—that promise “the deepest access,” and as such, are a contrast to autobiography: “the finished product called the story of his life,” and a form that therefore covers over the kinds of fissures or cracks where “truly revealing detail may lie” (21). Personal modes may be “less coherent,” says Egan, but they therefore “are more intimate” (22). But Goltz wants to be personal *and* objective, intimate *and* scholarly—he doesn’t want to be seen as sacrificing depth or as being self-absorbed. He reveals this in an oscillating set of autobiographical constructions of himself as journalist and narrator. He asserts himself as the “rogue” journalist of his subtitle, a member of the “informational shock-troops” on the ground determined to get the facts at any cost (xi). But he also asks his reader to consider him an “imperfect yet enthusiastic guide,” and a well-meaning bumbler: “the idealistic character of the Doonesbury comic strip” (xii). Goltz thus frames a dual purpose for his book. It is entertainment, but also history; diary, but also journalism. For reviewer

George Harris, these purposes betray “a split personality” in the work, and reflect a tactic that ultimately fails: “In the final analysis *Azerbaijan Diary* is not the authoritative presentation promised: It is one man’s personal account” (645). Harris’s criticism expresses an ambivalence that dogs Goltz. By foregrounding subjectivity and experience, Goltz gets bumped around a bit. He gets to know the people and their customs “from the inside,” but he risks the authority journalism conveys, however idealistically, to its practice as being one of fact and truth—of objectivity, not subjectivity. Goltz’s brand of personally engaged, self-reflexive journalism in diary form becomes “just journaling” to a critic like Harris, and its careful accounting of detail is just another life story. For Goltz, the effect of his text as a diary, the benefits and burdens of this kind of personal narrative, will become a point of particular focus for his next publication, *Chechnya Diary*.

### COLLECTING “BANG-BANG”: JOURNALISM’S “ATROCIOUS PRIVILEGE”

The remote western Chechnya village of Samashki is an unprepossessing location for covering the Russo-Chechen conflicts of the mid-1990s. When his illegal Chechen guide leads him there unexpectedly, Goltz fears he may have been kidnapped; there seems no other reason to be in the town. Nonetheless, he shoots “generic B-roll footage” of smashed-up houses, shattered furniture, and stoic villagers (*Chechnya Diary* 84). Commissioned by the American news program *Nightline*, he is in Chechnya to make “a one-man television documentary” on “the Chechen spirit” (5). His objective is straightforward:

My plan was to spend a few days in the town, get to know some folks, go out on a few missions, and then get out while the place was obliterated. In the best of all possible worlds, I would accomplish the getting out while the obliteration was taking place. In the television trade, this is called collecting “bang-bang.” (6)

Samashki is disappointing on the conflict front, and a “pretty weak brew compared to what was going on in Grozny a mere twenty miles away” (84), but Goltz stays—partly because he only has a “makeshift” Russian-issued press pass, a fact guaranteed to irk the local bureaucracy and to make traveling difficult, but mostly because he has unexpectedly found what he has been looking for in Hussein, commander of the local resistance: “With a jolt I understood that the man standing in front of me was exactly the sort of vessel I needed to explain the essence and nature of the Chechen spirit” (90). Goltz explains the documentary to Hussein, but skips the clichés. He wants to claim that this documentary will motivate American audiences to support the Chechen cause, but Hussein’s assertion is blunt: “You want to build a

career on this experience” (92). Hussein’s charge is an indictment: it casts Goltz as a media mercenary, and Goltz frets about this. After all, his presence in this war zone is derived from a market pressure, and not just a personal philosophy about capturing “real” detail. American audiences—and importantly, American news editors—desire footage from the thick of it. Goltz is alert and compliant to this demand. He timed his visit to Chechnya to “coincide with Genocide Commemoration Day of February 23–24 because I was sure it would make good television” (104). He needs the tense ethnic rivalries between Chechens and Russians to erupt so that he can capture on film the “bang bang folks at home find so very entertaining.” Has he really “bought into the idea of war as entertainment” (123)? Goltz wants to refute Hussein’s charge, but finds he cannot.

