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## Writer-Journalists and the Sudden Turn in Appreciation in the Sixties

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*Witnessing the Sixties.*  
*A Decade of Change in Journalism*  
*and Literature*

GRONINGEN STUDIES IN CULTURAL CHANGE

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Volume LI

*Witnessing the Sixties.*  
*A Decade of Change in Journalism*  
*and Literature*

EDITED BY

Frank Harbers, Ilja van den Broek & Marcel  
Broersma

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Parijs 1968. Eenzame agent van oproerpolitie gooit traangasgranaat naar  
hordes demonstrerende studenten op de Boulevard St. Michel. Frankrijk,  
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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 1999, the local Groningen Research School for the Study of the Humanities, and the Groningen members of the national Netherlands Research School for Medieval Studies succeeded in obtaining a grant for an innovative, large-scale, collective research programme entitled *Cultural Change: Dynamics and Diagnosis*. Supported by the faculties of Arts, Philosophy and Theology and financed by the Board of the University of Groningen, the *Cultural Change* programme constitutes an excellent opportunity to promote multidisciplinary approaches to phenomena characteristic of transformation processes in the fields of politics, literature and history, philosophy and theology. In order to enhance programmatic cohesion, three crucial 'moments' in European history were selected: 1) Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages (c.200–c.600), 2) Late Medieval to the Early Modern period (c.1450–c.1650), and 3) the 'Long Nineteenth Century' (1789–c.1918). In 2000 and 2002 further grants were obtained for *Cultural Change: Impact and Integration* and *Cultural Change: Perception and Representation* respectively. Many international conferences and workshops have been organised.

This volume focuses on the convergence between journalism and literature in the sixties. The sixties is shorthand for a ubiquitous social, political and cultural upheaval in the Western world with its culmination point in 1968. The changes in society were so encompassing and impressive that many considered traditional ways of making sense of the world no longer sufficient; accepted cultural forms suddenly seemed to lose their capacity to interpret reality. While witnessing and experiencing the reshaping of society both journalists and novelists – as well as film makers and artists – had to find new ways to describe what was happening. Imagination and commitment, subjectivity and performativity were pervading literary and journalistic representations alike.

These developments had a strong impact on journalistic and literary practice. Both journalists and literary writers experimented with new forms. They stretched the limits of their domains sometimes even dissolving the boundaries between both discourses. Several influential journalists, criticizing the dominant norms of journalism, turned to literature which resulted in a form of highly reflective reporting still famous under the caption 'New Journalism'. Concurrently, literary authors felt they could not ignore the sweeping developments in society. They entered the public debate, and experimented with journalistic forms of reportage and documentary to satisfy their social and political commitment.

The volume 'Witnessing the Sixties' explores the entwined journalistic and literary quest for adequate forms to represent reality from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective. It results from an expert workshop we



have organized in 2011. Scholars from journalism, media and literary studies engaged in vivid debates that reflected upon the changes in both fields.

We thank the Board of the University of Groningen for the financial support given to the *Cultural Change* programmes. The editors are particularly grateful to Marijke Wubbolts for helping to organise the workshop which was the inspiration for this volume, and Liselotte Schüren and Judith Katz for their hard work in preparing the texts for publication.

On behalf of the editors of this volume  
and the Editorial Board of the GSSC series,

Groningen, October 2015  
Prof. dr. Goffe Jensma (Chief Editor)

## CHALLENGED BOUNDARIES

### JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE IN THE SIXTIES

Frank Harbers & Ilja van den Broek

#### *Journalism vs. Literature*

In the 1960s, the well-known Dutch novelist Harry Mulisch (1927-2010) made a marked switch to journalistic non-fiction. He wrote several non-fiction books (i.a. *Message to the Rat King*, *Suit the Word to the Action*) but most famous is his coverage of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 for the Dutch weekly *Elsevier* – later reworked into a book-length reportage (*Criminal Case 40/61*).<sup>1</sup> He justified his highly unusual move outside the realm of literary fiction by saying: ‘It is war. And during war one should not concern oneself with writing novels. In such times there are more important things to do.’<sup>2</sup> Quite polemically, Mulisch thus dismisses fiction as something that is too disconnected from reality to have urgency in times of a social or political crisis. Subsequently, he criticized the influential idea that literature only deals with fictional worlds, thereby problematizing the common distinction between journalism and literature as well.

Narrowing down the terrain of literature to what is called the belles-lettres is based on a totally outdated notion of what literature is. It is a legacy from the ‘l’art pour l’art’ theory, which originates from the period in which the bourgeoisie was dominant, when authors involving themselves in social and political issues were considered highly unwanted.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas journalism is considered to be firmly rooted in society and is considered to be the realm of factual description and truth, literature is often assumed to be the result of the writer’s imagination and therefore not directly pertaining to referential reality.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that literature is regarded as entirely disconnected from social reality, just that it is considered to have a much more indirect and opaque relation to it. Rather

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from Dutch to English are ours, FH/IvdB

<sup>2</sup> Auwera, F., *Schrijven of schieten. Interviews* (Antwerpen/Utrecht, 1969), p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> Auwera, *Schrijven of schieten*, p. 96.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Broersma, M., ‘Journalism as a Performative Discourse. The Importance of Form and Style in Journalism’, in: Rupaar, V., *Journalism and Meaning-making: reading the newspaper* (New York, 2010), p. 16; Rigney, A., ‘De veelzijdigheid van literatuur’, in: Brillenburg Wurth, K. & Rigney, A., *Het leven van teksten. Een inleiding tot de literatuurwetenschap* (Amsterdam, 2006), pp. 54-55, 60-61.

than being a mirror *of* reality, literature is often considered to convey a more indirect reflection *on* reality. Current societal debates and issues ‘resonate’ in works of literature, as Vaessens aptly calls it. They do so by offering imagined stories about hypothetical situations and events – often packaged in a complex literary form demanding effort and expertise to interpret.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons, the type of information that literature offers generally does not intervene in or impact everyday reality in the same direct way journalism does – by informing people about social reality in a way they can act.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of Mulisch’ critique, the idea of the ‘aesthetic autonomy’ of literature has proven a fairly stable notion. Since roughly the Romantic period, literary writers pride themselves and have been praised for their ability to look beyond the ephemeral or perfunctory details of everyday issues in order to get to the essential and existential aspects of social reality.<sup>7</sup> Literature thus provides a ‘larger’ truth as New Journalist Gay Talese – among others – has called it.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of this commonsensical distinction between journalism and literature, they share a long history together. Up until roughly the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the institutional boundaries between journalism and literature were not that clearly delineated.<sup>9</sup> But as literature started to envision itself as a practice typified by its aesthetic autonomy it also developed a stronger institutional autonomy. As Dorleijn, Grüttemeier and Korthals Altes observe: ‘The history of the origin of the field runs parallel to the appearance of autonomous norms.’<sup>10</sup> Yet, this is a gradual process and as Vaessens points out there are always writers who do not follow the autonomist conception of literature. Nevertheless, it did become a dominant

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<sup>5</sup> Vaessens, T., *Geschiedenis van de moderne Nederlandse literatuur* (Amsterdam, 2013), p. 229.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Rigney, A., ‘Teksten en cultuurhistorische context’, in: Brillenburg Wurth, K. & Rigney, A., *Het leven van teksten. Een inleiding tot de literatuurwetenschap* (Amsterdam, 2006), p. 303; Broersma, ‘Performative Discourse’, pp. 15-16.

<sup>7</sup> Dorleijn, G., Grüttemeier, R. & Korthals Altes, L., ‘The autonomy of literature’: to be handled with care’, in: Dorleijn, G., Grüttemeier, R. & Korthals Altes, L. eds., *The autonomy of literature at the fins de siècles (1900 and 2000). A critical assessment*. pp. ix-xi; Rigney, ‘De veelzijdigheid van literatuur’, pp. 56-57; Rigney, ‘Teksten en cultuurhistorische context’, p. 303.

<sup>8</sup> Talese, G., *Fame and Obscurity: A Book About New York, a Bridge, and Celebrities on the Edge* (New York, 1970), p. vii.

<sup>9</sup> Roggenkamp, K., *Narrating the News: New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Journalism and Fiction* (Kent, 2005), xv-xix, 20-24; Cf. Bourdieu, P., *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge, 1993)

<sup>10</sup> Dorleijn, Grüttemeier & Korthals Altes, ‘The autonomy of literature’, p. xix.

norm that played an influential role in shaping the literary domain and distinguishing it from other domains, such as journalism.<sup>11</sup>

Even when the distinction had become clearer, there have been moments in which the boundaries between journalism and literature were challenged. In such periods convergent forms of narrative or literary journalism emerged. As John Hartsock suggests in the opening chapter of this volume, these periods were typified by strong social and cultural transformations or even crises. As a result the established modes of expression seem to have fallen short in capturing what was going on in society. For America, Hartsock points to the 1890s after the American Civil War, the 1930s after the Great Depression as precursors to the New Journalism of the 1960s.<sup>12</sup> The idea that the convergence of literature and journalism is induced, or at least reinforced, by societal or cultural transformation is supported by Thomas Vaessens. In his closing chapter of this volume, he compares the New Journalism of the sixties to the more current manifestations of narrative or literary non-fiction. In both cases he sees societal ‘unrest and turmoil’ as ‘the catalysts for literary journalism.’<sup>13</sup>

The idea behind this suggestion is that in times of social transformation or turmoil there is a strong need for insight in what it means to experience such societal changes and for more reflection on the way the changes are to be interpreted and explained. Hartsock suggests that in such periods journalism’s objectifying tendencies, which have arisen and endured since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, fall short. They are considered unable to capture the nature of such transformational developments and its impact on people’s lives.

Reinforcing Hartsock’s argument, Vaessens shows how literary writers struggled and again more recently struggle with the indirect nature of literature’s relation with reality. They feel the established literary forms do not allow them to engage in public debate and reflect on current events. To be able to overcome these impediments, journalism turns to literature for its experiential and reflective form, whereas literature adopts journalism’s direct orientation on social reality and referential truth.

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<sup>11</sup> Vaessens, *Geschiedenis van de moderne Nederlandse letterkunde*, p. 82.

<sup>12</sup> To what extent this periodization also applies to journalistic cultures in Europe remains to be seen as historical inquiries into the intertwining of journalism and literature are scarce. The research by Harbers suggests however that journalism in the Netherlands and France has maintained a strong literary orientation until the Second World War, cf Harbers, F., *Between personal experience and detached information. The development of reporting and the reportage in Great Britain, the Netherlands and France, 1880-2005* (Groningen, 2014), pp.117-121, 136-148, 173-176, 181-207

<sup>13</sup> In this volume: Vaessens, T., ‘Journalism and Postmodernism in the Netherlands’, p.190.

The sixties are particularly famous for these convergent modes of expression that uprooted the conventional distinction between both discourses.<sup>14</sup> As Hartsock puts it in his article on the roots of American New Journalism:

To conclude, then, American values were probed and challenged by the New Journalism at the most profound levels during the 1960s. That is its cultural legacy [...] Yet, it was not 'new.' But we can acknowledge that it reached its most daring expression during the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>15</sup>

In this period, the dichotomy between journalism and literature was rejected and undercut in a fundamental way, challenging the distinction between both discourses with regard to norms, practices and forms.<sup>16</sup> For that reason, it is a fruitful research object to gain more insight in hybrid forms of narrative journalism.

### *The Sixties*

The convergence of journalism and literature was rooted in a broader adversarial culture that emerged in this period. The 'sixties' is a notion that has become a historical and cultural benchmark. It is shorthand for a ubiquitous social, political and cultural upheaval in the Western world with its culmination point – at least in Europe – in 1968.<sup>17</sup> This decade gave rise to the Afro-American civil rights movement, the drug infused hippie culture, the sexual revolution, several political assassinations (e.g. John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King), the Vietnam War, the emergence of the women and gay rights movements and a series of influential student revolts, which disseminated quickly over the (Western) world partly due to the rapidly growing popularity of television. The pace in which society was altering, but also the changes themselves were overwhelming and deeply

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<sup>14</sup> Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 117-119; Pauly, 'The Politics of the New Journalism', in: Sims, N. ed., *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2008), p. 110; Wijfjes, H., *Journalistiek in Nederland 1850-2000. Beroep, cultuur en organisatie* (Amsterdam, 2004), pp. 347-350

<sup>15</sup> In this volume: Hartsock, J., 'Challenging the American Dream. The New Journalism and its Precursors', 18.

<sup>16</sup> Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 117-119; Pauly, 'The Politics of the New Journalism', pp. 110, 123-124; Brems, H., *Altijd weer vogels die nesten beginnen. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1945-2005* (Amsterdam, 2006), pp. 272-277, 287-299.

<sup>17</sup> Marwick, A., *The Sixties: cultural revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958-c.1974* (New York, 1998), pp. 3-20; DeGroot, G., *The Sixties unplugged. A kaleidoscopic history of a disorderly decade* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 1-2.

impressive in the eyes of people involved. The resulting epistemological and socio-political crisis robbed accepted cultural forms from their authority to depict and give meaning to reality.<sup>18</sup>

For journalism this meant that the norms revolving around the objectivity ideal that had come to dominate journalistic reporting were questioned, criticized, and undercut. The detached and depersonalized way of doing journalism was considered unable to capture what it meant to live in a society that was in the course of emancipating and reinventing itself. Moreover, objective journalism was accused of helping to maintain the political status quo by contributing to the hegemony of the ethnocentric and capitalistic ideals of a white-male cultural elite.<sup>19</sup>

Conversely, literature was critiqued for its inability to shed light on the changes going on in society and its perceived reluctance to come down from its ivory tower to engage in the societal debates.<sup>20</sup> According to New Journalists such as Tom Wolfe, the cherished aesthetic autonomy imaginative literature had been praised for before made literature into a bloodless formalistic game of self-reference.<sup>21</sup>

The broader cultural developments of the sixties thus had a strong impact on journalistic and literary practice. Traditional standards were challenged and the boundaries between journalism and literature were dissolving. Both journalists and literary writers experimented with new forms, stretching the respective limits of their domains. They were in search of alternative practices and forms to capture the disruptive experiences of the sixties. New journalists abandoned the traditional depersonalized way of reporting that took the emotions and opinions of the reporter out of the equation, embraced their subjectivity, and made their own experiences an integral part of their coverage. In their stories they often openly reflected on their own position as a reporter.<sup>22</sup> They moved away from the official elite sources, which they felt would only voice an official version of reality that reinforced the ideology of the societal elite. Instead, reporters focused on minorities and countercultural movements – which they often sympathized

<sup>18</sup> Marwick, *The Sixties*, pp. 3-20; Eason, 'New Journalism, Metaphor and Culture', pp. 147-148; Van Dijk, 'Cultuurkritiek en journalistiek', *Feit&fictie* 2, pp.77-78; Van den Broek, I., 'De persoonlijke politiek van het New Journalism', *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 6 (2003), no. 1, pp. 108-109.

<sup>19</sup> Pauly, 'The Politics of the New Journalism', p. 115; Wijffes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, pp. 344-349.

<sup>20</sup> Brems, *Altijd weer vogels*, pp. 272-277, 287-288, 296-299; In this volume: Vaessens, 'Journalism and Postmodernism in the Netherlands', 184-200; Bax, *De taak van de schrijver. Het poëtische debat in de Nederlandse literatuur, 1968-1985* (Leeuwarden, 2007), pp. 353-355, 359-362.

<sup>21</sup> Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism* (New York, 1973), pp. 20-22, 39-51; Pauly, 'Politics of the New Journalism', pp. 112-114

<sup>22</sup> Eason, 'New Journalism, Metaphor and Culture', pp. 142-146.

or identified with – and tried to convey their perspective by really immersing themselves in their alternative culture.

These changes in approach, form and subject matter resulted in compelling accounts, which drew heavily on literary traditions to be able to provide their readers with a vicarious experience. In the United States in particular this form of reporting became famous under the caption ‘New Journalism’ with its famous writer-reporters such as Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Hunter S. Thompson, and Joan Didion.<sup>23</sup> Their work extended itself to supplements of daily newspapers, literary non-fiction magazines and underground press and broadcast, but most new journalists have become best known for their book-length non-fiction.

Concurrently, certain literary authors felt they could not ignore the sweeping developments in society, and found their usual literary conventions inadequate. Writers like Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Jack Kerouac in the US and Harry Mulisch, Louis Paul Boon, or Hugo Claus in the Low Countries (the Netherlands and Flanders), started to criticize the autonomist principles, and the corresponding delineation and hierarchy of literary genres with the novel as most prestigious. These authors moved towards a stronger engagement with current events and experiences, often ignoring traditional genre boundaries. They experimented with form by mixing genres and different types of media, sometimes leading to intermedial performance projects. Like Mulisch, some writers even abandoned the world of fiction for referential representations of reality, adopting journalistic forms of reportage and documentary to satisfy their socio-political engagement.<sup>24</sup>

Although some journalists and literary authors had similar goals, and were experimenting along the same lines, there was nothing like a clear-cut movement at this time. Nevertheless, writers and journalists alike were looking for new ways to represent the rapidly changing world around them. They experimented freely, not bothered or impeded by the established distinctions between journalism and literature.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Pauly, ‘The Politics of the New Journalism’, p. 110; in this volume: Hartsock, ‘Challenging the American Dream. The New Journalism and its Precursors’, pp. 1-18.

<sup>24</sup> Brems, *Altijd weer vogels*, p. 296-298; Wagner-Martin, L., *A history of American literature: 1950 to the present* (Chichester, West Sussex, 2013), pp. 123-129.

<sup>25</sup> Eason, D., ‘The New Journalism and the Image-World’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1 (1984), pp. 51-65; Van den Broek, I., ‘De persoonlijke politiek van het New Journalism’, *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 6 (2003), no. 1, pp. 110-113; Brems, *Altijd weer vogels*, pp. 287-299.

*Scholarship: a Growing Field*

Nowadays, the sixties' innovative literary journalism is generally applauded for its insightful and compelling accounts of reality. Particularly in the United States, and to a lesser extent in Europe, 'writer-reporters' and New Journalists have gathered wide critical acclaim for their work within the journalistic as well as the literary domain – their work is nowadays often considered part of the literary canon.<sup>26</sup> These authors put narrative journalism on the map (again) and laid an important foundation for the current success of (digital) forms of narrative or literary journalism.<sup>27</sup>

Yet it took quite some time, before the convergence between journalism and literature in the sixties received the scholarly attention it deserves. And even then, academic research into the developments within journalism or literature of the sixties centers mainly on the American New Journalism, leaving similar developments within Europe largely unexplored.<sup>28</sup> The modest amount of research in general could in part be due to the fact that journalism and media studies are relatively young scholarly fields. Yet, this cannot be said of literary studies, which has only devoted attention to these developments sparingly. Hartsock argues that for a long time journalism and literary scholars have internalized the traditional boundaries between journalism and literature and have reinforced them by not devoting attention to hybrid forms of journalism and literature. As Hartsock explains, forms of narrative journalism were considered a marginal phenomenon within journalism. In light of the dominant objectivity norm the engaged and subjective accounts have always been regarded with suspicion concerning their truth status. Journalism scholars often internalized this conception of journalism and therefore deemed such forms of journalism unworthy of its attention.<sup>29</sup>

Something similar goes for literary studies, which research agenda was strongly infused by a literary canon of great artistic works famed for their aesthetic qualities. Examples of narrative journalism and literary forms of reporting were regarded as inferior as they clearly and openly breached the norms regarding the aesthetic autonomy of literature. For quite some time, literary studies were dominated by theoretical perspectives naturalizing

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<sup>26</sup> Pauly, 'The Politics of the New Journalism', pp. 111-112

<sup>27</sup> Boynton, *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on their Craft* (New York, 2005), p. xi; in this volume: Vaessens, 'Journalism and Postmodernism in the Netherlands', 184-200

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Sims, 'The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies', *Literary Journalism Studies* 1 (2009), no. 1, pp. 9-10.

<sup>29</sup> Hartsock, J., *A History of American Literary Journalism. The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, 2000), pp. 204-205; Pauly, 'The Politics of the New Journalism', pp. 115.



these autonomist assumptions.<sup>30</sup> As a result, literary journalism was mostly dismissed within this discipline. Only in a few cases these forms were accepted as part of the literary canon, but, as Frus argues, on such occasions the journalistic characteristics were downplayed and such works were ‘reduced’ to their aesthetic qualities, which made them into great works of art.<sup>31</sup> As Hartsock summarizes this strategy:

Despite their seemingly different emphases, both [journalism and literature, FH/lvdB] had similar aims: to construct a critical hegemony that had the effect of excluding narrative literary journalism as a discourse to be taken seriously. Ultimately, the form would prove to be a narrative cripple, a narrative imperfection for both, and ultimately too a reminder of what both those sectors of the academy sought so diligently to avoid in their own critical essentializing.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, the studies that were conducted within disciplinary boundaries restricted their focus to either the journalistic or the literary aspects rather than on their interconnectedness. The developments in the domain of interest – journalism for instance – are therefore often set off against a rather static and not well-defined image of the other domain – literature in this example.<sup>33</sup> Rarely have scholars adopted an interdisciplinary perspective. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that writers in both domains were moving closer to each other, making it hard to determine where journalism ends and literature starts.