The Chechen resistance fighter Hussein is a moral and narrative center of *Chechnya Diary*. The frontispiece photo is of Hussein and his family, and in his acknowledgments Goltz thanks, “at the top” of his list, “Hussein and his extended family, who invited me into their lives during a brief period of extreme confusion and duress. I doubt any will ever see this work” (ix). This poignant dedication, preceding the gung-ho bravado of the opening narrative, signals the seriousness of Goltz’s project, and its complexity. Admitting that he had “sallied forth” with “an overly romantic view of Chechnya and the Chechens . . . how this little people could rally their resources to fend off the overwhelming force of the might of the Russian army” (“Conversation”), in Hussein, he found the noble figure he desired: “a farmer defending his home” (*Chechnya Diary* 90). But the urgency of Hussein’s plight, and the daily reality of the village’s defensive endeavors, does not just illuminate Goltz’s story, it discomfits his integrity. Goltz finds his own presence in the conflict zone—and his reasons for being there—edging ineluctably closer to something other than witness:

Waiting for some shell to fall close enough that I get a good, solid “bang” but hopefully far away enough that I don’t die in the process. Just the people who have been looking after and feeding me and washing my boots after a hard day’s slog through the mud. Jesus Christ. I am worse than the usual casual voyeur of the death and destruction of strangers. I actively want the death and destruction of my friends because if it does not happen I do not have “a story.” (104)

In this second *Diary*, Goltz is also overtly concerned with ethnographic questions:

Are journalists’ perfectly neutral vessels who only see and record? Or does their very presence at critical moments make people act differently than they would

have had the journalist not been there at all? What happens when the story becomes more than that—when it becomes life? When does the observer affect the observed? (12)

This question, as much ideological as it is philosophical, cuts to the heart of his growing ambivalence and unease with the professional guise of war correspondent. After all, Goltz tells us that he “sallied forth” with not just a romantic view of Chechens, but also of his own potency in this zone: “This is common to many journalists, young and old, namely, the belief that the article you will write, that the television program that you shoot, will be so effective that the viewer, that the reader, will stand up and shout, ‘Stop! Stop this war! Stop this madness!’” (“Conversation”). But it is this kind of naked, naive, idealism he resisted using on Hussein, and the kind of romanticized image of the benevolent and effortlessly effective reporter that Goltz wants to reject, even as he acknowledges its uses: “maybe this is the pretence that you have at a certain point as a journalist, because otherwise it would be almost impossible to do your job in these extremely difficult circumstances” (“Conversation”). He wants to discard a construction of the war reporter as “neutral vessel,” and he wants to problematize the assumptions of journalists as witnesses, but doing so risks his own position, undermining his self-perception as an ethical subject. “My contact with Hussein,” writes Goltz, “has led me to ask a number of uncomfortable questions of myself and others involved in journalism, especially in areas and times of war and crisis” (*Chechnya Diary* 11). His diary provides both an opportunity and a problem: to work through the “uncomfortable questions” of war journalism.

Day by day Goltz finds himself absorbed into village life, and in the urgency and the reality of the Chechen cause. On a reconnaissance excursion, he jumps in to stop a SCUD missile rolling off the back of a truck. It is a defining moment: “If there are moments when the never-touch-a-weapon-on-either-side rule taught to prospective war correspondents is to be violated, perhaps this was mine. I dropped my camera in the mud and threw my shoulders and legs and back into the task at hand” (98). This act, albeit of self-preservation, earns Goltz an unexpected measure of approval. Previously surly Chechen rebels offer backslaps and smiles; the commander’s reticent younger brother shares a cigarette with him. “Was I slipping over some unspoken line?” asks Goltz, “Or just becoming ‘cuddled?’” (99). The nuances of this affection are increasingly irrelevant; for Goltz the experience has long since ceased to be a simple exercise in “collecting bang-bang” for broadcast. Instead, there is a new impetus for watching, for recording, and for being there. He notices that Hussein is acting “like I have become his own private

camera team” (119), and finds it doesn’t bother him. Nonetheless, he is grateful for his load of camera equipment: it “absolves me of asking if I could help carry one of the bandoliers” (119). Increasingly, the already hazy lines he has drawn around himself as “the press” and the Chechens as “the rebels” dissolve. His camera doesn’t seem any longer like a badge of neutrality, but as something more defensive. During a particularly violent skirmish, he films with the same intensity that the Chechens shoot the Russians, fantasizing his camera as a weapon and himself as one of the rebel band:

I want this camera of mine or the microphone that looks so much like an over-under gun mount to be just that right now, and I want the camera not to record but to recoil like my trusty 30-30 or maybe my left eject, pawnshop special twelve-gauge shotgun letting loose against the metal beasts that are to trying to kill me, kill us. KirBAAMMM!!! KirBAAMMM!! Would be the sound of my film. KirBAAMMM!!! (123–24)

Soon afterwards, Hussein decides Goltz must leave. He protests. He has more footage to collect, more interviews to conduct, he wants to stay and he wants to be part of the cause. But Hussein is firm: “this is not your war, it is mine. And given the present realities, my fear is now that you will lose all the material you have accumulated because you will get killed foolishly. It is time for you to go. I order you to go. It is our film too” (126).

If “To survive is to be allowed the opportunity to bear witness,” as Chris Daley writes, then doing so is “an atrocious privilege” (182). For Goltz, the atrocious privilege is not just of being a witness, but of being a journalist, a professional witness who stands to benefit from what he has seen. “We foreign correspondents wing our way into ghastly situations and report on them, and then just leave and move on to the next assignment with no respect to the aftermath,” notes a colleague from the BBC. It is a position drastically at odds with the kinship Goltz feels for Hussein. Increasingly, Goltz finds he can no longer reconcile his professional mandate with his experience on the ground. It is not about “the story” anymore. Rather, “I was out” says Goltz, “I was alive. I had my tapes. I had my story. No. Our Story. That was my part of the bargain” (143). Relinquishing his journalist’s principle of neutrality—now revealed as an abstraction—becomes an ethical response. Goltz’s allegiance to the cause, instead of to collecting “bang-bang” for a distant Western audience, now justifies his presence in the Chechen war zone, and just as crucially, his eventual absence.

When he tries to fulfill his “part of the bargain,” however, Goltz finds he is out of sync. For the American media, the story has already moved on. His contract with *Nightline* has evaporated, and he cannot find a distributor for

the documentary. Instead, he provides footage for a TV special on *Rights/Wrongs Chechnya*. The program airs three times in “ungodly” timeslots: “It was a marginal program, full stop” (218). Nonetheless, he is nominated for the Rory Peck Award for war journalism. It seems a chance for redemption, but he comes in second. He realizes the winner will be encouraged to do the unthinkable, “to go back in,” but that “as a mere also-ran, I was exempted from such expectations” (219). He tells himself it is over anyway, that his duty is done, that he should go home. The BBC offers to fund a follow-up, and Goltz finds he can’t refuse: “It was the logical, and now funded follow-up assignment to my original, almost-award-winning story on Samashki. It filled me with inexplicable dread” (220).

His concern is well founded. From the beginning of this trip back to Chechnya he is uneasy. Traveling with Reuters correspondent Lawrence Sheets, Goltz dissects their different motivations. When Goltz see smoke billowing in the distance, indicating a catastrophic event in Samashki, “I thought of all the point positions I knew of on the Samashki periphery, the gun pits and slit trenches—and their occupants. I was sick at heart of it all, but mainly sick at heart *for not being there*” (160). “Lawrence was sick, too,” Goltz goes on to note, but Sheets is sick with fury at missing out on what is obviously a significant event, and therefore on the opportunity for dramatic footage. While Sheets files, Goltz drinks, wondering “what has happened to *my people?*” (165). Disoriented, dislocated, and disillusioned, he stumbles across incriminating information about the Russian high command, evidence of war crime interference at Samashki: “That is news. Not without bodies, say all the editors I petition. Vodka that night. Buckets of it” (179). He finds himself distanced from his fellow journalists: “I was changing roles. It was time to work to save my friends, not interrogate them” (176). While his erstwhile colleagues track presidential poll results and film lines of haggard refugees and bombed out streets, Goltz frets about “Samashki. And almost without thinking about how easy it would be for anyone to kidnap me—a solo foreigner traveling alone at dusk—I jumped in the first car I found and began my journey home” (237). But when this homecoming foreigner gets there, Hussein has disappeared, and none of the villagers seem happy to see Goltz. Slowly, the story unravels. Coinciding with Goltz’s departure, the Russians launched a particularly brutal and violent attack. The villagers were unprepared, and the conflict was a massacre. An insider is suspected, and Hussein immediately comes under suspicion. He had befriended the foreigner, who so conveniently disappeared, and shown him “camera in hand” the village defenses. Under pressure from malign village politics and residual paranoia, Hussein and his family have been forced into exile. Contact journalism—Goltz’s