This volume aims to offer a broader and more refined perspective on the development of journalism and literature and their entwinement in the sixties, while contributing as well to research in general into the ways journalistic and literary discourse can merge. The different authors, from the fields of media studies, literary studies and journalism studies therefore approach the journalistic and literary quest for adequate forms to represent reality from complementary perspectives. The mix of articles focuses on important journalists, writer-reporters and novelists, offering a fresh perspective on the struggle to represent the changing world in the sixties and the new norms, routines and textual forms that were invented and explored.

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<sup>30</sup> Dorleijn, Grüttemeier & Korthals Altes, ‘The Autonomy of Literature’, p. xi; Hartsock, *American Literary Journalism*, pp. 244-245

<sup>31</sup> Pauly, ‘The Politics of the New Journalism’, pp. 112-114; Frus, P., *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative. The Timely and the Timeless* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1-11.

<sup>32</sup> Hartsock, *American Literary Journalism*, p. 205

<sup>33</sup> In such cases, anything not being literary is regarded to be journalistic and vice versa.

*Deconstructing the Boundaries Between Journalism and Literature*

Debate about crossover forms of writing – New Journalism and in general forms of journalism and literature that operate on the border of both domains – usually revolves around questions dealing with the (non-) fictional and literary status of the text. Can narrative journalistic accounts deal with referential reality in an adequate and trustworthy way? Did everything exactly happen as portrayed or did the writer make up parts of his or her story? And to what extent does this orientation on social reality interfere with an author's claim to the predicate 'literary' in the sense of being a work of art? Scholars dealing with hybrid texts have been grappling with these questions for quite some time. The answers they gave are highly dependent on the way the nature of the distinction between journalism and literature was perceived.

In the past, both scholars of journalism and literature have presented these boundaries as natural, reflecting the intrinsic differences between journalism and literature in regards to truthfulness, artistry and the narrative characteristics and genres employed in both domains.<sup>34</sup> Such a perspective maintains the idea of a fundamental and unproblematic distinction between the domains of journalism and literature. Yet, as John J. Pauly argues the convergent forms of journalism and literature in the sixties exposed the conventionality of the boundaries between the two of them:

The New Journalism, as a discourse on the nature of our storytelling practices, confronted both Journalism and Literature with the social habits and institutional structures that sustained them.<sup>35</sup>

The authors in this volume have a similar take on the matter and dismiss an essentialist perspective on the distinction between journalism and literature. They take the social and political nature of the boundaries between them as an implicit or explicit point of departure by discussing and illustrating how this boundary was challenged and undercut in the sixties. In their articles, they analyze how journalists and literary writers in the sixties attempted to reconceptualize journalism and literature with regard to four main issues: 1) the inherent subjectivity of representation, 2) the personal becoming political, 3) the tension between political commitment and aesthetic autonomy, and 4) the remix of different media forms and genres. Although they are here presented as separate issues, they are intertwined and often hard to disentangle. The different articles often focus on more than one of them, showing how they interrelate. In scrutinizing these issues, the articles adopt roughly two approaches. Several authors focus

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<sup>34</sup> Hartsock, *American Literary Journalism*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>35</sup> Pauly, 'The Politics of the New Journalism', p. 110.

specifically on the way writer-reporters and literary journalists position themselves within journalism and/or literature by voicing their thoughts and ideas about the truth status of a text or its literary merit. Others apply a textual approach, analyzing how the textual characteristics of specific texts challenge the dominant literary and/or journalistic norms in this period.

*The Inherent Subjectivity of Representation*

Journalism's relation to truth is a central theme within journalism studies as it is crucial to journalism's authoritative position within society. If a journalistic text cannot lay claim to truthfulness it loses purpose and becomes obsolete. Consequently, it is not considered to be journalism.<sup>36</sup> The rise of the objectivity ideal in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America (and a few decades later in Europe) provided journalists with a professional framework that would be very successful in convincing the public of journalism's claim to truth.<sup>37</sup> It is therefore not surprising that the emergence of New Journalism in the sixties – and literary journalism in general – incited that much debate about its truth status. The new journalists employed narrative techniques, associated with literary fiction, which highlighted the subjectivity of the reporter, thus defying the norms revolving around objectivity.

Criticasters attacked the truthfulness of these, often personalized accounts by accusing the authors of one-sidedness and bias. They pointed to suspicious routines like the use of composite characters and tried to expose inconsistencies that suggested fictionalizing wherever they could. This kind of criticism can be regarded as boundary work that attempts to maintain clear boundaries between journalism and literature, suggesting that stories can easily be divided in true or made-up.<sup>38</sup> In response, scholars such as Norman Sims and Mark Kramer have tried to carve out a set of conditions that narrative journalists have to fulfill in order to make a valid truth claim. These criteria revolve around the cardinal rule 'do not make things up.' In principle, they adhere to the same positivistic assumptions as objective journalism. They presuppose that reality can be represented truthfully as long as certain efficacious routines are followed.<sup>39</sup>

The articles in this volume challenge this perspective and dismiss the underlying positivistic assumptions. Any form of representation is regarded

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<sup>36</sup> Broersma, 'Performative Discourse', pp. 15-16.

<sup>37</sup> Harbers, *Between Personal Experience and Detached Information*, pp. 14-28, 114.

<sup>38</sup> Pauly, 'The Politics of the New Journalism', pp. 114-115.

<sup>39</sup> Kramer, M., 'Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists', in: Sims, N. & Kramer, M. eds., *Literary Journalism. A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction* (New York, 1995), pp. 22-34.

as inherently subjective and value-laden because it by definition presents a selective image of social reality. Journalists always offer their interpretation of reality, which they, subsequently, present as ‘the objective truth.’ By drawing on recognizable genres, formats and textual characteristics, such as direct quotes, balanced sourcing and detached coverage that filters out the presence of the reporter, journalists aim to convince their audience of the credibility of their stories.<sup>40</sup>

The conventional nature of what is accepted as truthful is highlighted in the work of the new journalists or writer-reporters that are the object of study in this volume. As David Eason argues with regard to New Journalism:

New journalism constitutes a metalanguage which holds up the assumptions of routine journalism for reflection. [...] New Journalism simultaneously calls into question the basis of making sense out of situations. By raising questions about the relationships necessary to create the report, New Journalism forces attention to the relationships necessary to create other forms of discourse. For instance, to supply an answer to the question, ‘Is it journalism or a novel?’ forces the discussion of commonalities and differences between these modes of discourse, and more importantly, of the relationship of the rules of discourse to reality. New Journalism thus can be best characterized not as a set of writing techniques but as a set of metajournalistic operations through which journalism as a language becomes a subject for explicit reflection.<sup>41</sup>

Harbers and Broersma analyze in their chapter how Dutch writer-reporter Cees Nooteboom incorporated reflections on the reporting process in his reportage series about the Paris revolt of 1968. Nooteboom wrote personal and engaged accounts in which he attempted to make sense of the events. He also used forms of collage to express the chaotic nature of the events. By implicitly pointing to his role as intermediary between reality and the public, he showed how he as an author shaped the representation of social reality instead of asserting to only passively mirror reality.

In addition, Harbers and Broersma point to the ambivalent reception of this subjective form of journalism. Nooteboom’s reportage series was praised – and even awarded a journalistic prize – for its piercing insight in the essentials of the event. However, the newspaper in which it was published, anticipated the public suspicion about their credibility by characterizing the articles as columns – a genre with much discursive freedom that is allowed to mix fact and fiction.<sup>42</sup> The authors suggest that

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<sup>40</sup> Broersma, ‘Performative Discourse’, pp. 19-24.

<sup>41</sup> Eason, ‘New Journalism, Metaphor and Culture’, pp. 145-146.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten, ‘Code voor de journalistiek.’ Consultable at: <https://www.nvj.nl/wat-wij-doen/dossiers/ethiek/code-voor-de-journalistiek>

the convergence between journalism and literature was not necessarily perceived as reliable by the mainstream press. Nootboom's work thus remained an appreciated exception by a respected literary author. It shows how influential and persistent the objectivity ideal is within mainstream media.<sup>43</sup>

Similar issues play a central role in the Flemish 'stenciled revolution' that Plateau scrutinizes in her contribution. Plateau shows how authors, such as Herman J. Claeys and Julien Weverbergh playfully pointed out the conventional nature of the boundaries between fact and fiction. The work of these Flemish authors differs from Nootboom's pieces – and most literary journalism in general. They used typical journalistic genres and techniques governed by the objectivity ideal to write (semi-)fictional accounts. Rather than journalism that reads like a novel of short story, it is fiction that reads like newspaper articles. As Plateau concludes: '[T]he authors seem to play with both literary as well as journalistic conventions, thereby creating an ambivalent status of the text.'<sup>44</sup> They implicitly showed that the self-evidence with which genres are commonly categorized as fiction or non-fiction lacks a solid grounding. They thus point out the socially determined nature of these boundaries are socially determined.

The chapters by Harbers and Broersma, and by Plateau illustrate Broersma's earlier argument that the persuasive power of journalism does not primarily reside in its ontological accuracy. Whereas journalists stress the importance of the verifiability of the factual accuracy of stories, the public can usually not judge whether an article presents reality accurately. According to Broersma, journalism – forms of literary journalism included – can therefore best be regarded as a performative discourse. He argues that textual characteristics convince the audience to believe that the reporter has captured reality in a trustworthy way. A journalistic text is perceived as truthful and meaningful when it links up to socially shared frames, uses familiar textual conventions and incorporates recognizable professional norms. By giving a detached and depersonalized account, the active role of the reporter in shaping the image of reality is naturalized. This allows journalism to preserve the illusion of journalism as the perfect mirror of reality. Although it actively constructs reality it gets the public to believe that it only passively transmits it. As a result, journalism transforms an

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Broersma, M., 'Objectiviteit als professionele strategie. Nut en functie van een omstreden begrip', in: Bardoel, J. & Wijffjes, H., *Journalistieke Cultuur in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 2015), pp. 163-182; Harbers, F., 'De revanche van de subjectieve ervaring. Personalisering in de geschreven journalistiek', in: Bardoel, J. & Wijffjes, H., *Journalistieke Cultuur in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 2015), pp. 123-142.

<sup>44</sup> In this volume: Plateau, L., 'Fictionalizing Journalism or Journalizing Fiction: the Flemish 'Stenciled Revolution' Authors', pp. 36-50.

interpretation into social reality.<sup>45</sup> As Eason puts it in his article on the Janet Cooke affaire, in which Cooke fabricated the story of a juvenile drug addict called Jimmy:

Against the habits of news reading that transform conventions into facts, 'Jimmy's World' asserted that facts are produced by consensus and that the consensus may be grounded in little more than the fit between style and expectation.<sup>46</sup>

The chapters by Harbers and Broersma, and Plateau show the complexity of debates about truthfulness and to a certain extent the impossibility to resolve such debates. As Frus puts it rather strongly: 'arguing over which parts a writer 'got right' in terms of accuracy is a hopeless exercise, because we have no primary or original text to compare later versions to.'<sup>47</sup> Both chapters point out the social nature and conventionality of the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction they also show that such debates seem inevitable. This more nuanced perspective is supported by literary journalism scholar Daniel Lehman, who points out that even if it is impossible to pinpoint the exact boundary between fiction and non-fiction this does not mean that the boundary is worthless.<sup>48</sup> Society needs such a distinction to decide which information about reality is trustworthy to be able to make decisions on how to act. For these reasons, we contend that it is more fruitful to approach journalism as a performative discourse. Scholars should look at how truth claims are shaped against the background of the evolving professional standards, thus acknowledging the social nature of truth.

#### *The Personal Becomes Political*

Within the framework of these broader epistemological issues, the chapters by Ilja van den Broek and Markku Lehtimäki focus on how writer-reporters came to terms with the social and political changes of their times. Michael L. Johnson argued that the convergence of journalism and literature was part of an encompassing 'underground press' characterized by its indirect or direct political engagement. Politics in this context was not restricted to the realm of politicians and political speeches and debates, but also referred to

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<sup>45</sup> Broersma, 'Performative Discourse', pp. 17-18; cf. Allan, *News Culture* (Bershire, 2004), pp. 98-100; Van Dijk, *News as Discourse* (Hillsdale, 1988), pp. 83-84

<sup>46</sup> Eason, D., 'On journalistic authority: The Janet Cooke Scandal', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3 (1986), no. 4., pp. 432-433.

<sup>47</sup> Frus, *Politics and Poetics*, p. 229.

<sup>48</sup> Lehman, D., *Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction over the Edge* (Columbus, 1997), p. 5.

the political nature of language.<sup>49</sup> As Pauly has put it: ‘Through activities like writing, publishing, and reading, groups come to imagine one another and thus to constitute the very forms of public life.’<sup>50</sup> Both Van den Broek and Lehtimäki explore this issue by focusing on the confrontation between a changing society and the personal struggle of authors to grasp such developments.

Van den Broek shows how Didion’s accounts are highly personal and argues that ‘her success in touching upon the special atmosphere of the sixties might be due to exactly [the] intertwinement between personal experience, portraying subjects from within, and emotionally involving readers.’<sup>51</sup> Didion relates her feelings of rupture and irreversible loss towards the societal disorder characterizing the sixties. The society in which she grew up disappeared and this incites feelings of nostalgia. Yet, Van den Broek shows that Didion is also critical towards the memories of her childhood, acknowledging their idealized nature. She forces herself to accept the inescapability of coming to terms – or ‘growing up’ in her own terms – with what she feels is a destabilized society. Ambivalence is also reflected in her attitude towards the social and political movements in the sixties. Didion sympathizes with their attempts to reorganize society, but she also points to the somewhat youthful naïveté and immature sides of the student protests, the feminist and black movements. In her reflexive accounts historical change is conveyed through her own life story, and her personal experience trumps official politics in its urgency and insightfulness into the changes taking place in the sixties.

Lehtimäki points to a similar struggle in the work of Norman Mailer, who also attempts to make sense of the experience brought forth by the sixties. Lehtimäki focuses on the way literary techniques and political practices interface in Mailer’s attempt to convey his experience of society and politics in the sixties. In a highly self-reflexive manner, Mailer reports on the political rhetoric in the sixties and early seventies, figuring politicians such as John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Lehtimäki shows how Mailer struggles with his attempt to depict the essential characteristics of these politicians and society in the sixties. In his search for the adequate form to capture a rapidly altering society in the sixties, he shows how the notion of the passive observer that dominates objective journalism is untenable. In his scrutiny of his form or reporting, Mailer can nothing but acknowledge that his stories are shaped by his political convictions, the image he has of the politicians he depicts, and also by his beliefs about the way a narrative should be composed. Although Mailer believes that this

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<sup>49</sup> Van den Broek, ‘Persoonlijke politiek’, pp. 113-114.

<sup>50</sup> Pauly, ‘The Politics of the New Journalism’, p. 111.

<sup>51</sup> In this volume: Van den Broek, I., ‘The Experience of Rupture. Joan Didion, The Sixties, and the Remembrance of California’, pp. 51-75.

way of reporting, employing techniques borrowed from literature, gives ‘greater depth and dimension to the facts’, Lehtimäki concludes that Mailer nevertheless points out that the complexity of American society in the sixties keeps on eluding every attempt to capture it, although he keeps on trying to find new forms to capture it.<sup>52</sup>

The articles by Lehtimäki and Van den Broek also show how the objectivity regime, in which fact and experience, the public and the private, detached truth and subjective stories are considered to be clearly separated from each other, was rejected by the respective New Journalists they analyzed. Moreover, they point out how the personal and the political are much more entwined than was – and is – often considered. Both scholars show how political discourse cannot be disconnected from narratives about personal experiences. Moreover, these personal stories themselves become political in the sense that they shed light on the beliefs that circulate within society, elucidating the power structures that they presuppose.

#### *Political Engagement Versus Aesthetic Autonomy*

Personal engagement with the societal issues of the sixties reveals another tension that arises when journalism and literature converge. Especially within the literary domain texts championing a certain social, ideological, ethical or commercial cause are considered suspicious as the aesthetic autonomy is compromised by such heteronomous influences.<sup>53</sup> Literature, and art in general, are:

understood to be autotelic – obeying only its own rules. It is not taken as a form of mimesis relative to reality but as constituting its own reality. It is not meant to entertain, edify, refine or teach its reader, viewer or listener.<sup>54</sup>

The idea of aesthetic autonomy can be traced back to Kant’s notion of *interesseloses Wohlgefallen*, or ‘disinterested delight’, as a key criterion for aesthetic judgment.<sup>55</sup> It emphasizes that a work of art can only evoke an aesthetic experience when it does not have a practical purpose or particular interest. It therefore cannot be created to produce knowledge, argue in favor of a political conviction or make money off it.<sup>56</sup>

This does not mean that literature actually *is* autonomous. The autonomy of literature is a normative claim about the nature of literature,

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<sup>52</sup> In this volume: Lehtimäki, M., ‘Political Conventions and Literary Conventions: Mailer’s Art of Reportage’, pp. 76-95.

<sup>53</sup> Dorleijn, Grüttemeier & Korthals Altes, ‘The Autonomy of Literature’, p. ix-xi.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. x.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. xi.

<sup>56</sup> Kant, I., *Over schoonheid* (Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 12-13.



which lacks firm empirical foundation. It should be regarded as a strategic assertion that literary writers use to set literature apart from other modes of expression like journalism.

In discursive practice, heteronomy and autonomy rather tend to stand in a rather complex tension[.] [...] '[T]he relationship between the heteronomous and autonomous pole are to be viewed not as dichotomous [...] but as polydimensional, gradual and complex.'<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, the notion of aesthetic autonomy has become an important norm within literature. Authors and critics draw upon this to defend or attack the literary value of a certain text.<sup>58</sup> However, as the quote by Mulisch at the start of this introduction illustrates, literary writers and journalists in the sixties started to challenge aesthetic autonomy as a literary value.

Both Sander Bax and Sarah Beeks show how the sixties brought about new notions of literary authorship in which the author was a committed public intellectual. To a certain extent, he also turned into a commercially successful literary celebrity. Beeks shows how famous Flemish writer and poet Hugo Claus struggled with these opposing perspectives on literature. He felt the need to comment on the world events, such as the protests against atomic weapons or the Vietnam War. Yet, journalistic genres, such as the essay or the reportage were a bridge too far in his opinion. He did not want to let go of the ambiguity and polyphony of his texts, which were considered typical for literature. Yet, Beeks shows how Claus developed a new poetic style in the sixties, for which he was inspired by political and social issues covered in newspapers, pointing out how he often made news facts part of his poems. These 'public poems' thus drew heavily on social reality, but Claus never tried to sever the conventional boundaries of fiction. As Beeks concludes, he moved closer to forms of engaged authorship, but his poems always maintained their ambiguity and their highly personal way of reworking reality, subjecting the factual foundation to the imaginative unity of Claus' poetry.

Bax focuses on Harry Mulisch, who did make the transition to non-fiction. He presents Mulisch as an example of an author who transforms from championing the autonomist doctrine to a public intellectual as well as literary celebrity. He also shows that the latter two types of authorship are at odds with each other as the celebrity status of an author undermines his intellectual reputation. Moreover, Bax shows that these novel conceptions of literature still drew on the idea of aesthetic autonomy. Mulisch therefore had to tread carefully in the way he presented himself. He could not move

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<sup>57</sup> Dorleijn, Grüttemeier & Korthals Altes, 'The Autonomy of Literature', p. xxii.

<sup>58</sup> *Idem*, p. xi, xix.

too far away from the idea that a literary author had to be independent and disinterested concerning the issues he writes about.

This idea of disinterestedness plays a central role in Josie Vine's article on Australian journalism in the sixties. She argues that the typical Australian notion of 'larrikinism', typified by a rebellious, anti-authoritarian and defiant attitude, reemerged in the sixties in order to keep the growing state and commercial pressure on the freedom of speech at bay. Vine shows that Australian journalists such as Wilfred Burchett, Mungo MacCallum and Charmian Clift embraced their subjectivity and engaged position, employing literary techniques to cover politically charged issues and events, such as the Vietnam War or women rights. These authors rejected the institutionally enforced objectivity regime. Drawing on the notion of the writer as independent, but committed public intellectual, they attempted to give a new impulse to journalism's responsibility to the public sphere – speaking truth to power. Vine shows how these writers reconceptualize and reinvigorate the idea that journalists should write from an independent position by inscribing themselves into a more literary notion of authorship.

#### *Remixing Media*

The strong rise of a pop culture in the sixties, aided by the rapidly growing popularity of television, challenged the traditional categorization of high and low culture. The exploding popularity of pop music with the Beatles as prime example, the budding entertainment programs on television, and the emergence of pop art rejecting the autonomist principles of art are only three examples of this encompassing pop culture that characterizes the 1960s.

As a result the hierarchy of genres and different media forms was put aside. Inspired by beat culture, authors, artists, and reporters were trying to represent the experiences the sixties brought about by mixing genres and media. They created intermedial productions in which poetry, sound and music, and reportage were fused together.<sup>59</sup> In general, the sixties can be seen as a period in which new forms of popular culture emerged, not taking heed of the traditional boundaries between cultural domains, media forms and genres. The mix between countercultural ideas and pop culture spoke to a new youthful generation, influencing their perspective and conception of journalism and literature and their quality standards.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Skerl, J., 'Introduction', in: Skerl, J., *Reconstructing the Beats* (London, 2004), pp. 1-2; in this volume: Stahl, H., 'Mashing-Up the Sound of the City. Exploring Underground Pop Literature and New Journalism in 1960's West Germany', pp. 167-183.

<sup>60</sup> Brems, *Altijd weer vogels*, pp. 287-299 ; Wijffes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, pp. 347-350.

As Annie van den Oever and Ernst Bruinsma show, television played an interesting role in the way journalism and literature converged. They scrutinize the work of and debate around the Flemish literary author and journalist Louis Paul Boon. They show how Boon started out as a novelist acknowledging the norm of aesthetic autonomy, writing novels in which he created coherent fictional story worlds. In the decades after World War II Boon's view on literature changed profoundly. He rejected autonomist ideas and started to experiment with integrating non-fictional elements in his novels, which he came across during his 'day job' as journalist. These 'collage novels', as Van den Oever and Bruinsma call them, 'profoundly transgressed the conventional boundaries between literature and journalism.'<sup>61</sup> They argue that what was striking about Boon's work in the sixties, is not so much his way of writing. He already used these techniques of montage before the sixties. Yet, whereas Boon's work initially met with critique by the literary establishment, the changing norms of the sixties meant a reappraisal of his literary techniques.

The scholars point to the influence of television, in the appreciation of Boon's work and of his status as a writer-journalist. Boon regularly appeared in cultural programs and quiz shows in the sixties. These guest appearances often focused on his work as a writer, or more on language and style in general. He became an appreciated public figure, which was typical for both journalists and literary authors in the sixties.<sup>62</sup> Boon exploited this status, as it gave him the opportunity to acquaint the general public and literary critics with his writing.

The case of Boon points to the way the distinction between high culture and popular culture was undercut in the sixties. The concordant difference in appreciation between them started to change as well.<sup>63</sup> Heiner Stahl's analysis of the pop literature scene in West-Germany in the sixties and early seventies, shows an even stronger collapse of traditional boundaries between cultural domains, genres, and forms of media. His exploration of the work of Hubert Fichte, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann and Jörg Fauser focuses on the way these politically engaged, left-leaning authors attempted to shed light on the political nature of the counterculture in West-Germany, by offering an authentic sensory experience of what it meant to be part of a countercultural community. They created a form of 'mashup' reportage, that

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<sup>61</sup> In this volume: Van den Oever, A. and Bruinsma, E., 'Writer-Journalists and the Sudden Turn in Appreciation in the Sixties. The Case of Louis Paul Boon', pp. 148-166.

<sup>62</sup> Wijffjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, pp. 338-339.

<sup>63</sup> Janssen, S. *Het soortelijk gewicht van kunst in een open samenleving: de classificatie van cultuuruitingen in Nederland en andere westerse landen na 1950* (Rotterdam, 2005), pp. 1-30; in this volume: Vaessens, 'Journalism and Postmodernism', pp. 184-200.

(re)mixed fictional and non-fictional ways of representation, as well as new or already existing textual, auditory, and visual material. Their purpose was to convey conceptions of individuality and constructions of the self in relation to feelings of disintegration in society.

In their work, which was inspired by the American Beat generation, Fichte, Brinkmann and Fauser attempted to represent 'the lingering repression of social norms and cultural mores in the post-Fascist society of West-Germany and marked [...] the adverse conditions of liberal capitalist welfare state.'<sup>64</sup> They all put conventional distinctions aside in their search for an authentic and tangible image of West-German society in the sixties, thereby 'testing the limits of media and public discourse.'<sup>65</sup>

### *Coda*

If anything, the articles in this volume show how strong some journalists and literary writers felt the need for alternative ways of coming to terms with the disturbing events and developments of the sixties. The established cultural boundaries and genre conventions were perceived as a limiting straitjacket, unable to capture what it meant and felt like to be part of these changing societies. Moreover, the different articles also show the diversity of the forms with which journalists and literary authors tried to convey the nature of these changes. Yet, the struggle of these different authors to find the right mode of expression also points out the probing character of their search for new ways of representation, and their ambivalence towards the possible success of their attempt.

Moreover, this volume clearly shows that the discursive practices of both domains share common ground. It points to the conventional boundaries between literature and journalism that are too often presented as self-evident. The articles also clearly illustrate how frail the distinction is. As John Hartsock and Thomas Vaessens show in their articles, journalism and literature share a long history of exchange between the domains. For too long, this connection has been strategically ignored within both domains, but also within the scholarly disciplines of literary and journalism studies. To do justice to this historical entwinement of journalism and literature, it is crucial to engage in interdisciplinary research into this shared history. This volume is therefore also as an appeal to ignore the traditional disciplinary boundaries within Academia. It aims to show how productive it is to focus on the way both domains have developed in relation to each other. The articles illustrate how the boundaries between journalism and

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<sup>64</sup> In this volume: Stahl, 'Mashing-Up the Sound of the City', pp. 167-183.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*.

literature have been set and crossed, how discursive norms, practices and forms have historically converged and diverged, and how hybrid texts emerged in the grey area between both domains.

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# CHALLENGING THE AMERICAN DREAM

## THE NEW JOURNALISM AND ITS PRECURSORS

John C. Hartsock

*'Things fall apart; the center cannot hold.'*

New journalist Joan Didion would cite those lines by poet William Butler Yeats at the beginning of her collection of New Journalism from the 1960s called *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, and they have since become something of a cultural metaphor for the era when indeed it seemed as if things were falling apart, and the cultural center, the societal mainstream, could not hold: they were times of cultural tension, strife, and reassessment.<sup>1</sup>

The New Journalism, so named because indeed it seemed new, played no small part in bringing about that recognition in the United States.<sup>2</sup> This is because it served as a profound rebuke to American values; as a discursive practice it probed, challenged, and defied a society's norms. It did so by reflexively examining the dominant concept of 'objectivity' in journalism, and it did so by examining closely a kind of American cultural triumphalism. The New Journalism, then, was fundamentally iconoclastic. And in its most withering critique, it challenged no less than the cultural myth and shibboleth of the American Dream. What made the critique withering was its full embrace of the literary in its many forms and shapes, from its affirmation of a subjective voice, to its conscious modeling of the more traditional story form.

How much influence it had beyond American borders is still being determined by scholars. But just as early practitioners and critics of the form mistakenly believed that what they were doing was 'new', it would also be a mistake to suggest that it was a unique manifestation solely in the United States.

In this essay, I will examine the precursors to the American New Journalism, the reasons why it emerged in the 1960s, and how it challenged the cultural mythology of the American Dream. Finally, I will explore very

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<sup>1</sup> Didion, J., *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (New York, 1968), p. viii. Y.B. Yeats's lines are from the first stanza of his poem 'The Second Coming'; see line 3.

<sup>2</sup> On the origins of the term "New Journalism," see John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, Mass., 2000), p. 200.



tentatively the parameters of its influence. By New Journalism and literary journalism I mean a journalism, to draw from New Journalist Tom Wolfe, that reads like a novel or short story.<sup>3</sup> While his definition is imprecise, it probably has proved the most durable from the American perspective. At the heart of the matter is what I prefer to characterize as a ‘narra-descriptive journalism’ in which the dominant modalities are narrative and descriptive, constituent parts of the unfolding of time and space inseparably linked in what the critic Mikhail Bakhtin has characterized as the chronotope.<sup>4</sup> It was, in other words, an attempt at literary storytelling, but one making a truth claim to reflect our phenomenal world – of time and space.

### *Nineteenth-century Origins*

From the outset, the ‘newness’ of the New Journalism was hardly the case. Simply called ‘literary journalism’ in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, the term would fade in and out of use until becoming more firmly established in the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> But it had a long history going back at least to the late nineteenth century, and, as did the ‘New Journalism’ of the 1960s, it derived for similar reasons from a perception of the inadequacy of the objectifying model of journalism – which dominated journalism practice during much of twentieth century in the United States – in the attempt to account for times of social and economic stress, crisis, and reassessment.

We can detect the modern origins of the New Journalism in the period between the American Civil War and 1900. During this era we see the rise of both literary realism in fiction as well as the early stirrings of what eventually would be called an ‘objective’ journalism. It is in the gulf between the two sides that a narrative literary journalism emerged. Thomas B. Connery describes it as a ‘third way of telling a story’ caught between journalism and literature.<sup>6</sup> He also articulates a historical template for this kind of journalism *and* literature in which it found particularly rich expression in the United States during three periods, the 1890s, the 1930s,

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<sup>3</sup> Wolfe, T. and Johnson, E.W. eds., *The New Journalism: With an Anthology* (New York, 1973), pp. 11, 21-22, 24.

<sup>4</sup> For Bakhtin, the two could not be separated in literary expression. See M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, C. Emerson and M. Holquist, transl. (Austin, Texas, 1981), p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, pp. 8-9, 38-40.

<sup>6</sup> T. B. Connery, ‘A Third Way to Tell the Story: American Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Century’, in: *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, N. Sims, ed. (New York, 1990), pp. 3-20.

and the period of the New Journalism from the 1960s into the early 1970s.<sup>7</sup> This does not mean, however, that it disappears during the intervening years.

The common historical thread that can be detected running through the three periods is that these were times of extraordinary social and cultural transformation and crisis. It was after the Civil War that a more disengaged, objectifying journalism emerged in the United States. A consequence of the development of a 'factual' or 'objective' news reporting was a paradox in human perception, Alan Trachtenberg suggests, in which American newspapers during this period appeared to bring the world closer to its readers when in reality it was alienating them from the *experience* of everyday life.<sup>8</sup> A narrative literary journalism, on the other hand, attempts to engage in an 'exchange of subjectivities', as Trachtenberg characterizes it, citing the example of Stephen Crane, or to narrow the distance between subjectivities as has been suggested elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> The narra-descriptive intention was to help readers imaginatively *experience* what others feel by means of the literary chronotope in a reflexive response to their own experience. For example, Lincoln Steffens, editor of the *New York Commercial Advertiser* during the 1890s, wrote in his autobiography, 'Our stated ideal for a murder story was that it should be so understood and told that the murderer would not be hanged, not by our readers. We never achieved our ideal, but there it was; and it is scientifically and artistically the true ideal for an artist and for a newspaper: to get the news so completely and to report it so humanly that the reader will see himself in the other fellow's place'.<sup>10</sup> In Steffens's observation we detect then the attempt to try to understand the subjectivities of those who have been consigned as the 'Other' by the objectification of the mainstream press. Among the more notable practitioners were Crane, Lafcadio Hearn (especially earlier, in the 1870s), Abraham Cahan, Hutchins Hapgood, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Richard Harding Davis, with Steffens serving as one of the forms foremost advocates.<sup>11</sup>

That first period of a narrative literary journalism began to pass as the United States entered the twentieth century, although it should be noted that

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<sup>7</sup> T. B. Connery, 'Preface', in: T. B. Connery, ed., *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (New York, 1992), pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>8</sup> Trachtenberg, A., *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1982), pp. 124-125.

<sup>9</sup> Trachtenberg, A., 'Experiments in Another Country: Stephen Crane's City Sketches', *Southern Review* 10 (2000), pp. 265-285; Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> Steffens, L., *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (New York, 1931), p. 317.

<sup>11</sup> Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, pp. 34-37.

there was a considerable debate in journals at the beginning of that century regarding a 'literary journalism,' and this provides the earliest reference as yet to that terminology.<sup>12</sup> But a collateral fact was that mainstream journalism was being repudiated by literature and *vice versa*, with the result that a narrative literary journalism would be orphaned by the aporia between the two.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, the genre never entirely disappears. Among writers of the first 'lull' before the 1930s were William Hard, John Reed, Dorothy Day, Morris Markey, Ben Hecht, and Ernest Hemingway.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, *The New Yorker* magazine, founded in 1925, would prove to be an important mainstay for the form throughout the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> And as the example of Hecht illustrates, it long survived in the work of newspaper columnists.<sup>16</sup>

### *The Great Depression*

The Great Depression, starting in 1929-1930, prompted a reevaluation of journalistic practice for similar reasons as it did in the 1890s. As a result many journalists would once again eschew a 'factual' or 'objective' model for a much more subjective and literary one because the former failed to adequately account for the social and economic crisis and transformation: Inherently, objectification leaves the subjectivities of readers alienated. But unlike in the 1890s, a narrative literary journalism would largely find its voice in magazines. This is because the political implications of the separation of subjectivity from an objectified world would be reflected in the low regard to which newspapers had fallen in the opinion of the average American in the 1930s.<sup>17</sup>

The narrative literary journalism of this period was often called 'literary reportage'. The terminology was promoted by Alfred Kazin in his 1941

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 154-155, and chapt. 6.

<sup>14</sup> For examples in Connery's *Sourcebook*, see R. E. Humphrey on Reed, pp. 151-160; J. J. Pauly on Runyon, pp. 169-178; and N. Roberts on Day, pp. 179-186. In Kerrane, K. and Yagoda, B., *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (New York, 1997), see their remarks on Morris Markey, p.93, and Ben Hecht, p.407; See Weber, R., 'Hemingway's Permanent Records' in: Sims, N. ed., *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, (New York, 1990), pp. 21-52.

<sup>15</sup> Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, pp. 169-170.

<sup>16</sup> J.C. Hartsock, "'It was a Dark and Stormy Night': Newspaper Reporters Rediscover the Art of Narrative Literary Journalism and Their Own Epistemological Heritage", *Prose Studies* 29 (2007), no. 2, p. 266.

<sup>17</sup> Stott, W., *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York, 1973), p. 83.

study of American literary realism *On Native Grounds*.<sup>18</sup> But the term 'reportage' was already in use in the 1930s, influenced by the reportage of the German-Czech Egon Erwin Kisch and the proletarian writer's movement in Europe and beyond. Indeed, there was a mutual influencing between the United States and Europe because of the cosmopolitan influence of the largely communist proletarian writer's movement.<sup>19</sup>

William Stott proposes that two kinds of 'documentary reportage' emerged, one 'instrumental' in attempting to prompt social action, and another more 'conservative' strain he calls 'descriptive', which did not have an overt political agenda.<sup>20</sup> Into the first group we can find such authors as Erskine Caldwell, Joseph North, and Dorothy Day. They did not hesitate to make clear their progressive and leftist ideological agendas. Among the more descriptive who restrained the tendentious urge were Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, and writers for *The New Yorker*, such as E. B. White, Joseph Mitchell, A. J. Liebling, and St. Clair McKelway.<sup>21</sup>

The efforts, whether instrumental or descriptive, anticipate what is perhaps the most memorable of such accounts, James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, an account of the lives of white tenant sharecroppers in the agrarian South. The book had its genesis in 1936 when Agee was assigned to write the story by *Fortune* magazine. As Phyllis Frus relates: 'The tone of such pieces was one of "breezy condescension" (...); the poor profiled were described in a manner designed to amuse or entertain *Fortune*'s affluent, powerful readers'.<sup>22</sup> They were, in effect, reduced to the sensational 'Other'. But as Agee became involved in the lives of the sharecropper families he found himself unable to remove his subjectivity from the story in order to reduce them to objectifications. Agee makes clear his intention: to acknowledge his own subjectivity in an effort to understand someone else's, such as that of tenant-farmer George Gudger: 'George Gudger is a man, et cetera. But obviously, in the effort to tell of him (by example) as truthfully as I can, I am limited. I know him only so far as I know him, and only in those terms in which I know him; and all of that depends as fully on who I am as on who he is'.<sup>23</sup> The emphasis on a more subjective voice is what would, in part, arouse later critics against the New

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<sup>18</sup> Kazin, A., *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (New York, 1942), p. 491.

<sup>19</sup> Hartsock, J.C., 'Literary Reportage: The "Other" Literary Journalism', *Genre* 42 (2009), no. 1, pp. 117-123.

<sup>20</sup> Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, pp. 238, 240.

<sup>21</sup> Sims, N., 'Joseph Mitchell and The New Yorker Nonfiction Writers', Sims, N. ed., in: *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: 1990), p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> P. Frus, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative: The Timely and the Timeless* (New York, 1994), p. 145.

<sup>23</sup> Agee, J. and Evans, W., *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Boston, 1941).

Journalism. This is true even in works not written from the first-person point-of-view, because of the abundance of description reflected in what Ronald Weber characterized as the author's 'shaping consciousness', which objective journalism attempted to erase in order to appear neutral: The shaping consciousness lies in the selection of the descriptive details of the chronotope.<sup>24</sup> *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* would anticipate the New Journalism of the 1960s when it later became something of a cult classic among critical circles.<sup>25</sup>

#### *World War II and the 1950s*

During World War II one finds notable American war reportage in the form of a narrative literary journalism.<sup>26</sup> The most memorable account was undoubtedly John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, appearing a year after the war concluded. The work narrates the story of how six residents of Hiroshima survived that city's atomic bombing. Frus, although she believes the volume flawed, notes that it is 'probably the best-known journalistic work of the post-World War II period'.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, in 1999, New York University assembled a distinguished panel of thirty-six journalists and academics to consider the most important examples of American journalism during the twentieth century. Whatever the inherent critical problems of any ranking, Hersey's *Hiroshima* was nonetheless ranked as number one.<sup>28</sup>

But in its time *Hiroshima* tended to be more the exception and by the mid-1940s the middle cycle of a narrative literary journalism was in decline, as Connery suggests in his template. The reasons are not altogether clear, but the triumph of science in World War II alone suggests that positivist assumptions had all but eclipsed subjectivity as a legitimate cognitive stance from which to interpret the world. Part of the triumph was reflected, too, in 'objective' journalism as the dominant model of journalism practice. After all, its advocates had long considered it to be a scientific discourse.<sup>29</sup> Also, in literary studies by the late 1940s and early 1950s the critical temper had all but solidified in the New Critical mold. Given that the New Criticism

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<sup>24</sup> Weber, R., 'Some Sort of Artistic Excitement', in: Weber, R. ed., *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy* (New York, 1974), p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> Fishkin, S. F., 'The Borderlands of Culture: Writing by W.E.B. Du Bois, James Agee, Tillie Olsen, and Gloria Anzaldua', in: Sims, N., *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1990), p. 147.

<sup>26</sup> Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, p. 185

<sup>27</sup> Frus, *Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative*, p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> Barringer, F., 'Journalism's Greatest Hits', *New York Times* (March 1, 1999), p. C1.

<sup>29</sup> Schudson, M., *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York, 1978), pp. 71-71, 74.

sought the meaning of a literary work in itself, a meaning transcendent of its phenomenal origins, that could not bode well for a discourse like a narrative literary journalism, which openly acknowledged its referentiality to those origins.<sup>30</sup> The genre, then, was once again an orphan between journalism and literature.

Still, during this second lull in the fortunes of the form *The New Yorker* continued publishing its 'descriptive' pieces such as Joseph Mitchell's accounts, not unlike Stephen Crane's of the 1890s, of pedestrian life in New York City. As Norman Sims notes, 'Mitchell and several of his colleagues at *The New Yorker* were responsible for keeping literary journalism alive during the middle years of the twentieth century (...)'.<sup>31</sup> Other writers of the form during this period include Meyer Berger, Mary McCarthy, and, again, Hemingway.<sup>32</sup>

### *The New Journalism*

What should be clear, then, at the advent of the 1960s, is that the New Journalism was part of a tradition, even if it was not recognized as such at the time because journalism practice and literary study largely ignored it. But like its precursors, it too attempted to aspire beyond the alienating objectification of the mainstream media. It, too, sought to engage subjectivities in a way objective news could not. By engaging in a journalistic discourse that emphasized narrative and descriptive modalities, the New Journalism bequeathed one of its most important legacies in challenging a country's cultural hubris. There was one difference, however, from the earlier periods. The New Journalism was less about economic crisis as was the case earlier, and instead more about social and cultural crisis in which a country increasingly lost confidence in its values.

Undoubtedly, the United States at the end of the Second World War could bask in a kind of cultural triumphalism. And fifteen years later, at the beginning of the 1960s, no country was as materially powerful and rich. Yet few would dispute that the sixties were an era of social and political stress and crisis in the United States: witness the civil rights movement, assassinations, and the drug culture. Not all was bad news. After all, astronauts landed on the moon in 1969, which was a triumph for American ingenuity, know-how, and a can-do philosophy. But meanwhile Vietnam

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<sup>30</sup> Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, pp. 224-225.

<sup>31</sup> Sims, 'Joseph Mitchell and The New Yorker Nonfiction Writers', p. 83.

<sup>32</sup> For example, on Berger, see: Appelgate, E., ed., *Literary Journalism: A Biographical Dictionary of Writers and Editors* (Westport, Conn., 1996); on McCarthy see Mansell, D., 'Unsettling the Colonel's Hash: "Fact" in Autobiography', in: Sims, N. ed., *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: 1990), pp. 261-280.

proved not only a quagmire, but also a challenge to the idea that American ingenuity, know-how, and a can-do philosophy, all idealized constructs, could overcome any obstacles. This challenged what many Americans believed about their time, that it was the 'American Century', another idealized construct. What was happening, then, in the 1960s is that Americans were discovering the limits of an empire of their ideas, including that over-arching palliative, the American Dream, with its promise and entitlement that all would have a happy ending, like a Hollywood movie.