immersion in village life as a foolproof strategy for getting straight the facts and realities of Samashki life, of the Chechen cause—has a different hue in retrospect, one that looks more like the actions of a duplicitous spy than a convert to the cause, and Goltz dissects his actions in his diary:

The foreigner, meanwhile, remains blissfully oblivious to the impact of his very presence in the small community in the small country at war, and particularly, the impact his presence has had on the life of the expelled leader because the foreigner was only there observing. Yes, that was it. The foreigner was not an actor; he was merely observing, and thus innocent of any crime, hurt, or fallout. Not. It was all much more like a real-life, warped paraphrase of the Heisenberg chaos theory about the observer affecting the observed. (249)

For Goltz, the aftermath of his presence and absence in Samashki is overwhelming. His personally transforming experience, from observer to convert, is tainted, and the benevolence of the reporter in the foreign conflict zone is exposed as devastatingly inadequate. Ultimately, the transaction Goltz wants to make, impelled by his sense of inclusion, is revealed as empty.

Unfolding events for his reader in a diary account is a sympathetic way to tell this kind of story, but it is also authoritative. Goltz is clear: he has worked on his manuscript, readying it for publication and for persuasion, to the point that he was “embarrassingly close to being seven hundred days overdue in submitting” (xii). *Chechnya Diary* is not a simple artifact of his experience, but is a construct. In her discussion of the internment diary of Peggy Abkhazi, Laurie McNeill attributes the lack of popular success of the narrative to its limited scope as a diary, and therefore, its lack of activity as a story. “Writing originally in diary form,” argues McNeill, “Abkhazi could only narrate what she was experiencing in the moment. She therefore could not shape her story to include pattern or purpose; writing without the benefit of hindsight she could not know what kinds of events could matter for a narrative of ‘history,’ both public and personal” (“Performing Genres” 89). Goltz, however, negotiates with the discursive implications of McNeill’s insight in a more oblique way. His use of the diary is strategic in that it allows him to show a self that is processual and in flux, so that the ongoing activity of his transformation—daily, almost imperceptible—finds expression. Using diary in this way abdicates, rather than excludes, Goltz from an imperative of autobiography or memoir: the need to explain or justify with the judiciousness of hindsight. After all, as an experienced journalist, with a history of war correspondence, Goltz needs to report an experience that he tells us caught him off guard. He wants to prove his innocence even as he reveals his complicity, and his diary becomes an unlikely bildungsroman of this task. Publishing

the diary allows Goltz to deprive himself of the interpretive advantage retrospection is assumed to confer; indeed, to reveal this perspective as sometimes a burden, not always a privilege.

Goltz needs *Chechnya Diary* to do certain things: to reach a broader audience than his documentary could achieve, to tell the story of Samashki, and to reveal the effect of a journalist merely “observing”—indeed, to problematize altogether the position of the journalist as witness. However, while Goltz makes it clear that the form and ideology of his narrative is designed to do justice to the story of the Chechen people, in that he can represent the intimacy, urgency, and dailiness of their struggle, his representation is also necessarily invested in being self-defensive. Goltz contests an assumption of war reporting as benevolent, and in doing so exposes a crucial fissure. As a result, in his various appearances to promote the publication of *Chechnya Diary*, Goltz reflects on Chechnya's international relations, on journalism, and on writing personal narrative. While providing a forum for him to promote his political views on Chechnya and the Caucasus in general, these public performances also allow Goltz to intervene in his audience's perception of his text, which he does to contest its generic nomination. This is significant. After all, “genres,” as McNeill reminds us, “act as cultural scripts that enable particular audiences to recognise and interpret” (“Editorial” xii). For Goltz, however, genre is also an imposition, one of a series of problems tied to the production of a publication: “I would never have chosen the word diary for either the Azerbaijani book or the Chechen. They were both imposed upon me” (“Meet the Author”). Especially since Goltz has recently cemented his reputation as a “Caucasus diarist” with the publication of *Georgia Diary*,<sup>5</sup> this assertion is unexpected, if not blatantly disingenuous. Nonetheless, it is a statement worth consideration. What is he rejecting by claiming that he would not have chosen diary?