Those practicing the New Journalism understood that mainstream practice, fundamentally objectifying in nature, failed to adequately account for and make meaning out of the transformations and crises of the era. For example, when many of his short pieces from the 1960s were collected and published as *Fame and Obscurity* in 1970, Gay Talese, one of the earliest of those recognized as a 'New Journalist', observed: 'The New Journalism, though often reading like fiction, is not fiction. It is, or should be, as reliable as the most reliable reportage although it seeks a larger truth than is possible through the mere compilation of verifiable facts'.<sup>33</sup> As John Hellmann observes, Talese's 'larger truth' is 'a key statement of the need that caused new journalists to abandon the limitations of conventional journalism. The contemporary individual was in less need of facts than of an understanding of the facts already available'.<sup>34</sup>

Norman Mailer took contemptuous aim at the practices of mainstream journalism when he wrote in his 1968 *Armies of the Night*, an account of a massive anti-war demonstration at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.: 'Now we may leave *Time* [magazine] in order to find out what happened'.<sup>35</sup> In other words, mainstream journalism was not to be trusted. Continuing, he noted, 'The mass media which surrounded the March on the Pentagon created a forest of inaccuracy which would blind the efforts of an historian'.<sup>36</sup> Michael Herr, as a correspondent in Vietnam, quickly realized an epistemological futility to reporting on the Vietnam conflict utilizing the formulas of conventional journalism, in other words, 'objective' news: 'The press got all the facts (more or less), it got too many of them. But it never found a way to report meaningfully about death, which of course was really what it was all about'.<sup>37</sup>

In order 'to report meaningfully', the new journalists turned increasingly to granting their subjectivities greater range in imaginatively

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<sup>33</sup> Talese, G., *Fame and Obscurity* (New York, 1993), p. vii.

<sup>34</sup> Hellmann, J., *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as Fables of Fact* (Urbana, Ill., 1981), p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Mailer, N., *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel: The Novel as History* (New York, 1968), p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 243.

<sup>37</sup> M. Herr, *Dispatches* (New York, 1991), pp. 214-215.

characterizing the societal distress. By imaginatively characterizing I do not mean to suggest the creation of outright and unambiguous fictions (given that any kind of mediation can be described as a 'fiction' of the original referent). Rather, it is again the author's subjective 'shaping consciousness' that engages in a selection of descriptive details referential to existing phenomenon. The results are an imaginative characterization based on a much fuller and richer range of the aesthetics of experience than the attempt at a neutrality of tone we find in mainstream 'objective' journalism. The results, of course, could only aspire to a more nuanced and literary result.

The work of Mailer and Joan Didion illustrate this increased respectability for a heightened if not gorgeously affirmed shaping subjectivity and the distrust for objectified mainstream journalisms. As Phyllis Frus notes, Mailer's helps him overcome the kind of objectification of the world that marginalizes other classes as the inaccessible 'Other'.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Didion, in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, acknowledges that in her stories she was attempting to 'Remember what it was to be me' when she recounted what she had observed.<sup>39</sup> As Sandra Braman notes, 'Didion rejects the canon of objectivity that still, at least rhetorically, drives conventional journalism (...). Her subjectivity is a deliberate stance understood *to be a position of strength* [emphasis added], the source of her credibility'.<sup>40</sup> In their efforts to understand the subjectivities of others by acknowledging their own, Mailer and Didion conclude with the inability to arrive in the safety zone of critical closure, which is the ultimate imperial illusion and delusion: an encompassing global view. That, of course, was the ambition of an 'objective' journalism.

In 1965 Truman Capote published *In Cold Blood*. The same year Tom Wolfe published *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, a collection of his New Journalism. As Hellmann observes, 'it must be considered more than a coincidence that Wolfe and Capote developed the forms simultaneously, for they were only the most visible experiments in a genre responding to a unique shift in American culture'<sup>41</sup>, a shift reflective of cultural transformation and crisis. As we will see, one can quibble with the claim that Wolfe and Capote 'developed' the form, given a much longer history that has only been excavated in recent years. But the appearance of such works was certainly a watershed for the New Journalism. That same year, for example, saw Joan Didion engaged in her own form of New Journalism in California independent of what was taking place in New York

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<sup>38</sup> Frus, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative*, p. 183.

<sup>39</sup> Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, p. 136.

<sup>40</sup> Braman, S., 'Joan Didion' in: Connery, T.B. ed., *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (New York, 1992), p. 355.

<sup>41</sup> Hellmann, *Fables of Fact*, pp. 1-2.



when she published new journalistic articles in *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Holiday* magazines on such themes as John Wayne, the California lifestyle, and Guaymas, Mexico.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, John McPhee published his profile of basketball star Bill Bradley in *The New Yorker* before it appeared later in the year in book form.<sup>43</sup> But it would be a mistake to suggest that 1965 was the year the New Journalism suddenly appeared. As Wolfe acknowledges, he was inspired by Talese, who had been writing for *Esquire* since 1960.<sup>44</sup> What did happen in 1965 is that the New Journalism reached a critical mass. One reason is that when *In Cold Blood* appeared, Capote proclaimed in an interview with George Plimpton (also a sometime new journalist) that he had invented a new form, the 'nonfiction novel'.<sup>45</sup> That ignited a critical debate about the drafting of techniques we commonly associate with the realistic novel and applying them to journalistic accounts.<sup>46</sup>

*Assaulting the Cultural Triumphalism of the American Dream*

Central to those efforts was the challenge to the entitlement implicit in the American Dream, a challenge that was not only journalistic but literary as well. We can detect it in numerous works. For example, Wolfe's 'The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby' provides an important cultural foreshadowing of the social distress and transformation to come. In some ways, it might be more appropriate to explore Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* as representative of the iconoclasm of the New Journalism. Indeed, it shocked the establishment when it appeared in 1968, because Wolfe described Ken Kesey, author of the 1962 fictional novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and his companions known as the 'Merry Pranksters' traveling across the United States in an antiquated school bus painted in psychedelic colors, during which they ingested copious amounts

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<sup>42</sup> Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, pp. 41, 186, 216.

<sup>43</sup> McPhee, J., *A Sense of Where You Are* (New York, 1978).

<sup>44</sup> Wolfe, 'The New Journalism', pp. 10-36; Talese, *Fame and Obscurity*, p. vii.

<sup>45</sup> Plimpton, G., 'The Story behind a Nonfiction Novel', *New York Times Book Review* (January 16, 1962), p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Hellmann, *Fables of Fact*, p. ix. Also, for a sense of that debate, especially by critics who were outraged by the iconoclastic nature of the New Journalism, see: Weber R., *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy* (New York, 1974); Gold, H., 'On Epidemic First-Personism', in: Weber, R. ed., *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy* (New York, 1974), pp. 283-287; and Macdonald, D., 'Parajournalism, Or Tom Wolfe's Magic Writing Machine', in: Weber, R. ed., *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy* (New York, 1974), pp. 223-233; Powers, T., 'Cry Wolfe', *Commonweal* 102 (1975), pp. 497, 499; Kazin, A., *Bright Book of Life* (Boston, 1973), p. 240.

of illicit drugs, such as LSD, the ‘acid’ in the title.<sup>47</sup> Wolfe’s account revealed, by 1968, how far the country had come in challenging the sober righteousness of the post-war triumphalism, and in doing so was not very subtle.

But ‘The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby’ is revealing because it is an earlier work in which the author intuits the vulnerabilities of the American Dream. The account of the custom car subculture first appeared in *Esquire* magazine in 1963. The article is in two parts. The first is about affluent American teenagers ‘consumed’ by the material culture, and is more representative of the kind of cultural probing the New Journalism engaged in during the early 1960s. The second part is a more prosaic account about the builders of custom cars. Focusing on the first reveals young people immersed in the hubris of cultural innocence. The account starts at a custom car show in Burbank, California, a suburb of Los Angeles, and is sponsored by Ford Motor Co. to try to attract youthful drivers to the Ford brand at a time when Chevy was the preferred mark of the young. What emerges is a social portrait of callow young people seduced by the success of American consumerism. In a swimming pool a Chris-Craft cabin cruiser goes around in circles, filled with teenagers. Chris-Craft has a long history in the United States as a manufacturer of personal power boats appealing to middle and upper classes for recreational purposes. A swimming pool, too, is a symbol of middle and upper class success.

Elsewhere in the story, 200 teenagers dance to a rock band on a raised platform, doing the ‘hully-gully, the bird and the shampoo’.<sup>48</sup> The young people dress alike. The teenage women-girls have bouffant hairdos. The teenage men-boys have their hair combed back, and ‘none of them had a part’, meaning that the hair styles were likely greased back *à la* Elvis Presley.<sup>49</sup> Wolfe characterizes the event as ‘Plato’s Republic for teen-agers. Because if you watched anything at this fair very long, you kept noticing the same thing. These kids are absolutely maniacal about form. They are practically religious about it. For example, the dancers: None of them ever smiled. They stared at each other’s legs and feet, concentrating (...). They were all wonderful slaves to form’.<sup>50</sup> They were, in effect, finding comfort in conformance as they danced out their youthful American Dream.

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<sup>47</sup> Wolfe, T., *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York, 1969). For references to ingesting LSD in beverages like orange juice and the American sugary drink for children called Kool-Aid, see, for example, pp. 61, 68-87, and 244.

<sup>48</sup> Wolfe, T., ‘The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby’, in *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (New York, 1966), p. 62.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 64.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 63-64.

What Wolfe shows us then is a generation of innocence cultivated by material consumerism. Initially, it is not immediately clear how there is an exchange of subjectivities. Instead, Wolfe's account appears as a more sensational treatment, seeking to emphasize the differences between the innocent, fatuous teenagers, and, presumably, the mature, sophisticated readers of *Esquire*. But one must examine closely his treatment to detect another side because what we see is the subjective examination in the shaping consciousness of the author that engages, through description, in more of an exchange of subjectivities than one would find in a traditional hard news story in an objectification that might read something like this: 'More than 200 Los Angeles-area teenagers turned out at the Ford Custom Car Caravan in Burbank yesterday to admire the art of the custom hot rod'. The issue is one of degree between the two kinds of voice, the first more imaginative, the second neutered of the literary.

Wolfe's account serves then as an important cultural statement looking back toward social innocence but also forward in anticipating a cultural crisis of confidence that was slowly overwhelming the 1960s. In effect, innocence was on trial, and Wolfe was probing the fragility of the American Dream. We know the result: The innocence of youth would soon find itself drafted for service in war, as has so often been the case.

Perhaps more than any other work, *In Cold Blood* is about the symbolic death of the mythic trope of the American Dream. Like a *diabolus ex machina*, two murderers appear out of nowhere and kill the exemplary American family, the Clutters. Regarding the exemplariness, on the day before the night of the murders, exemplary sixteen-year-old Nancy Clutter bakes a cherry pie, the wholesomeness of which is another American mythic trope, and volunteers to tutor a younger student, this, on the family farm in Kansas.<sup>51</sup> She is the ideal teenage daughter. We have, in effect, the innocence of Paradise, the realised American Dream. But in the aftermath of the murders there can be no return to Paradise. This is because the effort to know who the Clutters are recedes as Capote's intention becomes clear, to explore the psychologies of the murderers, their lives, how the murders came about, and how the murderers were caught, tried, and executed. The Clutters are consigned to being dramatic foils to the murderers. Thus, Capote joins the ranks of Dostoevsky, who focused on the murderer in *Crime and Punishment* except as a fiction. And the result is like Dostoevsky's: What we find are anti-heroes (and anti-myth). They fail to fit into the exemplary – and mythic – norms of society. Instead, the murderers' aspirations for Paradise in Capote's volume end on the gallows. But unlike the Russian *Crime and Punishment* where there is redemption in the end, there is none in the American version. That is Capote's terrible indictment

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<sup>51</sup> Capote, T., *In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences*, (New York, 1965), pp. 28-30, 35-36.

of the American Dream, achieving his literary – and philosophical – depth precisely because he challenges a culturally derived mythic archetype: His is the story of a terror lurking beneath the American mythic – and psychic – landscape, that all may not turn out well in the end. Thus Capote reveals cultural myth-making for what it is, the consequence, to borrow from Paul DeMan, of ‘an idolatry, a fascination with a false image that mimics the presumed attributes of authenticity when it is in fact just the hollow mask with which a frustrated, defeated consciousness tries to cover up its own negativity’.<sup>52</sup> There is reason then for why Capote calls his a ‘true account’ in his subtitle to the book: He is engaging in anti-myth to unmask the fiction of the myth.

Admittedly, *In Cold Blood* was not without its flaws, flaws that traditional mainstream journalists often used in dismissing the New Journalism. Since shortly after *In Cold Blood* appeared, Capote has been accused of inventing scenes. The charges remain troubling given that Capote insists in his acknowledgments that the book is true to life.<sup>53</sup> But participants in the events have challenged the accuracy of his observations and interviews.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, no one disputes that the book is largely true to life.

Joan Didion takes up a variation on the American Dream. In an article originally published in the old *Saturday Evening Post*, ‘Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream,’ she challenges the myth of the ‘California Dream,’ a cultural construction first cousin to the American. In epic fashion, Didion begins, ‘This is a story about love and death in the golden land (...)’.<sup>55</sup> It could be the beginning of a story by an ancient bard – appealing to myth: ‘Once upon a time, in a golden land far, far away, there was love, and there was death (...)’ . But not only will Didion assault the myth, she will also assault what she perceives as its maker: modern media. After a review of what attracts Americans from the rest of the county to Southern California, Didion observes of their mythic quest, ‘Here is where they are trying to find a new life style, trying to find it in the only places they know to look: the movies and the newspapers’.<sup>56</sup> They are, in effect, seeking a new beginning, a new paradise.

Didion proceeds: ‘The case of Lucille Maxwell Miller is a tabloid monument to that new life style’. Thus, what Didion suggests is that tabloid media have raised up a monument – a celebratory myth – to husband-murderer Miller. Miller killed her husband, ‘Cork’ Miller, by burning him alive in his Volkswagen. This is because she is engaged in her own mythic

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<sup>52</sup> De Man, P., *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis, 1983), p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> Capote, *In Cold Blood*, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Plimpton, G., ‘Capote’s Long Ride’, p. 70.

<sup>55</sup> Didion, J., *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (New York, 1968), 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 4.

quest, her own attempt to realize California's Golden Dream. This meant killing her boorish husband in order to find happiness with her lover, Arthwell Hayton. But Arthwell abandons Lucille. She is charged with her husband's murder and is convicted.

But it is not so simple. Because as Didion notes, 'What was most startling about the case that the State of California was preparing against Lucille Miller was something that had nothing to do with law at all, something that never appeared in the eight-column afternoon headlines but was always there between them: the revelation that the dream was teaching the dreamers how to live'.<sup>57</sup> In other words, they heard the siren song of the media. The trial itself takes on mythic proportions in the media. As Didion observed, 'Two months dragged by, and the headlines never stopped (...). Two months in which the Miller trial was pushed off the Los Angeles *Herald-Examiner's* front page only by the Academy Award nominations and Stan Laurel's death'.<sup>58</sup> In other words, the only events that could displace Lucille from the front pages of newspapers were the elevation of contemporary heroes by the Academy Awards to movieland Valhalla, and the death of one of movieland's longstanding heroes, Stan Laurel, of 'Laurel and Hardy' fame, who was a comedian and, in effect, a latter-day court jester. Such are the mythologies Americans create for themselves.

During the course of her trial Lucille continues to dream her dream of Paradise. This can be detected in the detail of her hair-do as something more than just a hair-do. At the opening of her trial she is described as 'a meticulous woman who insisted, against her lawyer's advice, on coming to court with her hair piled high and lacquered'.<sup>59</sup> Her vanity, then, her belief that she is better than she is (or at least than her lawyer believes she is), gets the better of her in her mythic conceit.

With characteristic understatement, Didion concludes the article with one last salvo aimed at cultural myth. Lucille's lover, Arthwell, spurned her in order to marry his young Norwegian governess. In a seeming indirection that shifts the focus from Lucille, Didion concludes the article with news of the new Mrs. Hayton's wedding: 'The bride wore a long white *peau de soie* dress and carried a shower bouquet of sweetheart roses with stephanotis streamers. A coronet of seed pearls held her illusion veil'.<sup>60</sup> The parody of wedding announcements that appear in the society sections of American newspapers is self-evident. But that this new young wife is wearing an 'illusion veil' speaks to the cultural resonance Didion has marshaled, a resonance that reflects a use of an anti-myth against myth. While the illusion veil is a staple of weddings, one must also ask what illusions the

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 21.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 28.

new Mrs. Arthwell Hayton has, she twenty-seven, he forty-four, when they married in 1965? All of this, the reader realises, while Lucille languishes in prison, pregnant – although it's not clear if Hayton is the father – amid the debris of her own illusions about the California Dream, that alter ego to the American.

Hunter Thompson's 'gonzo' journalism occupies an anomalous position in relation to the kind of narrative literary journalism discussed here. Yet his work is often discussed as literary journalism, albeit described as a 'gonzo', or outrageous and 'over the top', due in no small part because he did much of his reporting while drinking alcohol and doing illegal drugs.<sup>61</sup> Part of the difficulty is that while it is usually narrative, his works such as his *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* engage in satire so outrageous they beg the question of just how true they are. Thus, we detect one reason why his work can be anomalous. In the case of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Thompson ostensibly goes in search of the 'American Dream' in the heart of America's gambling mecca, Las Vegas, Nevada. The problem is that satire raises additional questions about whether the real intent is to narrow the gulf between subjectivities, or to widen it with sensational outrage. But again, like Wolfe, Capote, and Didion, Thompson holds up a cultural mirror – by means of the shaping consciousness subjectively selecting the details of the chronotope – to white, well-to-do Americans so that they can see a more garish side to the culture they embrace. That may well be part of the answer regarding the relationship of 'gonzo' journalism to a narrative literary journalism, in that if the ideological purpose of the latter is to narrow the gulf between subjectivities, or between 'others,' Thompson's gonzo journalism represents, to borrow from post-colonial criticism, the colonial 'Other' writing back to the empire. In the satire, the 'empire' (or the 'American Dream' as the case may be) is forced to see a side to itself that only the marginalized 'Other' can provide, in this case that of a psychedelic drug user. But if Thompson's outrageousness casts doubt on what constitutes the truth of the truth claims, what is 'true' becomes part of his cultural critique. In his post-imperial satire, Thompson challenges the very notion of what qualifies as the correct state of consciousness (sobriety?) for reporting on the world.

Finally, there were the accounts of the Vietnam War, the most notable probably Michael Herr's *Dispatches*. In it we can detect one more variation on the challenge to cultural triumphalism – and the American Dream. What repeatedly surfaces in *Dispatches* is the incongruity between the material reality and the triumphalism. It is rarely pointed out by critics that many of

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<sup>61</sup> See Kerrane and Yagoda, *Art of Fact*, p. 302; Applegate, E., *Literary Journalism*; A.J. Kaul, ed., *American Literary Journalists, 1945-1995: Dictionary of Literary Biography* 185 (Detroit, 1997); Hartssock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, p. 200.

the young American soldiers in Vietnam were the children of the generation that fought in World War II, which was the generation that had earned the cultural triumphalism. But the fathers and the sons were involved in two very different wars. World War II may well have been the last righteous war, assuming one is not a pacifist (for whom there is no righteous war). What we detect in *Dispatches* is a disconnect from the triumphalism. For example, there is the army surgeon in the tent hospital in the jungle who drinks a can of beer while doing surgery.<sup>62</sup> Or, four dead marines are brought into camp from a firefight and another soldier walks by singing quietly, ‘When you get to San Francisco be sure and wear some flowers in your hair’, a reference to one of the pop music anthems of the counter culture in the United States at the time.<sup>63</sup> A captured Viet Cong is brought in for interrogation, his arms tied behind his back, and it is clear that the interrogation will not be in accordance with the ‘civilised’ rules of war.<sup>64</sup> A military radio program plays Top 40 rock songs, and listening, you could think it was a commercial Top 40 radio station back in the United States. But after an Otis Redding song, an announcer begins to discuss the importance of thoroughly cleaning a machine gun after using tracer fire because the ammunition leaves deposits that can jam the barrel in later use. Thus, the commercial break of the Top 40 turns into an advertisement for how to conduct war – and kill – and not one selling automobiles or suntan lotion as commercials would do back home in the United States. Then there is the drug use, and not all of it illicit. Medics dispense Dexedrine – speed – to night patrols. One American soldier takes them ‘by the fistful’.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, soldiers smoke marijuana out on patrol in the jungle and continue to listen to the Top 40.<sup>66</sup>

What emerges from a flood of Herr’s subjective impressions are not the triumphant values of American democracy, nor defeat, but rather a psychic and numbing disengagement from the trauma taking place around the soldiers. But because it is disengagement, it too resists incorporation into the euphoria of triumphalism. These are the children of the triumphant American G.I.s from World War II who had tried to build the American Dream. These are the Baby Boomers trying to drown out a triumph that has now become an empty, mocking echo. Psychic disengagement becomes a survival skill.

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<sup>62</sup> Herr, *Dispatches* p. 185.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 83.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 8.

### Conclusion

What did the New Journalism mean then for the wider world beyond the borders of the United States? That is still very much being explored. But we know that to some extent it took place. For example, Hunter S. Thompson's 'gonzo' journalism was well received by the staff of the German magazine *Tempo*, which published from 1986 to 1996.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, they engaged in antics that today could be considered 'gonzo', such as describing a walking tour in a city while on LSD.<sup>68</sup> Also, it was not long before standards of the genre such as Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night* were published elsewhere, as well as Tom Wolfe's treatise and anthology *The New Journalism*.<sup>69</sup> The latter, published in the United Kingdom in 1975, two years after its American appearance, proved so popular that the British version was republished in 1996.<sup>70</sup> And then came the translations, and, moreover, translations in societies not known for openness and free expression. For example, *In Cold Blood* was translated into Slovene in 1968, and *Armies of the Night* into Serbo-Croatian in 1971, in what was then Tito's communist Yugoslavia.<sup>71</sup> And reporters at the Cuban magazine *Juventude Rebelde* were familiar with the nonfiction of Wolfe, Talese, and Capote at the end of the 1980s.<sup>72</sup>

That said, the influence of the New Journalism is still imperfectly understood. A reporter for *Tempo*, for example, erroneously reported that Hunter S. Thompson 'invented' the American New Journalism, in what appears to be a conflation of 'gonzo' journalism and the New Journalism.<sup>73</sup> In Finland, gonzo arrived in the 1980s.<sup>74</sup> But Esa Kero, one of the foremost practitioners in the style of the New Journalism in that country at the time, expresses ignorance of the New Journalism movement.<sup>75</sup> The same is true of the more contemporary Dutch writer Arnon Grunberg.<sup>76</sup> Thus it remains

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<sup>67</sup> Poerksen, B 'The Milieu of a Magazine: Tempo as an Exponent of German New Journalism', *Literary Journalism Studies* 2 (2010), p. 20.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> Wolfe, T. and Johnson, E.W., *The New Journalism* (London, 1975).

<sup>70</sup> Wolfe, T. and Johnson, E.W., *The New Journalism* (London, 1996).

<sup>71</sup> Merljak Zdovc, S., *Literary Journalism in the United States of America and Slovenia* (Lanham, Md.), pp. 86-87.

<sup>72</sup> Pérez González, J.O., 'Revolution is Such a Wonderful Word!': Literary Journalism in Castro's Cuba', *Literary Journalism Studies* 4 (2012), p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> Poerksen, 'The Milieu of a Magazine', p. 20.

<sup>74</sup> Lassila-Merisalo, M., 'Exploring the "Reality Boundary" of Esa Kero', *Literary Journalism Studies* 2 (2010), p. 40.

<sup>75</sup> Hartsock, J.C., 'Editor's Note: Has Europa Gone Gonzo?', *Literary Journalism Studies* 2 (2010), p. 8.

<sup>76</sup> Harbers, F., 'Between Fact and Fiction: Arnon Grunberg on His Literary Journalism', *Literary Journalism Studies* 2 (2010), p. 74.



to be determined the extent to which the American New Journalism and its gonzo variant may have influenced other national traditions. Or it may be that if there was an influence, it was more in the nature of general cultural influences, the 'spirit of the times' so to speak, in which challenges to the values of institutional authority, at least in the Western democracies, was ubiquitous. And in that, the New Journalism may have offered a convenient label.

To conclude, American values were probed and challenged by the New Journalism at the most profound levels during the 1960s. That is its cultural legacy, or at least part of the legacy. Yet, it was not 'new.' But we can acknowledge that it reached its most daring expression during the 1960s and early 1970s. And it indisputably leaves us lessons about the value of cultural critique that engages journalistic dimensions as reflected in the literary chronotope. How lasting those lessons will prove must yet be determined. After all, American politicians still routinely invoke the myth and shibboleth of the American Dream as the most recent presidential election revealed, presumably because Americans still hear its siren call of entitlement in the longing for a center that holds, where things will not fall apart.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> One can readily detect this in recent American politics. See, for example: <http://vimeo.com/31651906>, <http://www.mittromney.com/blogs/mitts-view/2012/05/new-web-video-american-dream>; <http://www.businesspundit.com/25-barack-obama-quotes/>; <http://www.hark.com/clips/kwjvcchdcn-reclaim-the-american-dream>. All accessed July 2, 2012.

## PERSONAL JOURNALISM AGAINST THE CURRENT

### CEES NOOTEBOOM, THE PARIS REVOLT AND NEW JOURNALISM IN THE NETHERLANDS

Frank Harbers & Marcel Broersma

#### *Introduction*

It was a refreshing choice when in 1969 the most important Dutch award for newspaper journalism was granted to someone who was not primarily a journalist. As a contributor to the quality newspaper *de Volkskrant*, novelist Cees Nooteboom (1933) had written a striking reportage series on the Paris revolt. According to the jury of the *Prijs voor de Dagbladjournalistiek* [Prize for Daily Journalism], it allowed ‘his gripped readers to directly experience the events.’ Nooteboom was praised for his ‘impressionistic style’, ‘rife with imagery and emotion’ which ‘superbly conveys the inner drama of events and situations.’ However, the jury also noted that he had an easy job compared to other reporters. Because his contributions were labeled ‘columns’ he was not obliged to follow the routines and conventions of journalistic reporting. As such he could confine himself to ‘a personal choice from the total range of events.’<sup>1</sup> Nooteboom probably did not feel offended by these remarks of a jury that regarded his work as distinct from ordinary and everyday journalism. He strategically positioned himself in between the journalistic and literary field, and cherished his outsider position. He felt that this allowed him to reveal what the conflict was essentially about.

Both Nooteboom’s writing and positioning show strong similarities with the New Journalism that emerged in the United States during the 1960s. The rise of this form of reporting was a response to the transformative events in the 1960s and the dominance of the objectivity regime within American journalism. New Journalists, such as Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, Joan Didion and Hunter S. Thompson, explored the boundaries between journalism and literature. They rejected the objectivity norm and championed a more overtly subjective journalism practice in which the ‘mediating subjectivity’ of the journalist played a central role.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Prijs voor de dagbladjournalistiek. Rapport van de jury.’ [Unpublished jury report of the Prize for Daily Newspaper Journalism in 1969 from the archives of the Dutch press museum]

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘mediating subjectivity’ is coined by Jean Chalaby, see: Chalaby, J., ‘Journalism as an Anglo-American invention: a comparison of the development of

They wanted to understand the societal transformation of their times and felt traditional journalistic methods and textual formats and conventions were unable to do so. Consequently, they experimented with storytelling techniques that were typically associated with literary fiction.<sup>3</sup> ‘The idea was to give the full objective description, plus something that readers had always had to go to novels and short stories for: namely, the subjective or emotional life of the characters’, Wolfe wrote.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars have pointed out that New Journalism fundamentally differed from earlier forms of narrative journalism because it also entailed an epistemological critique.<sup>5</sup> New Journalists rejected the ‘naïve empiricism’ of their predecessors and displayed a strong distrust in the ability of journalists to represent reality unequivocally.<sup>6</sup> According to David Eason, New Journalism should therefore be defined as ‘a set of meta-journalistic operations through which journalism as a practice becomes a subject for explicit reflection.’<sup>7</sup> Articles typically highlight their own discursive form as a way of meaning-making. They make the engagement of the narrator manifest while in the objectivity regime journalism is depersonalized.<sup>8</sup>

In this article we first analyze Nootboom’s coverage of the Paris revolt to show how his work relates to New Journalism. We argue that he employed narrative techniques that are commonly associated with literature. Moreover, in his texts he moved beyond naïve empiricism and reflected on the issues that representing reality entailed. Secondly, we ask why New Journalism never made much headway in the Netherlands. Although

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French and Anglo-American journalism, 1830s-1920s’, *European Journal of Communication* 11 (1996), pp. 303-326.

<sup>3</sup> Pauly, J., ‘The Politics of the New Journalism,’ in: *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 111-116; Michael Johnson, *The New Journalism. The Underground Press, the Artists of Nonfiction, and Changes in the Established Media* (Kansas, 1971), pp. xi-xvi.

<sup>4</sup> Wolfe, T., *The New Journalism* (London: Picador, 1973), p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Eason, D., ‘New Journalism, Metaphor and Culture,’ *Journal of Popular Culture* 15 (1982), no. 4, pp. 145-146; Pauly, ‘The Politics of the New Journalism,’ pp. 121-124.

<sup>6</sup> Roggenkamp, K., *Narrating the News. New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers and Fiction* (Kent, 2005), pp. 117-124; Harbers, F., *Between personal experience and Detached Information. The development of reporting and the reportage in Great Britain, the Netherlands and France, 1880-2005* (Groningen, 2014), pp. 44, 82; cf. Muhlmann, G., *A Political History of Journalism* (Cambridge, 2008), pp.22-26; Pauly, ‘The Politics of the New Journalism’, pp. 121-124.

<sup>7</sup> Eason, ‘New Journalism, Metaphor and Culture,’ pp. 145-146.

<sup>8</sup> Broersma, M., ‘Journalism as a Performative Discourse. The Importance of Form and Style in Journalism’, in: Rupa, V., *Journalism and Meaning-making: reading the newspaper* (New York, 2010), pp. 24-29.

Nooteboom's work was admired and awarded an important journalistic prize, its impact on mainstream journalism remained limited. It suggests that the mediating subjectivity of the reporter and the storytelling techniques that went along with it were appreciated, but only as a marked exception in the margins of mainstream journalism.

*The Mediating Subjectivity of the Reporter*

Dutch journalism had a long and vivid tradition of authorship. Only in the late 1950s it reluctantly accepted objectivity as a concept. In the US, the objectivity regime was already fully embraced in the 1920s.<sup>9</sup> In this framework journalism was depersonalized, organized according to routinized practices and formulaic textual conventions, and basically turned into a 'skill anyone could learn.' However, Dutch journalists valued a style of journalism that centered on the mediating subjectivity of the reporter.<sup>10</sup> True journalists aimed to add *intelligence raisonnée* to the facts. They 'wrote down their vision of the world in measured terms and superb literary style.'<sup>11</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s, the Dutch media maintained a reflective style, while at the same time gradually an event-centered news style developed. In the reflective style, news value was not the guiding principle. Factual news reporting was held in low esteem.<sup>12</sup> Dutch journalists preferred a style in which reporters conveyed their authentic experiences in an evocative manner.<sup>13</sup> The most acclaimed reporters were praised for their sharp and eloquent analyses, and for their expressive writing in a 'literary-psychological style.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Broersma, M. 'Objectiviteit als professionele strategie. Nut en functie van een omstreden begrip,' in: Bardoe, J. & Wijffjes, H., *Journalistieke cultuur in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 2015), pp. 173-177; Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, pp. 260-261; Schudson, M., 'The objectivity norm in American journalism,' *Journalism 2* (2001), no. 2, pp. 149-170.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Van Vree, F., *De Nederlandse Pers en Duitsland, 1930-1939. Een studie over de vorming van de publieke opinie* (Groningen, 1989), pp. 42-45; For a more detailed version of this argument, cf. Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, pp. 149-207.

<sup>11</sup> Broersma, M., 'Form, style and journalistic strategies', in: Broersma, M., ed., *Form and style in journalism. European newspapers and the representation of news. 1880-2005* (Leuven, Paris and Dudley, 2007), p. xv.

<sup>12</sup> Broersma, 'Form, Style and Journalistic Strategies,' pp. xv-xxiii; Broersma, M., 'Visual strategies. Dutch Newspaper Design between Text and Image, 1900-2000', in: Broersma, M. ed., *Form and Style in Journalism. European Newspapers and the Representation of News, 1880-2005* (Leuven, Paris and Dudley, 2007), pp. 177-198.

<sup>13</sup> Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, pp. 205-206.

<sup>14</sup> Wijffjes, H., *Journalistiek in Nederland 1850-2000. Beroep, cultuur en organisatie* (Amsterdam, 2004), pp. 62-65, 349.

The objectivity regime in the US aimed to provide journalism with an aura of reliability, detached factuality, neutrality and independence. This set of norms and practices substantiated its professional claim as an autonomous social institution. Yet, in the Netherlands the subjectivity of the reporter, manifesting itself in either a very personal style or forms of advocacy journalism, was not perceived as that much of a problem. Many newspapers, both on the national and the local level, were affiliated with the different social groups in the 'pillarized' society. These organized social life according to religious and political ideologies. Media were a central organizing mechanism. They functioned to underline and foster the coherence and interests of the various social groups. Journalists considered themselves, somewhat paradoxically, as independent representatives of their 'moral community.'

Other newspapers presented themselves as neutral and tried to cater to a broader audience. The mediating subjectivity of the journalist was also central to their reporting. They did not perceive this as a problem but rather as an asset. Journalists mediated between readers and the news by offering their observations and experiences of reality. Influenced by French journalism and its professional ideal of the *grand reporter*, reporters did not filter out the subjective elements to gain the trust of the audience. Instead, they emphasized the authenticity of their observations and experiences by employing literary techniques.<sup>15</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s reportages, typified by the personal approach of the reporter, were still considered extraordinary and a selling point for newspapers.

For instance, a series about travels through the Dutch Indies by C.K. Elout, star reporter of *Algemeen Handelsblad* and former secretary of the Dutch Press Union (Nederlandsche Journalisten Kring), was in 1929 still printed on the front page.<sup>16</sup> All information about the colony is overtly rooted in Elout's personal impression, reflection and judgment. His use of the first person perspective, thought representation, imagery, and stylistic devices such as alliteration and assonance is aimed to make his experiences tangible for the reader. The nightly atmosphere in the inlands was, for example, portrayed as follows:

The light bouquets that the countless ships raised in the moon and starry night, their cradling reflecting vanes in the black water, the quiet, black trunks, the large, rose gold orange slice of the backwards lying half-moon, the grinding of the oars of a sampan against the wooden tholes, the far-away rolling of a wins, someone calling over the wide water and, enveloping everything, the blurry-

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<sup>15</sup> Wijffjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, pp. 61-63.

<sup>16</sup> For a more elaborate analysis of Elout's reportage series about the Dutch Indies, see: Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, pp. 177-201.

wrapping of the pale-bluish night.<sup>17</sup>

Providing such an authentic experience that involved the readership vicariously was intended to offer a univocal representation of reality. According to Géraldine Muhlmann, the reporter took the role of ‘witness-ambassador’ and observed the world *in lieu* of the absent readership that could not do so themselves.<sup>18</sup> The assumption was that the experiences of the journalist were similar to those of any other observer who would be there.

### *New Journalism Versus the Objectivity Regime*

The main aim of Dutch journalism in the first half of the twentieth century was not to offer detached and neutral information. It tried to clarify the news for readers by understanding events through first-hand experiences and well-considered opinions, analysis and reflections. After the Second World War this way of reporting lost ground. Stimulated by quickly growing circulation numbers, expanding editorial staffs and professional training, Dutch journalists started to strive for professional autonomy. In the course of the 1950s and 1960s, they gradually loosened the ties with the moral communities they still belonged to. Due to growing profits, editorial departments acquired a more independent position in news companies. The objectivity regime offered a workable professional strategy to socialize new entrants to the profession and organize the news production process according to clear routines. Moreover, it provided a strategy to claim independence. The main principle in journalism was no longer the mediating subjectivity of the journalist as an intelligent and talented observer who explained the seemingly unrelated social reality to his readers in well-written reflections or evocative depictions. Instead, the guiding norms now shifted to a standardized and depersonalized method of gathering facts and presenting them in formatted textual conventions.<sup>19</sup> Journalism practice thus became much more strictly delineated and moved

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<sup>17</sup> ‘[D]e licht bouquetten die de tallooze schepen hieven tegen den maan- en sterrennacht, hun wiegelende weerschijnhanen in het zwarte water, de stille, zwarte rompen, het groote, rosegouden sinaasappelpart van de ruggelings liggende halve maan, het knarsen van de riemen eener sampan tegen de houten dollen, het verre rollen van een wins, wat roepen over het wijde water en, om alles heen, het wazig-wikkelen van den blauwig-bleeken nacht.’ The alliteration and assonance Elout employs here (emphasized by us) is for the most part lost in the translation above. Elout, C.K., ‘Merkwaardigheden van Asahan,’ *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 9 April 1929; all the translations of the quotes into English are our own.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Muhlmann, ‘Political History of Journalism’, pp. 22-23.

<sup>19</sup> Schudson, ‘The objectivity norm,’ pp. 149-151; Broersma, ‘Objectiviteit als professionele strategie,’ pp. 169-173.

away from the ideal of the *grand reporter* with its orientation on literature.<sup>20</sup>

The objectivity regime was based on the distinction between fact and value. These should be clearly separated from each other in the coverage. In general, a journalist was not supposed to choose sides. He or she should consult multiple sources and write a balanced account, thereby shedding light on different sides of the story. In addition, a journalist was supposed to write in a detached style, using a third person perspective keeping him- or herself outside of the text. These norms and corresponding textual conventions, such as the use of direct quotes and a composition following the 'inverted pyramid' in which the main facts of the story were mentioned in the first paragraph, were supposed to ensure an unambiguous and monolithic representation of reality.<sup>21</sup>

When in the late 1960s a critical cultural emerged in the Netherlands, Dutch journalism was thus still in the process of embracing and implementing the objectivity regime and acquiring professional autonomy. It had just moved away from a personalized way of doing journalism, when the American New Journalists started advocating similar personal forms of reporting in response to the dominant professional environment in the US.

The American New Journalism was not just a critique on journalism. It was part of a broader cultural development that criticized the organization of society as a whole. By means of both playful and more violent protests, the protest generation opposed and challenged capitalistic culture and the white male societal elite. At stake was a more egalitarian society and, in particular, the emancipation of students, women, homosexuals and ethnic minorities.<sup>22</sup> The dominant discursive practices within politics and journalism were regarded as expressions of the ideology of the Establishment. The ontological basis of the objectivity regime – that 'the facts' could be conveyed in a value free manner – was critiqued as an illusion. Objective journalism was considered a practice that reproduced an image of reality that was in line with and therefore beneficial to the values of the Establishment.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, pp. 260-261.

<sup>21</sup> Ward, S., *The Invention of Journalism Ethics: The Path to Objectivity and Beyond* (Montréal, 2004), pp. 14-19; Broersma, 'Journalism as a Performative Discourse', p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Righthart, H., *De eindeloze jaren zestig. Geschiedenis van een generatieconflict* (Antwerpen, 1995), pp. 28-29, 256-261; Kennedy, J., *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw: Nederland in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam, 1995), pp. 10-22, 126-145.

<sup>23</sup> Van den Broek, I., 'De persoonlijke politiek van het New Journalism', *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 6 (2003), no. 1, pp. 108-109; Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, pp. 335-338.

Journalists who shared this critique were mostly of the same generation as the protesters and often identified strongly with them. In many cases, they did not only report *on*, but were also part *of* the countercultural movement. Yet, even if they remained at the sideline, the performative power of their reporting was an important force in shaping the public debate and the events as such.<sup>24</sup> By using literary techniques journalists could show instead of mask their engagement with the ideals and events of the sixties. It enabled them to involve readers in the experiences they described. 'It was only by allowing imagination into journalism that journalism could speak to the imagination of the times', as Michael Staub wrote.<sup>25</sup>

The countercultural movement also resonated among many, often young, literary writers. As part of their engagement they envisioned a newform of literature that intervened more immediately in reality. Traditional literature was criticized for its aloof practice of writing imaginative and non-committal fiction (following the ideals of *l'art pour l'art*). The younger generation felt that writers needed to descend from their ivory tower and engage themselves with social reality and societal issues.<sup>26</sup> 'For a time, and certainly by mid-decade, it looked as if the surest means for a novelist to build a reputation – or rebuild it, as the case may be – *was to write a nonfiction report on a historical event, but write it as if it were a novel.*'<sup>27</sup>

Whereas writers borrowed from journalism, journalists started to draw on literary forms and techniques and moved 'beyond the conventional limits of journalism.'<sup>28</sup> Front men of the New Journalism such as Gay Talese, Norman Mailer and Tom Wolfe wanted to capture the fast-paced changes of their times that went beyond the imagination of many of their readers. They wanted to get into the minds of the counterculture protagonists, make their experiences understandable by immersing their readers into thoughts and events, thereby getting a grip on what they experienced as an almost apocalyptic era. 'It seemed all-important to *be there* when dramatic scenes took place, to get the dialogue, the gestures, the facial expressions, the details of the environment.'<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Pauly, 'The Politics of the New Journalism', p. 123.

<sup>25</sup> Staub, M. 'Black Panthers, New Journalism, and the Rewriting of the Sixties', in: Waldrep, S. ed., *The Seventies. The Age of Glitter in Popular Culture* (New York, 1999), pp. 22-23.

<sup>26</sup> Brems, H., *Altijd weer vogels die nesten beginnen. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1945-2005* (Amsterdam, 2006), pp. 254-255, 261-262, 268-277.

<sup>27</sup> Staub, 'Black Panthers, New Journalism', pp. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, pp. 34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 35.