*Chechnya Diary*, like Goltz's other diaries, is a hybrid text. It contains accounts of dreams, moments of retrospective reflection, and excerpts from the memoirs of his peers and from scholarly reports. Sometimes, he indicates futures yet to unfold, such as when he nods to the ethnic tensions that will bubble up in the area after September 11, 2001. Sometimes, passages from what seems to be an originary diary are included. This tactic heightens the sense of *Chechnya Diary* as an amalgam narrative—part autobiography, part reportage, part social and political commentary, but not strictly a diary at all. Of course, both contemporary and historical diaries can confound what are assumed to be hallmarks of diary form. The capaciousness, mutability, and hybridity of the genre comprise a trait in and of itself. *Chechnya Diary* marks a site of contemporary diary practice that Philippe Lejeune has also discussed:



“a chronicle presented in the form of a diary, written from a diary, but not at all the originary diary” (“Auto-Genesis” 209). According to Lejeune this kind of diary can be understood as having undergone operations that are seen either as “improving the text (such is the prevailing spirit: make the text ‘readable,’ interest the readers, and do not try their patience) or as deteriorating it (the authenticity that gives value to this genre is reduced or destroyed)” (209). In either case, it is still a diary.

Without eliding the ways in which Goltz’s text is or is not a diary, it clearly acts like one, and is usually interpreted as one. This is important. Indeed, it becomes clear that Goltz’s resistance to genre is not a structural concern, a sense of false ascription, but is an ideological concern. Encapsulated in the designation diary is a move that Goltz says he wants to reject: the privileging of the Western journalist at the center of a story about conflict elsewhere. The subtitle only exacerbates his problem:

Without joking, I said absolutely not. This is not a book about me, rather it is about me but it says it already in the title, *Chechnya Diary*, which you’ve imposed upon me. We’ve got to get something that is a little bit more resonant, that says something more about the book. What about “The Story of a Massacre and its Aftermath?” And the marketing people said, no. (“Meet the Author”)

On one level, Goltz’s concern appears to demonstrate an obvious point. Books need markets, and genres designate audiences; that authors may have little to do with either of these ends is hardly a revelation. We know that Goltz was late in submitting the manuscript, and that this robbed him of bargaining power, but there is also a more urgent issue at stake. Goltz desires his diary to capture the lives of hitherto insignificant others—the Chechen people—but he wants somehow to reduce his role in this representative act. He is concerned about the authority genre confers, and the jurisdictions it defines:

The subtitle misses the entire point and it shifts the emphasis to the vessel or to the recorder, namely the journalist, the war correspondent, as opposed to the event. I wanted, and I fought for having the word “Samashki” in the subtitle. I wanted and fought for having the word “aftermath” in the subtitle. I wanted and fought for having the word “massacre” in the subtitle . . . thus moving the emphasis away from the journalist. But the marketing people had their way. (“Conversation”)

In various news media, Goltz has tried to tell and circulate his story of Chechnya. For various reasons, these circuits have proved elliptical. *Chechnya Diary*, then, is his way into the market, but it is also something more: “I have been working on *our* book of war,” says Goltz, “as some sort of testament or at least reminder of human foibles and frailties but also devotion” (285). For

Goltz, diary is not a structural or textual object that he can take up or move away from, but an ideological problem. It is a consequence of marketing, but also of the story he has to tell—about Goltz, about the Samashkian people, and about Hussein; this is “our” story. In his public discussions of his text, Goltz presents diary as burdensome: an imposition that narrows the focus back to the author, and in this case, re-inscribes Western privilege. Nonetheless, in his narrative and in his oeuvre, he accedes to the conventions of the genre, and takes up its strategic possibilities. In some ways, Goltz’s resistance to diary reveals a lingering prejudice attached to it as an inadequate mode for telling public history. In another way, Goltz reveals his uneasiness with an American market that demands a Western body at the center of the story, and he tries to show some of the consequences of this presence—to make the aftermath part of the story. In both cases, Goltz reveals the diary to be a capacious and hybrid mode, but also a distinct form and perhaps a dangerous one.

### **“BLOODSPORT”: “OUR BOOK OF WAR”**

In *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Paul John Eakin notes a characterization of biography as “bloodsport” acknowledges that the genre “does possess the potential to harm its subjects; text can harm a person because the person-property axis runs both ways” (172). So Goltz’s earlier conceptualization of journalism as “bloodsport” (*Azerbaijan Diary* xi), like Eakin’s, acknowledges the dangers inherent to professions dependent on representing others, while Goltz’s sense that it is only through being close enough to the action, close enough “to get bumped around” (xi), that the truth can emerge tells us about what feeds this impulse. For Goltz, the diary provides a mode alternative to journalism, and a mode in which his story, and that of the Chechen people, can travel westwards. But the problem remains that this story must also travel through him.

There are many things to dislike about the kind of journalistic role Goltz both lives and outlives in *Chechnya Diary*. This is a love-hate portrait of the reporter as anti-hero and as savior. As a journalist, Goltz already has a cultural space from which to speak. He is not, as Jennifer Sinor has described, one of “those in marginalized positions, those who have traditionally held neither gun nor pen” (405). Indeed, Goltz has held both. And yet, in wrestling for a receptive space, and in the reception it incurs, Goltz’s narrative demonstrates the difficulty of claiming “the right to speak from experience” (Sinor 405). In war, everyone has a story to tell. As a journalist, Goltz has tried to tell a certain kind of story; as a diarist, he has tried to tell it again. In both cases, he

finds he has failed to do justice to the lives of those on the ground in Samashki, even as he shows the urgency and need for such representation. Through Goltz, the diary becomes a mode for exploring ongoing tensions between public and private knowledge, and for questioning what a journalist is and what a diary can do. Ultimately, his use of the diary, and his discomfort at some of its effects, makes visible certain problems. When does genre create a story outside of what is told? How is it possible to represent lives and remain true to individuals? How can the war correspondent be an ethical witness to conflict?

From the perspective of life narrative, Goltz's turn to diary as a way of consciously engaging with and making visible the contradictions of his position and his profession is particularly relevant now. His diary publications, belated in terms of the historical moment they describe, enter into a contemporary context where they are of keen interest. So the kind of engagement that characterizes journalistic life narrative from Iraq, for example—particularly under the influence of blogging, a mode of writing related to the diary—reproduces a broader cultural turn to individual experience and daily, immersed perspective as authoritative and as authentic. Amidst the various media Goltz negotiates, the diary is distinctive. Its publication indicates that audiences—and publishers—want something more from the story, that audiences recognize the mass media as a portal through which only certain stories are allowed to pass, and that they value the individual perspective as an alternative. Further, concerns about seemingly peripheral matters—genres and subtitles—draw attention to the ways in which texts are interpreted even before they are read. When Goltz resists diary as a descriptor for his story, he resists the implications of narcissism, inwardness, and irrelevance that conventional prejudices about the genre proclaim. When he uses diaristic narrative to tell his story, he shows us how this can nonetheless be a powerful tool in achieving particular ends. When journalists publish diary they discard the assumed objectivity of their profession, and the reader enters a quotidian and intimate space from which they are usually excluded as news audiences. That Goltz has now completed a diary trilogy demonstrates, despite his sometime protestations, that the genre is both successful and useful for him. Uses of the diary now draw attention to discourses of identity that privilege individual experience over collective, immersion over analysis, and authenticity over authority. In *Chechnya Diary*, these things coalesce and become visible.