In Europe, similar developments took place. They were exacerbated by the popularity of the American New Journalism, which did not go unnoticed across the Atlantic. In the late sixties and early seventies, the work of several Dutch writers and journalists converged. These authors operated, just as their American counterparts, in the discursive grey area between journalism and literature. They challenged the established norms in these fields and the boundaries between them. The journalistic work Cees Nootboom had been writing since the mid-fifties gained momentum and other Dutch writers, like Harry Mulisch, also started writing non-fictional reportage – without abandoning the use of literary techniques.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, journalists such as Martin van Amerongen, Gerard van Westerloo, Cherry Duyns, Martin Schouten, Ischa Meijer and Bibeb (pseudonym of Els Lampe-Soutberg) rejected the norms, routines and conventions of the objectivity regime. Like the American New Journalists, they considered objective reporting misleading and limiting, and therefore unable to capture something so complex as reality. They accepted the idea that a reporter could not separate ‘objective’ information from their personal experience and values. Just as happened before the Second World War they organized their journalistic stories around their own mediating subjectivity.<sup>31</sup> This is illustrated nicely by Nootboom’s accounts that allow the reader to follow events through his eyes.

#### *An Engaged Observer*

At the end of May 1968, Nootboom drove to Paris with photographer and friend Eddy Posthuma de Boer to experience and cover the revolt. At that moment Nootboom was already an established novelist. He had made his literary debut with *Philip en de anderen* [*Philip and the others*] in 1955 and a year later he published his first collection of poems. This reinforced his position in the literary domain. Nootboom arrived in Paris on the high point of the uprising. Between May and June 1968 *le Quartier Latin* around the Sorbonne University witnessed a violent mix between overt mass protest and guerilla war strategies. Bricks and Molotov cocktails competed with teargas grenades and barricades of cars and trees were built to fend off the *flics*.<sup>32</sup>

From the start of his literary career, Nootboom had always combined his work as a literary writer with journalism. ‘My work had to lose its overdone lyricism’, he later explained. ‘A certain *connaissance du monde* is

<sup>30</sup> Brems, *Altijd vogels die nesten beginnen*, pp. 296-297.

<sup>31</sup> Wijffjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, pp. 347-352.

<sup>32</sup> Marwick, A., *The Sixties: cultural revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958-c.1974* (New York, 1998), pp. 602-618; Righthart, *De eindeloze jaren zestig*, pp. 255-259.

required for writing. That's why I started travelling.'<sup>33</sup> In 1956 he wrote his first reportage, titled 'Moord met voorbedachte rade' ['Premeditated murder'] in the Amsterdam daily *Het Parool*. This series about the revolt in Hungary against the Stalinist regime was the start of a career as a prolific travel journalist. Over the next decades, Nootboom published his reportages mostly in the daily *De Volkskrant*, the weekly *Elsevier*, and the monthly glossy magazine *Avenue*.<sup>34</sup> His political engagement, however, was at its strongest in his reportage series on the Paris revolt at the height of the protests in Europe.<sup>35</sup>

In Paris, Nootboom was free to portray the riots as he liked. Unlike other reporters covering the events, such as Paris correspondent Bob Groen of *De Volkskrant* or Eric Boogerman of *Algemeen Handelsblad*, he was not limited by the constraints of the upcoming objectivity regime. This immediately becomes clear from the differences between the 'journalistic' coverage in the newspapers and Nootboom's accounts. Rather than providing a detailed overview of the daily events, as his colleagues did, he focused on conveying the atmosphere of revolution that was ubiquitous in Paris. He did not spend attention to factual description of the riots whereas this was an important focus in articles by other journalists.<sup>36</sup> Instead, Nootboom's accounts convey a highly personal perspective on the event. His particular impressions are illustrated with many small anecdotes and are often written in an evocative style. Take for instance the account of the protest march Nootboom witnessed on the first day he and his photographer roamed through Paris:

We go and sit on the side, at the feet of a lady who starts to sing or sings along with the Internationale every ten minutes - and then we see it pass us by for almost two hours - a procession that never quits, fills the boulevard on both sides, students, Spanish workers, hospital personnel dressed in white, typesetters, printers, chauffeurs, hotel personnel, teachers, all groups with their own songs, all ages, often arm in arm, unbelievably many women and girls, everything else that otherwise walks the Paris' pavement, a happy crowd, which finally like a river disappears in itself. The head is already out of sight a long time, but standing on a bench I see the river flowing through, the largest crowd I have ever seen.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> De Bezige Bij, 'Biografie', [Consultable at: <http://www.ceesnootboom.com/?lang=en>, last consulted July 28, 2015]

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Welsink, D. 'Cees Nootboom: een leven in data,' in: Bekkering, H., Cartens, D. & Meinderts, A. *Ik had wel duizend levens en ik nam er maar één!. Cees Nootboom* (Antwerpen, 1997), pp. 149-155.

<sup>35</sup> Brems, *Altijd weer vogels die nesten beginnen*, pp. 297.

<sup>36</sup> Harbers, *Between Personal Experience*, pp. 273-284.

<sup>37</sup> Nootboom, C., 'Adieu,' *de Volkskrant*, May 30, 1968.

As a narrator, Nootboom is constantly at the centre of his accounts. His writing first and foremost openly conveys his attempts to make sense of the events that happen around him. His description of the protesters passing by as an endlessly flowing river accompanied by continuous singing of protest songs conveys the feeling that these protests are a natural phenomenon that will not stop by itself. In addition, it makes his experiences much more tangible to his readers.

In Nootboom's articles the mediating subjectivity of the reporter is pivotal. He lends the reader his senses, as it were, to experience reality vicariously. His subjective perspective and observations not only aim to convey scenery and atmosphere to the reader, but also guide the interpretation of events. Nootboom frequently applies this literary technique in his work, which is aptly described by his close friend, the former Dutch politician Hans van Mierlo. When he in 2004 awarded Nootboom the P. C. Hooftprijs, arguably the most prestigious literary prize in the Netherlands, Van Mierlo emphasized that Nootboom's depictions of reality cannot be separated from the expression of the emotional impact reality has on him as a writer.

This is Cees Nootboom [...] the unequalled master in evoking scenery, cities, cathedrals, monasteries and visual works of art. His descriptions of color, sound, scent and the state of the weather are interweaved with the expression of how his observations affect him: feelings of amazement, admiration, joy, melancholy, and it is in this that the reader recognizes his own emotions and gets the feeling that he is reading something he has seen before, but had forgotten about.<sup>38</sup>

Besides attempting to evoke and convey what is happening in Paris, Nootboom also tries to put the revolt in a broader context. Contrary to the other correspondents in Paris, he does not aim for a detached and balanced rational analysis of the events. He merely offers reflections that associatively contemplate the events he is witnessing. His writing offers a very personal perspective on the protest movement in which he openly displays his warm admiration for the protesters and their ideals. Some of his reportages even make a committed plea for the cause he seems to believe in as much as the protesters do.

It keeps on being marvellous: Somebody speaks from one of the golden loges, the beautiful and serious, the finally no longer bored faces are raised in that direction, the arguments flow back and forth in the longest conversation in the world that has been continuing for days, 24 hours a day. [...] If I have ever

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<sup>38</sup> Van Mierlo, H., 'Laudatio bij uitreiking P.C. Hooftprijs 2004 aan Cees Nootboom,' in: Földényi, L., *In het oog van de storm. De wereld van Cees Nootboom* (Antwerpen, 2006), p. 216.

envied the French it is at this moment and with a jealousy that resembles love I turn in and just before I fall asleep I hear somebody down at the square shouting with a really thick Spanish accent: 'Vive les anarquistas!' [Long live the anarchists, FH/MB]<sup>39</sup>

### *Questioning Journalism's Principles*

Although he clearly sympathizes with the protesters, Nootboom does not present his descriptions and interpretations as unequivocal. In his writing, he openly shows his struggles to make sense of the Paris revolt. He tries to take the reader by the hand and impart his problems as a participant-observer to them. More in general, Nootboom regularly reflects on journalism's ability to depict the social world truthfully. He points to the complex and chaotic nature of reality, which cannot be definitively portrayed by a reporter.

He, for example, struggles with the question what the lasting impact of the revolt will be and how it will be remembered in history. On the one hand, his initial enthusiasm for the revolt and his committed bias towards the protesters incites a certain conviction about the outcome. After he has first laid eyes on the enormous crowd that goes into the streets to protest against the authorities, Nootboom states with quite some certainty: 'What its significance will be I cannot judge. But it means the definitive end of an era, and that doesn't only apply to France.'<sup>40</sup> Strongly impressed by the revolutionary atmosphere, he admits that in his mind, and in the minds of the other protesters, President De Gaulle has already resigned. Yet, when De Gaulle makes clear in a speech that he will not step down, Nootboom self-reflexively admits how overly rash these conclusions have been. He points to the uncertainties of such a far-reaching interpretation of the events and to the opacity of historical reality in general.

I bend over and see that the pamphlet talks about the commune of 1871 and suddenly realize how odd it is that the former French revolutions seem more real than what is happening now; that Thiers is easier imaginable than De Gaulle and I wonder whether that is because of the thin atmosphere of anticipation that is still present everywhere. An allegorical representation is painted above the podium with bodies of mythical and naked skin and with those annoying women from the 1880s with a harp, who probably have to depict Hope and who with a slow pace are directly walking towards the rising sun. I notice that I am beat and go outside. It is pouring on the empty courtyard, on the bannisters and on the portrait of Trotsky, on the columns, the stairs and the flags.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Nootboom, C., '1968?', *de Volkskrant*, May 31, 1968.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> Nootboom, C., 'De revolutie wacht,' *de Volkskrant*, June 6, 1968.

Nooteboom's implicit doubts about the possibility of a monolithic representation of reality are in line with his views on his style of reporting that differs from regular objective reporting:

The word flipside has been abused so often already – let's say that I have always looked for the side, the bottom and the frays of the events. I literally have a cross perspective. At a certain moment in time events are canonized, they become part of the history books and seem coherent and final, but in reality they have never been like that.<sup>42</sup>

The epistemological issues Nooteboom raises – that reality is too chaotic by nature to convey in an unequivocal way by journalists – are also expressed by two of his articles that clearly deviate from the other reportages in the Paris series. In these pieces (see illustration 1), Nooteboom makes a bricolage of captions, quotes and statements he has encountered. By thus abandoning the coherent story composition of a clear and conventional narrative, he attempts to give the reader an idea of the chaos of the revolution and the profusion of slogans, pamphlets, speeches and debates that flooded the participants. This patchwork of quotes is only accompanied by a short introductory paragraph in which Nooteboom explains his reasons for choosing this form:

Who spends these days and weeks in Paris is besieged by words, spoken and written. Words from this time and from the other revolutionary moments that France, and with France Europe, has known, 1789, 1848, 1871. [...] Together it [the bricolage, FH/MB] has to render an impression of the arena in which onlookers swirl round, but whose actors know perfectly well what they are doing. It is only one hundredth, maybe even one thousandth what I have here. *I am deliberately conveying it as chaotic as reaches me hour after hour.*<sup>43</sup>

While journalism usually tries to organize chaotic social realities into linearly structured articles, Nooteboom points to the impossibility of ordering and making sense of the (over)flow of information.

#### *An Esteemed but Marked Exception*

Nooteboom's coverage of the Paris revolt of 1968 shows how much freedom *de Volkskrant* allowed him. Yet, this kind of reporting should not

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<sup>42</sup> Piryns, P., 'Cees Nooteboom: 'Ik ben bang dat het niet zo duidelijk aan mij te zien is, maar in mijn geheime hart ben ik natuurlijk een anarchist', in: Cartens, D. ed., *Over Cees Nooteboom. Beschouwingen en interviews* (Den Haag, 1994), p. 211.

<sup>43</sup> Nooteboom, C., 'De papieren revolutie,' *de Volkskrant*, June 8, 1968.

be taken as the benchmark for the way Dutch journalism developed in the sixties. The impact of the New Journalism has been considerably smaller in the Netherlands than in the United States. Not only were pieces by its protagonists printed in influential periodicals such as the *New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Rolling Stone*, in the national daily press and in the underground press, but it also encouraged journalists more broadly to experiment with the form of their pieces.<sup>44</sup> In the Netherlands only a few individual reporters moved towards forms of New Journalism and challenged the boundaries of journalism and literature, of fiction and non-fiction. Their articles were only included in a few specific periodicals (*Haagse Post*, *Avenue*, and to a lesser extent *Vrij Nederland*). As such, the impact on journalism as a whole was limited.<sup>45</sup>

The boundaries between journalism and literature that were established throughout the nineteenth century remained firmly intact. Both discourses were rhetorically positioned as opposed to each other based on the commonsense distinction between fact and fiction.<sup>46</sup> The daily workers of the word who were crafting a first draft of history, had considerably less cultural capital than literary authors.<sup>47</sup> Although the distinction between a journalist and a literary writer was not always entirely clear, literature was generally held in higher regard. Because of its imaginative freedom, authors could supposedly exceed the ephemerality of everyday reality and write stories about universal issues with a longer lasting value.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Pauly, 'The Politics of the New Journalism,' pp. 119-120; Van Dijck, J., 'Cultuurkritiek en journalistiek,' *Feit & Fictie* 2 (1994), no. 1, pp. 68-69; the lack of attention for the material context of the New Journalism still makes it difficult to get a good idea of the outlets such accounts were published in.

<sup>45</sup> Wijffjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, pp. 338-339.

<sup>46</sup> In this volume: Harbers, F. & Van den Broek, I., 'Challenged Boundaries. Journalism and Literature in the Sixties', pp. ix-xxvii.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Sapiro, G., 'Forms of Politicization of the French Literary Field', *Theory & Society* 32 (2003), pp. 641-647.

<sup>48</sup> Rigney, A., 'De veelzijdigheid van literatuur', in: Brillenburg Wurth, K. & Rigney, A. eds., *Het leven van teksten. Een inleiding tot de literatuurwetenschap* (Amsterdam, 2006), pp. 56, 68-71; Frus, P., *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative. The Timely and the Timeless* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1-11; Hartsock, J., *A History of American Literary Journalism. The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, 2000), pp. 208-218; by no means should this be read as a claim that literature actually provides universal truths, although this idea is often put forward in discussions about literature. As any discourse, literature and the truth it might provide, is always bound to a specific cultural-historical context, cf. Rigney, A., 'Teksten en cultuurhistorische context', in Brillenburg Wurth, K. & Rigney, A., *Het leven van teksten. Een inleiding tot de literatuurwetenschap* (Amsterdam, 2006), pp. 303-304.

This is illustrated by both the way *de Volkskrant* viewed and presented Nootboom's articles and the ways he positioned his own work as deviating from 'regular' journalism and the objectivity regime. Nootboom focuses on revealing the ambiguities of an event and presents himself primarily as a poet.

The question is posed: are you a writer or a journalist? I am a hybrid, but for myself I am first and foremost a poet. And if I have ever really been a journalist, it was less to my own credit rather than that of the editor-in-chief of *de Volkskrant* [...] who said: do whatever you like.<sup>49</sup>

Nootboom positioned himself firmly within the literary domain and called journalism merely a means to become a better writer. He implicitly acknowledged that he could lose literary prestige by identifying too much with professional journalists. They did not have the same creative freedom and artistic autonomy that was considered crucial to literary quality.<sup>50</sup> This positioning strategy is reinforced by the way he characterized his experiences in Paris. By emphasizing that to him the events were first and foremost a poetic experience, he clearly set himself and his approach as a reporter apart from journalism.

It was a unique experience, Paris '68. It was a dream. You didn't go to bed anymore. You wanted to be present at everything. The days and nights got strung together. It was poetry. Obviously it was also something else. But for me, the reporter who was walking around there at that time, it was first and foremost poetry.<sup>51</sup>

Nootboom's *status aparte* as a journalist is reinforced by *de Volkskrant*'s editor-in-chief, Joop Lückner. He did not consider Nootboom as a reporter in the traditional sense of gathering news and covering events, but as someone he would send in addition to a regular journalist to 'cover the falling of the leaves.'<sup>52</sup>

Implicitly, the jury of the journalistic award Nootboom received for

<sup>49</sup> Piryns, 'Cees Nootboom', p. 211.

<sup>50</sup> In this volume: Harbers & Van den Broek, 'Challenged Boundaries,' pp. ix-xxvii; Bax, S., *De taak van de schrijver. Het poëtische debat in de Nederlandse literatuur, 1968-1985* (Leeuwarden, 2007), pp. 353-355, 359-362.; Brems, *Altijd weer die vogels*, pp. 258-262, 272-277; Buurlage, J., *Onveranderlijk veranderlijk. Harry Mulisch tussen literatuur, journalistiek, wetenschap en politiek in de jaren zestig en zeventig* (Amsterdam, 1999), pp. 200-215.

<sup>51</sup> Brokken, J., 'De voorbije passages van Cees Nootboom,' in: Cartens, D. ed., *Over Cees Nootboom. Beschouwingen en interviews* (Den Haag, 1984), p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> Joop Lückner cited in: Peters, A., 'De Parijse beroerte,' *de Volkskrant*, May 2, 2008.

his work also seemed to value the literary quality of his accounts the most. In their report, they emphasized Nootboom's writing style and his ability to get beyond the superficial description of the everyday events. They thus echoed the idea that literature can offer a more profound perspective on social reality than journalism.

But what he depicts in seemingly arbitrary, actually accurate, strokes is usually the essential. By evocative wording and direct expression he penetrates the deeper layers of the context and causes.<sup>53</sup>

Nootboom's reportage series had an added value for the newspaper because they offered an alternative focus and style. However, this came at a price. His work did not enjoy the same trustworthy status as that of normal reporters. Although he evidently wrote reportages that conveyed the atmosphere of the events in Paris, *de Volkskrant* purposely presented them as columns. They were clearly demarcated from the other articles on the news pages by conspicuous black borders. Because the genre is typified by its lack of strict generic conventions, it is less strictly bound to factuality, and can thus mix fact and fiction freely, the message to the readers was clear: these were exceptional pieces written by an outsider.<sup>54</sup>

It expressed a certain anxiety regarding the truth status of Nootboom's reportage. Although acknowledging that such accounts can offer an alternative perspective on reality, the newspaper conveyed that they should be read as an addition to mainstream reporting. Because they offer a personalized version of reality and adhere to other norms regarding veracity and reliability, the newspaper more or less waved responsibility. What had been common practice before the Second World War when the mediating subjectivity of the journalist was guiding almost any article in the paper, was now sidetracked. This kind of coverage only had a place as an marked exception at the margins of mainstream journalism.

### *Conclusion*

Nootboom's reportages clearly deviate from the mainstream reporting that was common in the Netherlands under the upcoming objectivity regime. His personal approach to events and his explicit commitment to the cause of the protesters are reminiscent of the accounts of the *grand reporters* before the Second World War. It was a recollection of the times in which the mediating subjectivity of the journalist was the guiding principle in

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<sup>53</sup> 'Prijs voor de dagbladjournalistiek. Rapport van de jury.' [Unpublished jury report of 1969 from the archives of the Dutch press museum].

<sup>54</sup> Brems, *Altijd weer vogels*, p. 381-384; Cf. Gijselhart, A., *De Column als vrijplaats* (Amsterdam, 1986).



journalism. In 1968, when the counterculture also touched the Netherlands, most Dutch media just tried to escape from the constraints imposed upon them by the pillarized structure of society and the media system. To them, objectivity was a useful strategy to claim an independent position in society.

Contrary to the *grand reporters* or the ideologically infused coverage before the 1950s, Nootboom's accounts openly doubt the positivistic epistemology of journalistic representation. His reflection on how to make sense of the events in Paris and his occasionally unorthodox collages of statements and slogans point to the complexity and ambiguity of reality. Nootboom's reportages show strong similarities with the New Journalism in the US and suggest a strong orientation on literary discourse. Because of the narrative techniques Nootboom employed and the way his stories were structured, the form of his reporting shows clear similarities to literary prose. By the use of narrative techniques such as first-person perspective, detailed dialogues, and regular reflection on his own attempt to capture the experience of the Paris revolt, he aimed to evoke a truthful image of reality in all its subjectivity, ambiguity and opacity.<sup>55</sup>

This is what makes Nootboom's reportages series an odd one out in journalism of his times. His reportages were praised for their evocative style and for the way they captured the 'essence' of social reality by deviating from the dominant norms of journalism practice. At the same time this literary journalism was set apart from mainstream journalism by his newspaper, the jury of the award for newspaper journalism and fellow reporters. His reportage series was thus applauded by both the readers and the jury for the profound insights in the *Zeitgeist*, but it also suffered from a whiff of fiction that never fails to surround a literary author.

Nootboom clearly did not fit the professional profile of the regular reporter, nor did he put in any effort to position himself in that way. As a well-known novelist he could not afford to position himself too close to professional journalism, for that could cost him literary prestige. Although literary discourse changed in the sixties, and left its ivory tower focused on imagination and creativity to get inspired by reality, everyday journalism was still considered to be at odds with the creativity and artistic autonomy an artist needed to have.<sup>56</sup>

The longer period in which the literary oriented forms of journalism had played a central role in Dutch journalism discourse made forms of New Journalism less innovative than in America. The use of narrative techniques associated with literature was connected with the form of journalism that

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. Hartsock, *American Literary Journalism*, pp. 11-12; Wijffes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, pp. 347-350; Pauly, 'The Politics of the New Journalism', pp. 123-125.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Brems, *Altijd weer vogels*, pp. 258-262, 272-277; Buurlage, *Onveranderlijk veranderlijk*, pp. 200-215.