## NOTES

1. These aspects of contemporary journalism are often addressed in the venues of interest themselves. So, for example, blogging and journalism are hotly debated topics among

news bloggers and journalists. For a critical overview of this topic, see Bruns and Jacobs's recent volume *Uses of Blogs*. For a discussion of the impact of new media technology on war journalism, see Thussu and Freedman, and Allan and Zelizer. In the context of the recent Iraq conflict, this question has been addressed by Katovsky and Carlson, and by Massing; and in the aftermath of the "War on Terror" and September 11, by Zelizer and Allan, and Hess and Kalb. The concept—and potential—of the citizen journalist is perhaps most dramatically illustrated by the emergence of websites like *Scoopst*, a photo brokerage site. Promising to "bridge the gap" between "amateur and photo desk," *Scoopst* negotiates financial remuneration and all-important public exposure for "anybody with a digital camera or a cameraphone who just happens to be in the right place at the right time." Recently, *Scoopst* was reported to be expanding its services to include selling blog posts to newspapers and magazines (Tryhorn).

2. Diaries by journalists, but also by soldiers and civilians, have been particularly prominent in relation to this conflict. One reason for this may be the importance during the war of blogging, a form of online writing that has often been compared to the diary. A particular advantage to such writing arises from the relative speed and immediacy with which bloggers are able to disseminate information about the war. For example, the infamous "Baghdad blogger" Salam Pax was posting as often as three times a day during the height of the invasion. For a discussion of Pax, and an examination of the contemporary production of journalistic memoir from the Iraq conflict, see Whitlock. Further, the US military policy of embedding media with troops created a bias in the American and the global media towards coverage that was "at the front-line" (see Katovsky and Carlson). These characteristics have made the production of diary narratives popular, because they provide the kind of narrative a diary—the document of the eyewitness—is assumed to convey: daily in scope, immersed in perspective, and written close to the time of the events related. For diary accounts by journalists of the Iraq conflict, see Garrels, Zinsmeister, Turnley, and McGeough. Though timeliness was not a characteristic of war diaries in the past (Peterson 926), contemporary war journalists increasingly use the diary not only as a space for observing and recording war, but also for formulating and then sharing with the public, often with publication in mind, their experience in the war zone at the current moment.
3. While here taken positively, this distinction has been used to devalue, as in Zelizer's assessment of Hemingway's "just journalism" as an inadequate mode until dignified through its verbatim reproduction in fiction. The phrase "just journalism" is of course not far from "just journaling," and in both cases the qualifier has been used to demarcate a practice diminished, inferior to a more "proper" form. And yet, diary and journalism can acquire a special authority and power from their status as "marginal practices." As Langford and West remind us, "Margins, after all, are places where distinct domains meet, where crossings from here to there, from sameness to otherness, are constantly being negotiated, and where mutually interdependent definitions of selfhood and alterity are necessarily reformulated again and again" (7).
4. Virginia Woolf writes, "There can be no doubt that the good diarists are those who write either for themselves or for a posterity so distant that it can safely hear every secret and justly weigh every motive. For such an audience there is no need for either affectation or restraint. But a diary written to be published in the author's lifetime is no better than

a private version of the newspaper, and often worse" (689). Here we see a seductive construction of the diarist, and the beginnings of a familiar ideal: given the right conditions, the diarist is assumed to be uniquely capable of representing a truth that is *unaffected* and *unrestrained*. The diary gratifies the desire to get in close, and promises access to knowledge that would not otherwise emerge in public. For this essay, it is also interesting to note that the figure lurking at the edge of Woolf's analogy is the journalist: diarists become authors of private newspapers when they write with an audience in mind. The effect is disparaging. According to Woolf, this kind of diarist is no diarist at all, but a journalist telling private things as news. Though Woolf's construction is now partly anachronistic—the idea of diary as a necessarily private text has been thoroughly critiqued in recent years—its discursive relevance is still sharp, as the diary continues to complicate assumptions about the value of personal writing in the public sphere.

5. In the words of Alex van Oss, "this volume, on Georgia, completes what the author waggishly calls his career as a Caucasus 'diarist.'"

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