# FICTIONALIZING JOURNALISM OR JOURNALIZING FICTION?<sup>1</sup>

## THE FLEMISH 'STENCILED REVOLUTION' AUTHORS

Liesbeth Plateau

### *Introduction*

John C. Hartsock defines 'narrative literary journalism' as a body of writing that 'reads like a novel or short story except that it is true or makes a truth claim to phenomenal experience'.<sup>2</sup> Besides literary journalism, there are quite a few hybrid text forms that intertwine characteristics of both literary and journalistic discourse, which are usually examined in literary studies. Both research fields sometimes make rivaling claims over the same piece of writing. Literary journalism scholars consider for instance Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966) as a form of journalism that reads like a novel,<sup>3</sup> whereas literary scholars consider it as a form of fiction based on facts.<sup>3</sup> The question arises whether it is useful to maintain the traditional distinction between these two research fields, as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would typify them. I am strongly convinced that both research fields have more than enough in common to benefit from mutual research efforts, as the different research methods and insights can only enrich and inspire the future research on literary journalism, and all its variants. In this article, I would like to discuss two hybrid text forms that appeared (sometimes in premature form) in the Flemish countercultural press of the 1960s, and more specifically in the stenciled underground magazines that flourished in this period.

In Flanders the term *stenciled magazine* generally refers to an independent (and typically smaller) literary magazine produced on a stencil machine, focusing on counterculture issues and controversial themes. Although these magazines focus on literature, the authors might use them as

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<sup>1</sup> This contribution is part of a broader ongoing research project that investigates the importance of the 'stenciled revolution' in Flanders. As there are no translations of the Flemish text fragments available, all translations in this article are mine.

<sup>2</sup> Hartsock, J. C., *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Technically speaking, literary journalism and fiction attribute a different role to objectivity. Where it is denounced by literary journalists, fiction authors aim for an objective representation of reality in their work, even though a certain attitude and subjectivity towards certain events and circumstances is inherent to the genre.

a platform for an alternative form of journalism when they suspect a lack of attention or neutrality of the mainstream press. For instance, the stenciled magazine *Daele* (1966-1968) introduced a voluminous section on censorship in its fourteenth issue in 1967, in which international press articles on this subject were collected. In general, these magazines were the product of individual initiatives and they were produced with very little budget, which translated in a poor layout and sometimes a clumsy composition. Typically, they tend to be politically to the left or far left. More narrowly defined, the term 'stenciled magazine' most often refers to publications in the period 1960-1970, when local tabloid underground magazines were booming in and beyond Europe. The Dutch magazine *Gandalf* (1964-1971), the French *Actuel* (1967-1976), the Italian *Mondo Beat* (1965-1966), and the British magazines *International Times* (also IT) (1966- 1972), *The Black Dwarf* (1968-1972) are just a few of the many examples. A common feature in these magazines is the intense political and social commitment of the authors. This social engagement, that is so typical for the 1960s, was a key factor in inspiring authors to turn away from fictional work and engage in reportages and documents with an ethical and political drift. Regular key topics from those publications include politics, police brutality, hippies, lifestyle revolution, new society, Vietnam, environmental concern, drugs, popular music, cinema, graphics, etc. A significant number of these countercultural magazines drew inspiration from the American Beat generation that peaked in the 1950s, next to a number of local factors. Not only were Beat authors presented in general articles on contemporary trends in culture, they were sometimes imitated. The most interesting example in this respect is probably Max Kazan's essay on Kerouac for *Labris*, which is written in a similar associative, non-argumentative style. This both literary and political commitment to actual problems is demonstrated more in particular by the active participation of authors in a number of protest meetings or in pamphlets on censorship.

Another local factor that led young Flemish writers to opt for the stenciled medium is the crisis of the literary infrastructure and institutions in Flanders, which resulted in a significant decrease in the number of debuts between 1966 and 1976.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, in this period Flemish authors had a very limited visibility in the Netherlands. Flemish books by Flemish

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<sup>4</sup> Brems, H., *Altijd Weer Vogels die Nesten Beginnen: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Literatuur 1945 - 2005* (Amsterdam, 2006), p. 422; Throughout the seventies, the Flemish publishing world was scourged by fusions, mergers and bankruptcies. Manteau, the literary publisher *par excellence*, experienced since 1970 the one crisis and takeover after the other, due to both personal and economic problems. Certain purely Flemish publishers, often with a catholic signature but with a limited literary fund like Lannoo, or without literary high fliers, like Davidsfonds and Boekengilde de Clauwaert managed to stay out of the crisis.

publishers were seldom reviewed in the Dutch press and almost nowhere to be found in Dutch book stores. This problem was partly due to the shortcomings of the Flemish publishers (e.g. lack of management, lack of promotion, unattractive presentation), and partly due to the dynamic expansion politics of the Dutch publishers.<sup>5</sup> As society criticism, cultural engagement or literary experiment did not always fit in the objective of the mainstream press, young Flemish authors created their own publishing space in the stenciled magazines. Small alternative publishing houses such as De Galge (1964-1975) and Sonneville (1966-1975) published their work in book form.<sup>6</sup> Some authors, however, even refused to have their work published and distributed by more or less established publishers; instead they continued to print their own work in small numbers by relying on private presses.

Interestingly, certain stenciled magazines focused more on literary experiment, with their authors challenging the traditional novel forms and introducing elements from other cultural fields, such as art and music. In this respect, both society fiction - combining a partly fictional intrigue with real historical events and settings - and faction or factfiction are interesting since they are literary genres that balance on the verge of literature and journalism. Whereas literary journalism is a subjective and narrative form of journalism, conversely these genres seem to be a form of 'journalized' fiction, adopting the characteristics of objective journalism. But besides this significant difference with literary journalism, it is interesting to find that there are also a number of remarkable similarities.

In this paper, I will first examine several articles of society fiction that Herman J. Claeys published in the stenciled magazines *Komma* (1965-1968), *Daele* (1966-1968), and *Totems* (1968-1969). This self-invented genre combines elements of journalistic and literary discourse in a most particular way. Secondly, I will analyze the composition of the documentary work *Het dossier Jan* (1968), written by Julien Weverbergh. His intriguing decision to add his fictional pamphlet novel *Een dag als een ander* (1965) to this 'document' will give rise to a number of reflections about the discrepancy between fact and fiction, or rather the absence of this discrepancy in this context. Both Claeys and Weverbergh were intensely involved in the small world of the Flemish stenciled magazines: they were part of the same editorial boards, they went to the same literary cafés, and they were equally convinced that their 'stenciled revolution' would

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<sup>5</sup> Conversely, over two thirds of the available literature in Dutch on the Flemish market around 1980 was Dutch import (Brems, *Altijd Weer Vogels die Nesten Beginnen*, p. 423).

<sup>6</sup> Simons, L., *Geschiedenis van de Uitgeverij in Vlaanderen* (Tielt, 1987), pp. 199-200.

overthrow the literary society on the one hand, and the political and socio-economic society on the other. Regarding literary history, very little has been published on the work of these authors and these magazines, despite the interesting range of literary experiments that they entail.<sup>7</sup> Thus, I will demonstrate the close yet complex interrelation between literature and the extra-literary preoccupations.

In what follows, it is not my aim to go too much into detail about the discursive differences between literature and journalism, but rather to examine the consequences of the overall textual composition of literary practices.<sup>8</sup> How do these texts relate to literary journalism? Is literary journalism fundamentally different from fiction and how does it relate to society fiction? A thorough analysis of both articles and novels with attention to the form, style and content will hopefully shed more light on these questions.

#### *The 'Antikrant'*

In 1966, Herman J. Claeys published the first critical article from the 'Antikrant' (Anti-Papers) in the stenciled magazine *Daele*.<sup>9</sup> In a short introduction he informs the reader that the Antikrant will be published as an exclusive newspaper issue in the near future. This single copy would compile all the critical articles that were published under this title in different stenciled periodicals. Unfortunately, it is uncertain whether this special copy of the Antikrant eventually appeared, but it is beyond doubt that the articles that were published in these magazines are innovative in form, style and content.

Like mainstream and literary journalists, Claeys employs what Frank Harbers calls 'well-known reporting techniques' like interviewing, extensive background research, a meticulous observation of events and surroundings, and a consequent use of the depersonalized third person perspective.<sup>10</sup>

Weert (Limburg) Oct. 11 (Bnl.P) – This morning eleven teachers and one headmaster were arrested while practicing their profession. It concerns the educational staff of the Secondary School in the A.Beertenstraat in Weert. At 9:20 am, at the start of the second class, they were discretely arrested and

<sup>7</sup> Brems, *Altijd weer Vogels die Nesten Beginnen*.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Hartsock, J. C., *A History of American Literary Journalism*:

Harbers, F., *Defying Journalistic Performativity: The Tension between Journalism and Literature in Arnon Grunberg's Reportage*, in: Boucharenc, M., Martens, D. and Van Nuys, L. eds., *Interférences littéraires* (2011), no. 7, pp. 141-163.

<sup>9</sup> The very first society fiction article by Claeys was published in the first issue of the magazine *Komma* under a different title, 'Uit het knipselarchief'.

<sup>10</sup> Harbers, 'Defying Journalistic Performativity', p. 149.

brought in for questioning, after the pupils were sent home. Until further notice the school was closed and put under surveillance of the local police. For quite some time, the board of the educational institution was under suspicion of giving the youth entrusted to them a sectarian and tendentious education. An official statement has not been made yet, but from written complaints to the ministry appeared that the pupils were openly religiously influenced and kept ignorant from every other world-view (...).<sup>11</sup>

All the articles are preceded by the heading 'Uit de Anti-krant', and while some of them have a title, others start with the location and the date. The page layout varied: sometimes the page is divided in two text columns, on other occasions the text runs non-stop over the page. The style of the articles is very formal and seems averse from subjectivity.

Antwerp, October 11.

Wednesday afternoon the local police in Antwerp arrested an eccentric dressed in black medieval robes. He was arrested at the moment when he uttered formulas in a foreign language and made banishing gestures over a newborn child, on whom he had sprinkled water, this in the complicity of the parents and family members present. During the questioning by Superintendent Verbeken from the 4<sup>th</sup> bureau, the man claimed to fulfil a mediating role between god and humans, and he said to be empowered to release newborn children by means of the formulas and gestures mentioned above, from the inherited moral guilt with which, still according to his statements, all humankind is born (...).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Claeys, H., 'Uit de Anti-krant', in: *Daele* 2 (1966), p. 85; Original text: Weert (Limburg) 11 okt.(Bnl.P.) - Hedenmorgen werden elf leraren en één schoolhoofd tijdens de uitoefening van hun ambt gearresteerd. Het betreft hier het onderwijzend personeel van de Middelbare School gelegen in de A.Beertenstraat te Weert. Ze werden te 9 u.20, bij de aanvang van het tweede lesuur op diskrete wijze aangehouden en ter ondervraging opgeleid, nadat de leerlingen huiswaarts waren gezonden. Tot nader order werd de school gesloten en onder toezicht geplaatst van de gemeentelijke politie. Sinds geruime tijd woog op de direktie van genoemde onderwijsinstelling de verdenking de hen toevertrouwde schooljeugd een sektaire en tendentieuze opvoeding te geven. Een officiële mededeling werd dienaangaande nog niet verstrekt, doch naar uit schriftelijke klachten, gericht tot het ministerie, bleek, werden de leerlingen er openlijk in religieuze zin beïnvloed en onkundig gehouden van elke ander levensbeschouwing (...).

<sup>12</sup> Claeys, H., 'Uit de Anti-krant', in: *Daele* 3 (1966), p. 76; Original text: Antwerpen, 11 oktober. In de loop van woensdagnamiddag heeft de Antwerpse gemeentepolitie een zonderling aangehouden die in zwarte middeleeuwse gewaden rondliep. Hij werd gearresteerd op het ogenblik dat hij vreemdtalige formules uitsprak en bezwerende gebaren maakte over een pasgeboren kind, waarover hij water had gesprenkeld, dit met medeplichtigheid van de terplaatse aanwezige ouders en familieleden. Tijdens de ondervraging door Commissaris Verbeken van het 4de bureau, beweerde de man een bemiddelende rol te spelen tussen god en de mensen, en zei hij ertoe gemachtigd te zijn pasgeboren kinderen door bovenvermelde



These critical articles of variable length display a form that is typical for objective journalism. According to Marcel Broersma the success of journalism's truth claim resides for an important part in the form as it refers to the accepted journalistic norms and routines.<sup>13</sup> However, as Harbers' research on Arnon Grunberg has shown the success of the truth claim can be challenged by deviating textual characteristics, like irony or foregrounding and reflecting on the reporting process.<sup>14</sup> With that in mind, Claeys' anecdotal Antikrant articles are highly interesting. They deal with fictional situations and events that take place in the future, but they clearly refer to contemporary habits, rituals, customs, like the article cited above that overtly targets Catholic baptism.

The Antikrant does not only mock religion and ethics, but also social services, law, the government, philosophy, psychology and manners.<sup>15</sup> In practical terms, Claeys published articles about the absurdity of the army (*Daele 2*), the ownership of land, the renting of houses (*Daele 3*), the unequal pay for employees and management (*Daele 4*), the absurdity of the hunt (*Daele 3*), air pollution (*Daele 4*), unlit roads (*Daele 4*), taking the name of one's husband (*Daele 4*), the abortion of disabled children (*Daele 3*). Also Catholicism is heavily criticized in the articles about baptism as child abuse (*Daele 3*) and the brainwashing of children on catholic schools (*Daele 2*).

False name. Miss Carla Willems from Eindhoven turned out to be named Van der Hagen, but out of love or admiration for her husband, she took his name. Letters and forms were signed as Carla Willems – Van der Hagen. When she signed an official file she was summoned at the police station. She will be prosecuted for bearing a false name.<sup>16</sup>

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formules en handelingen te ontheffen van een erfelijke morele schuld, waarmee, steeds volgens zijn beweren, alle mensen worden geboren (...).

<sup>13</sup> Broersma, M., 'Journalism as Performative Discourse: The Importance of Form and Style in Journalism', in: Rupaar, V. ed., *Journalism and Meaning-Making: Reading the Newspaper* (Cresskill, N.J., 2010), pp. 15-35.

<sup>14</sup> Harbers, 'Defying Journalistic Performativity', p. 143.

<sup>15</sup> Claeys, H., 'De Penisgroet en Society Fiction', in: *Daele 13* (1967), p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> Claeys, H., 'Uit de Anti-krant', in: *Daele 4* (1966), p. 121; Original text: Valse naam. Mevrouw Carla Willems uit Eindhoven bleek in feite Van der Hagen te heten, maar uit liefde of bewondering voor haar man, nam ze diens naam over. Brieven en formulieren placht ze te ondertekenen met Carla Willems -Van der Hagen. Toen zij aldus een officieel stuk ondertekende werd ze op het politiebureau geroepen. Ze zal vervolgd worden wegens het dragen van een valse naam.

According to Claeys, the title ‘Antikrant’ refers to its absurd and impossible character compared to the common type of magazine in Flanders.<sup>17</sup> ‘In feite gaat het hier om een doodgewone krant, waarin doodgewone dingen geschreven staan’, writes Claeys in his introduction, but he warns his readers about the suspicious and absurd nature of everything in society that seems obvious.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, this is exactly his purpose, to brutally awake the contemporary reader from his numbing routines. In every article, he aims to defy a(n) (absurd) routine convention of daily life, by replacing it with another convention that is equally absurd. ‘Society Fiction’ wants to bring the reader to insight by a shock effect:

[W]ith the help of the medium society fiction the author calls up a society, that is either better than ours, so that the reader can possibly pursue it, or that is so much worse – I recall Orwell’s 1984, Alphaville, Brave New World – so that the reader will resist such an evolution. (...) The degree of his provocation is the barometer of his integration in the contemporary society.<sup>19</sup>

The combination of the journalistic style and form, and the ironical fictional content results in a very smart form of societal criticism. The fact that the Antikrant events take place in a future that leans on Marxist, communist and PROVO principles (references to a ‘Karel Marx-hospital’, white cars, etc.), displays a deep environmental concern and a fanatic anti-Catholic (references to the *Index librorum prohibitus*, etc.) and anti-capitalist disposition, should stimulate the reader’s imagination about the possible alternative if he dissociates from contemporary routines and ideologies.

Remarkably, there is one Antikrant article that breaks with all the conventions of the other articles. ‘De penisgroet’, published in the tenth issue of *Daele*, has no journalistic frame of reference; there is no heading ‘Uit de Antikrant’ or a deviating layout (columns) that remind the reader of a newspaper article. Additionally, the author breaks with the style of his other Antikrant articles, and now applies the we-, you-, and I-form. In ‘De penisgroet’, Claeys proposes to replace the traditional handshake by a penis greeting. The exhaustive and provocative descriptions illustrate that a penis greeting is much more expressive and genuine than a simple handshake.

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<sup>17</sup> Claeys, H., ‘Uit de Anti-krant’, in: *Daele* 2 (1966), p. 85.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Claeys, ‘De Penisgroet en Society Fiction’, p. 81; Original text: [M]et behulp van het medium society fiction roept de schrijver een maatschappij voor de geest, die ofwel beter is dan de onze, zodat de lezer die eventueel gaat nastreven, ofwel zodanig veel slechter – ik denk aan Orwells 1984, aan Alphaville, aan Brave New World – dat de lezer zich tegen een evolutie in die zin gaat verzetten. (...) Het geprovoiseerd-zijn van de lezer is de barometer van zijn geïntegreerd-zijn in de huidige maatschappij.

## The penisgreeting

We are going to introduce a new way of greeting: instead of shaking each other's hands, we will shake each other's penis. Shaking the hand is so monotonous, it offers so little variation, it is not expressive enough. You can obviously express a hint of friendship in a firm handshake, and a hint of boredom in a flabby touch, but that's it. No, you can also shake the hand, as a sign of enthusiasm. But by using the penis the possibilities are endless. When you meet a colleague it is a formal and automatic touch of the trousers with the fingers. Do you meet your boss then it is merely a symbolical hand gesture in the direction of the lower belly, you with respect, he careless. Are you getting introduced to a stranger, during a meeting, then you absent-mindedly open your zipper and let him touch your underwear. During a reception you can just as well leave your zipper open. But when you meet your friends, then there are as many variations as there are degrees in friendship: lightly touching the penis with one or two fingers; enclosing it with the hand; softly caressing it; revealing the tip; pressing the tip; raising the penis to a light erection; caressing the penis in erection; one pull; two pulls, three, etc. The size of the erection is the barometer of sympathy (...).<sup>20</sup>

Due to this indecent proposal, both Claeys and the editor of *Daele* faced vehement opposition from the Belgian authorities. In October 1967, their houses were searched for pornographic material, as both were accused of moral corruption. The seizure of *Daele* copies, unpublished manuscripts, books, diaries and other personal items engendered significant cultural upheaval. The manifest in the subsequent *Daele* copy (the 'Emergency Copy') expanded the incident into a violation of personal freedom, freedom

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<sup>20</sup> Claeys, H., 'De Penisgroet', in: *Daele* 10 (1967), p. 57; Original text: De penisgroet. We gaan een nieuwe wijze van groeten invoeren: in plaats van elkaar de hand te drukken, drukken wij elkaar de penis. De hand drukken is zo eentonig, het biedt zo weinig variatie, het is niet expressief genoeg. Je kunt natuurlijk iets van de vriendschap uitdrukken in een stevige, ferme handdruk, en iets van de verveling in slappe aanraking, maar dat is ook alles. Nee, je kunt ook de hand schudden, als blijk van geestdrift. Maar met de penis zijn de mogelijkheden onbepaald. Bij een kollega is het een vormelijk en automatisch aanraken van de pantalon met de vingers. Ontmoet je je baas dan blijft het slechts een symbolische handbeweging in de richting van de onderbuik, jij met respect, hij achteloos. Wordt je aan een vreemde voorgesteld, tijdens een vergadering of bijeenkomst, dan open je verstrooid je guld en laat je ondergoed aanraken. Tijdens een receptie kun je gerust je guld open laten staan. Maar ontmoet je je vrienden, dan zijn er zoveel variaties als er graden in de vriendschap bestaan: de penis licht aanraken met een of twee vingers; hem met de hand omvatten; hem lichtjes strelen; de eikel ontbloten; de eikel drukken; de penis oprichten tot een lichte erektie; de penis in erektie strelen; één pompbeweging; twee pompbewegingen; drie, enzovoort. De mate van erektie is de barometer van de simpatie (...).

of speech, press freedom, and all other democratic liberties. As human rights were violated, the case engendered a lot of support from various corners, among others from Paul de Wispelaere and Hugo Claus, but also from less progressive authors like Bernard Kemp and Raymond Brulez, which illustrates how serious this case was taken.<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly, although his article does not contain any external or internal reference to the *Antikrant*, Claeys explicitly situates it in this context by stressing its similar purpose. The fact that the article differs considerably in form and style from the other *Antikrant* articles, and that its content is much more adult suggests that the author's afterward classification is rather unreliable. Nevertheless, Claeys solves this potential problem by designating 'De penisgroet' as a contribution for the readers' section of the *Antikrant*.

'The Penisingreeting was meant as a so-called 'contribution' for the reader's section of the *Antikrant*. It only has sense and meaning in the context of that *Antikrant* (that is familiar to the Daele-reader) and in that light it is a routine-account of one of the many conventions that we know, namely the handshake, which is after all very absurd. In fact, in the imagination of the reader I replace this convention with another convention that is equally absurd, if not more absurd, but I don't do this in order to propagate this convention but only for the sake of the contrastive effect, which turns out optimal in this case.'<sup>22</sup>

Drawing a full comparison of society fiction and literary journalism could probably fill a paper on its own, so I have restricted myself to the main issues. Starting from Hartsock's definition of literary journalism, summarized by Harbers as 'a form of journalism in which the objectified way of presenting reality is repudiated', while '[i]t nevertheless makes a claim to be able to render a referential representation of reality,' I will focus on two points.<sup>23</sup> First of all, Claeys his *Antikrant* hardly corresponds with the first part of Hartsock's typification. On the contrary, the *Antikrant* rather rejects the subjective way of presenting reality. Alternatively, Claeys could

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<sup>21</sup> Buys, G., 'Censuur Ging Ver Buiten de Schreef' (*De Rode Vaan*, 19.10.1967), in: *Daele* 13 (1967), p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> Claeys, 'De Penisgroet en Society Fiction', p. 82; original text: 'De Penisgroet' nu, was bedoeld als een zgn. 'ingezonden stuk' voor de lezersrubriek van de *Antikrant*. Het heeft alleen zin en betekenis in het raam van die *Antikrant* (waar de Daele-lezer mee bekend is) en zo beschouwd is het een routine-afrekening met een der vele konvensies die wij kennen, nl. de handdruk, die op de keper beschouwd zeer absurd is. In feite vervang ik in de verbeelding van de lezer deze konvensie door een andere konvensie die al even absurd is, zoniet absurder, maar dit doe ik niet om die konventie te propageren maar enkel terwille van de contrastwerking die in dit geval optimaal is.

<sup>23</sup> Harbers, 'Defying Journalistic Performativity', p. 148.

have written a subjective essay enlisting negative arguments on the ideological and organizational principles of contemporary society, and the advantages of a different (more Marxist, etc.) approach. Instead, he chose to wrap the subjective content in an objective form, thereby applying a typical mainstream journalism norm. The objectivity regime was established as a leading norm in Anglo-American journalism in the 1920s, 'affiliating itself with the rising public demand for facts as a basis for rational choices and actions', and as a means to 'distinguish itself from propaganda and the public relations industry', according to Broersma.<sup>24</sup> 'Additionally, the objectivity norm provided rules for the craft, making it easier for editors to discipline reporters, compelling them to conform to the industrial patterns of mass newspaper production.'<sup>25</sup> As a crucial style element, the objectivity norm adds to the journalistic performativity of the text. The relation between the fictional nature of the events and the use of an objective, informative style in the Antikrant articles shows that the author plays with both literary and journalistic conventions, which creates an ambivalent status of the text.

His embrace of the objective journalistic form makes the contrast with the highly subjective content even larger. Claeys considers society fiction as a purely imaginative product, but he ridicules existing customs and habits through his use of irony. This element links society fiction with the second part of Hartsock's definition, even though society fiction renders a representation of a possible future reality, instead of contemporary reality. Claeys stressed its potential to become outdated in time, as 'a creation of situations that could be possible, thinkable or obvious in a future society, but are completely absurd when they are projected onto our current society'.<sup>26</sup> By considering literature as a unique experimental ground to project future constellations, we can arrive at a much more profound insight both into the present situation and into the dynamics of historical (r)evolution.

Thus, these fundamental differences show that society fiction and literary journalism are quite different. Yet, society fiction can be regarded as a form of inverted literary journalism. Harbers argues that literary journalism is closest to journalism regarding its routines of gathering information, but the process of rendering this information comes closer to literature.<sup>27</sup> In this light, Claeys his society fiction seems a perfect inversion; the process of information gathering is almost entirely fictional, while the author uses the journalistic form and style to deliver his content.

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<sup>24</sup> Broersma, M., 'Journalism as Performative Discourse', p. 26.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Claeys, 'De Penisgroet en Society Fiction', p. 80.

<sup>27</sup> Harbers, 'Defying Journalistic Performativity', p. 149.

*'Het dossier Jan': Playing with the Conventions of Non-fiction*

In 1968, Weverbergh published his polemic book *Het dossier Jan*, in which he denounces the Flemish educational system. *Het dossier Jan* (*The file John*) consists of eight files in the form of interviews, open letters, articles, a lecture and a pamphlet-novel. This complex textual construction is intended to objectify and to generalize the particular anecdotal story line by opening up the discussion in more general terms. At the same time it is meant to intensify the reality effect of the text.

The title of the book refers to one of Weverbergh's colleagues at the secondary school in Denderleeuw, a village in Flanders, where he shortly worked as a French teacher. A short while before, Weverbergh had interviewed the Dutch teacher about the literary education in secondary schools in Flanders, clearly demonstrating his lack of interest in contemporary literature. To spare his colleague from shame, and also to emphasize his exemplary character, Weverbergh did not reveal the teacher's identity and chose the nickname 'Jan'. This common Flemish name transforms this teacher into 'the prototype of the Flemish language teacher; (...) [and] the prototype of the Flemish intellectual - or what is regarded as such.'<sup>28</sup> 'Jan' had never heard of progressive contemporary Dutch and Flemish authors such as Willem Frederik Hermans, Gerard Kornelis van het Reve, or J.B. Charles, nor did he ever read a novel by Hugo Claus. Weverbergh concludes that there is practically no interest in literature in Flanders, little interest in contemporary Flemish authors, and no interest whatsoever in Dutch literature.<sup>29</sup> The only solution at hand is 'for the teacher of the mother tongue (...) to stimulate the interest for *contemporary* literature', as youngsters are most appealed by contemporary books that deal with contemporary problems, according to Weverbergh.<sup>30</sup>

*Het Dossier Jan* was released by the well-known Dutch publisher's house De Bezige Bij, and its form is vaguely reminiscent of *De zaak 40/61* [*Criminal Case 40/61*] by Harry Mulisch. This famous and early example of literary journalism, in which Mulisch reports on the Eichmann trial in Israel, was published under the same roof in 1962. With *Het dossier Jan*, Weverbergh does something similar: he selects a number of relevant files, with one exception all journalistic accounts, and builds his argument as if it was a court case. His key witness 'Jan' remains anonymous, but the fictional characters of the pamphlet-novel serve as independent witnesses, all adding to the main argument or charge. Weverbergh presents his interview as authentic, and if there might exist any doubt about its constructed nature, certainly the letters of the school directed to the pupils'

<sup>28</sup> Weverbergh, J., *Een Dag als een Ander* (Brugge, 1965), p. 202.

<sup>29</sup> Weverbergh, J., *Het Dossier Jan* (Amsterdam, 1968), p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 17.

parents appear as genuine evidence. The second article in the book contains his defense: it is not his aim to harm his colleague, but he wants to challenge the educational system. Naturally, Weverbergh cannot be compared with Mulisch in *De zaak 40/61*, as he takes up the role of 'literary' prosecutor rather than literary journalist. Another significant difference is that one of Weverbergh's 'files' is essentially of a fictional nature. The pamphlet-novel *Een dag als een ander* had previously appeared in 1965 in the series 'Galgeboekjes' of underground publisher De Galge.

*Een dag als een ander* addresses the same theme as *Het dossier Jan*. The novel denounces the educational circumstances in 'an imaginary secondary school' in Flanders. Each chapter shows the perception of one particular day by a teacher or a member of the school staff. Interestingly, Weverbergh also plays with the conventions of non-fiction in *Een dag als een ander*, applying a different strategy than in his second book. Instead of following the traditional narrative structure, Weverbergh composed each chapter in a different prosaic genre. The confrontation of literary and journalistic discourse is elaborated in the seemingly contradictory information given by the content, the epilogue and the book cover.

Firstly, Weverbergh plays with the conventions of the novel by the overabundant application of different genres. This makes *Een dag als een ander* a pastiche of the popular style of a number of Flemish authors. While the unusual succession of various genres in each chapter emphasizes the narrative character of the book, the content of the final chapter deconstructs it. In the final chapter, the fictional character prefect Hein Pereboom argues that Weverbergh intended to write a pamphlet, which he disguised as a story in order for his protest to reach the widest possible audience.

In an accompanying letter You delude me into thinking that You did not write a 'novel'; that You wanted to write a pamphlet. You have put this pamphlet in a story that is constructed as simple as possible, in order for the message to be clear, in order to make Your protest against the mediocrity of our secondary education appealing for the simplest readers. Allow me to doubt Your intensions. Because why do You beat up different 'literary genres' chapter after chapter? (...) Monologues, psychological narrative, pages from a diary, a long and confused phone call, a letter; what is that other than an attempt to literature?<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Weverbergh, J., *Een Dag als een Ander*, pp. 184-185; original text: In een begeleidend briefje maakt U me wijs dat U helemaal geen 'roman' schreef; dat het U om een pamflet begonnen was. Dit pamflet hebt U in een zo eenvoudig mogelijk geconstrueerd verhaal gestopt, opdat het 'over' zou komen, opdat Uw protest tegen de mediocriteit van ons middelbaar onderwijs de meest eenvoudige lezers zou aanspreken. Sta me toe aan Uw bedoelingen te twijfelen. Want waarom klutst U hoofdstuk na hoofdstuk verschillende 'letterkundige genres' door mekaar? (...) Monologen, psychologische verhaaltrant, dagboekbladzijden, een lang en verward

The fictional prefect remarks that the application of various genres and styles reinforces the literary nature of the text. *Een dag als een ander* certainly disposes of some of the essential characteristics of a pamphlet. It is a critical text denouncing persons and situations and it has a certain documentary value – since it presents an actual case in the ongoing debates on education and authority –, but the use of prosaic genres gives the so-called file an artificial and literary look.<sup>32</sup>

The paradoxical deconstruction of the narrative character of the book by one of its fictional characters subsequently contrasts with the content of the epilogue. The epilogue, entitled ‘Janisme’, was written by Herman J. Claeys for the first edition of the book. Here Claeys explicitly stresses the extra-literary relevance of *Een dag als een ander*. According to Claeys, Weverbergh wrote this book to dismiss the society that tolerates a public secondary school education which is essentially nothing but:

a training centre for loyal citizens which means a workshop of capitalism, a breeding place for the reactionary, a bastion of Christianity, a factory of patriots, a nursery for unproductive parasites, and furthermore or maybe due to that a damper on a natural physical and mental development of the child.<sup>33</sup>

On the book cover, Weverbergh admits that Claeys exactly pinpoints his motivation to write this book. But the same book cover stresses its literary value as well as its extra-literary relevance:

I wrote a ‘novel’ in eight chapters. The ninth chapter of this book, however integrated in the story, unsettles all the claims, relations and characters in these eight chapters. Indeed: the truth can never be discovered, human kind is illusive; the psychological novel is an absurd and fossil absurdity. Don’t be blinded by ‘the story’. An sich it is less of a protest against administrative atrocities than You think. Herman J. Claeys, who wrote the epilogue, guessed precisely why I wrote this book.<sup>34</sup>

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telefoongesprek, een brief; wat is dat anders dan een poging tot geliteratuur?

<sup>32</sup> Van Gorp, H., Delabastita, D. and Ghesquière, R., *Lexicon van literaire termen* (Mechelen, 2007), p. 338.

<sup>33</sup> Claeys, H., ‘Janisme’, in: Weverbergh, J. ed., *Een Dag als een Ander* (Brugge, 1966), pp. 209-210; original text: een opleidingscentrum voor loyale staatsburgers d.w.z. een workshop van het kapitalisme, een broedplaats voor reactionairen, een bolwerk van het christendom, een fabriek van patriotten, een kweekbak voor onproductieve parasieten, en bovendien of juist daarom een domper op een natuurlijke fysieke en geestelijke ontwikkeling van het kind.

<sup>34</sup> Weverbergh, *Een Dag als een Ander*, s.l.; original text: Ik schreef een ‘roman’ in acht hoofdstukken. Het negende hoofdstuk van dit boek, alhoewel geïntegreerd in het verhaal, zet alle beweringen, verhoudingen en personages van en in deze acht hoofdstukken op losse schroeven. Inderdaad: de waarheid is nooit achterhaalbaar, de mens ongrijpbaar; de psychologisch-verhalende roman een absurd en fossiel onding.



On the back cover, Weverbergh stresses the literary importance of *Een dag als een ander*, referring to the characters, the structure, the decline of the psychological novel and the inadequacy to know or represent the truth or man. However, Weverbergh informs the reader that the story is less of a protest against administrative abuses than it seems. He concludes that the epilogue contains the essence of what he tried to illustrate. This is rather remarkable since the epilogue condemns the secondary school system as a means to produce model citizens, brainwashed by capitalism, Catholicism, and patriotism while the story does not focus on the students but on the teachers' struggle and/or manipulation of the school system. Clearly, the need for educational reform remains focalized by means of the adult point of view, hence re-establishing to a certain extent the very notions of power and authority the book wants to destroy.

The paradox formed by the final chapter and the epilogue of *Een dag als een ander* is dismantled by the information on the book cover. The different opinions about the book are two reading indicators: the reader can follow the argumentation of the fictional character and read the book as a deconstruction of the psychological novel, or he can read it from the point of view of the author and political activist Claeys, as a deconstruction of the existing educational system. However, Weverbergh himself urges the reader to consider the content of the book in the broader societal context and look beyond the difficulties of the teacher with the educational administration to the impact of the educational system on the student. In this respect, the pamphlet-novel fits perfectly in the 'non-fictional' context of *Het Dossier Jan*, in which specific genuine documents are combined with narrative mechanisms. Interestingly, Weverbergh does not blend elements from journalistic and literary discourse in the typical way that literary journalists do, but sets up an idiomatic collage that combines both discourses. On the one hand, Weverbergh inserts various texts that are either obviously journalistic, like interviews, open letters and articles, or literary, such as the pamphlet-novel. On the other hand, he also includes texts that make it more difficult for the reader to separate truth from fiction, for example the interview with the exemplary teacher 'Jan'. While the teacher remains anonymous (and can technically be seen as fictional), Weverbergh admits that he allowed Jan to adjust his words here and there, so that the interview is not completely accurate.

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Staart U zich ook niet blind op 'het verhaal'. An sich is het minder een protest tegen administratieve wantoestanden dan U denkt. Herman J. Claeys, die voor een nawoord zorgde, heeft precies geraden waar het mij bij het schrijven van dit boek begonnen was.

*Literary Journalism...with a Twist*

The analyses of the work of Claeys and Weverbergh have pointed out that it cannot be categorized as literary journalism according to the typifications and findings of Hartsock or Harbers. However, typifying these texts as literature would be an equally unsatisfying conclusion, since they not only criticize the equation of literature with fiction but they also experiment with the borders of fictional and textual reality. Both authors combine various discursive elements of journalism and literature, diverging from the 'standard' literary journalism as their fictional content is dressed up as journalistic discourse, instead of the other way around. Yet, the authors seem to play with both literary as well as journalistic conventions, thereby creating an ambivalent status of the text.

Given the ideal of the objectivity regime mainstream journalism did not prove the most adequate form for these authors to express their desire for (often controversial) political and societal change. This constraint has inspired many Flemish authors from the sixties to experiment with the wide array of discursive characteristics of literature and journalism. Instead of the 'classic' literary journalists, they mixed and matched these elements according to their own purposes and needs, resulting in sometimes inventive in-between-forms of journalism and literature. Whether these innovative combination forms of journalism and literature 'belong' to the field of literary journalism or literature is a rhetorical question. This paper has demonstrated that there exists a fairly large spectrum of combinations of discursive elements from journalism and literature that has not received any attention yet. The analysis of the work of Claeys and Weverbergh is a first attempt to illustrate the different ways in which the convergence of journalism and literature has manifested in Flanders.



## THE EXPERIENCE OF RUPTURE

### JOAN DIDION'S PERSONAL STRUGGLE WITH THE SIXTIES

Ilja van den Broek

#### *Introduction*

Joan Didion was not a fan of the Sixties. Towards the events of this decade, she maintained 'a detached scepticism that bordered on existential dread.'<sup>1</sup> As a journalist she did not witness many of the major happenings. She missed out on the campus protests in Berkeley and Columbia. To make up for this, she went to San Francisco State College when the college was closed because of riots. She was not impressed. 'The place simply never seemed serious,' Didion wrote about the 'pastel campus.' In her opinion, black militants and administrators, and white radicals 'joined in a rather festive camaraderie, a shared jargon, a shared sense of moment: the future was no longer arduous and indefinite, but immediate and programmatic.' For every one of them something was to be gained: picking the games, talking about programs, imagining themselves as 'urban guerrillas.' The fights were hardly real, focussing on the form of press conferences and administrative details.<sup>2</sup>

Didion was sometimes amused, but mostly annoyed by the Sixties' political radicalism. She described herself as a student of the 'silent' and personally orientated generation of the Fifties that read Sartre and was mainly interested in existential issues. 'We were all very personal then, sometimes relentlessly so, and, at that point where we either act or do not act, most of us are still.' In college, collective action or politics were not considered a way to improve the world.

We were silent because the exhilaration of social action seemed to many of us just one more way of escaping the personal, of masking for a while that dread of the meaningless which was man's fate.

In fact, she and her friends did not believe in the possibility of improving the world at all. They just tried to live with:

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Weingarten, *The gang that wouldn't write straight: Wolfe, Thompson, Didion and the New Journalism revolution* (New York, 2006), p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Joan Didion, *The White Album* (London, 1979), pp. 37-39.

the ambiguity of belonging to a generation distrustful of political highs, the historical irrelevancy of growing up convinced that the heart of darkness lay not in some error of social organization but in man's own blood.

This was a deeply depressive view of the world, and several acquaintances from this period committed suicide.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding this reserved attitude, Didion got a reputation as a meticulous chronicler of the Sixties. She seemed capable of grasping the special atmosphere of the period, especially in her two volumes *Slouching towards Bethlehem* and *The White Album*. Didion called *The White Album* 'more tentative': 'I don't have as many answers as I did when I wrote *Slouching*.' Maybe this accounts for the slightly different tone in *Slouching*: mildly ironic and with a glimpse of light-heartedness, compared to the disorientated and black stories in *The White Album*. Her interpretation of the Sixties as 'ominous and disturbing' remained the same.<sup>4</sup> *Slouching* opens with a poem of W.B. Yeats, fearing the approach of a dangerous animal: 'And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?'<sup>5</sup> The title of her second volume of essays comes from the Beatles' *White Album* that she found 'an album inextricably connected to the Manson murders and the dissonance of the 60's.'<sup>6</sup>

In *The White Album*, she wrote about 'the paranoia of the time' referring to the period from 1966 until 1971. At this point she 'began to doubt the premises of all the stories I had ever told myself.'<sup>7</sup> Her personal life and the disturbing events happening in the world around her, appear to have been inextricably linked together. Her eyes colored by depression might have seen a meaningless and fearful decade. Or, the other way around, her sensitive personality might have almost collapsed under the burden of her times. Like many acquaintances in Los Angeles, she believed that the Sixties ended abruptly on August 9, 1969 with the Manson murders: 'The tension broke that day. The paranoia was fulfilled.'<sup>8</sup> Didion's personal Sixties ended shortly thereafter: in January 1971 she left her house in Hollywood and moved to a house on the Pacific Coast.<sup>9</sup> It remains to be

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<sup>3</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 206-207; Ellen G. Friedman, 'The Didion sensibility: an analysis', in: Ellen G. Friedman ed, *Essays and Conversations* (New Jersey, 1984), pp. 81-90.

<sup>4</sup> Michiko Kakutani, 'Joan Didion: staking out California', in: Ellen, G. Friedman, *Essays and Conversations*, pp. 29-42.

<sup>5</sup> Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem. Essays* (New York ,2008, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1961), p. xi.

<sup>6</sup> Kakutani, 'Joan Didion', p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

asked whether collective paranoia or Didion's personal fear characterized this period best. The distinction is difficult to make.

*Historical Change as Personal Experience*

Rapid historical changes involve personal experience in historical events. As philosopher Frank Ankersmit states, when history and society change slowly it is only possible to determine historical change in retrospect. These slow changes are perceived externally, as gradual changes in the world around us, not within our own persons. However, if historical time speeds up, we have to face our personal development and history becomes internalized. According to Ankersmit it thus becomes *personal* experience.<sup>10</sup> In a similar wording, Didion wrote that looking back was to her: 'Remember what it was to be me.' She remembered historical situations in terms of the different stages in her personal history. Inevitably, she was emotionally attached to the previous stages in the life and the experiences, either positively or negatively, that were connected with it. So:

one of them, a seventeen-year-old, presents little threat, although it would be of some interest to me to know again what it feels like to sit on a river levee drinking vodka-and-orange-juice and listening (...) to the car radio.

However, at age twenty-three she was greatly bothered by herself, with long skirts, and 'shy to the point of aggravation.' Didion did not want to hear the complaints and stories of this former self again, 'at once saddening me and angering me with her vulnerability and ignorance, an apparition all the more insistent for being so long banished.'<sup>11</sup>

In 'On the Morning after the Sixties', Didion called herself 'a child of my time.' Thinking about the Sixties was for her most closely related to an afternoon at Berkeley in 1953. This afternoon on which she had a date for a football lunch was in retrospect 'implausible in every detail', suggesting 'the extent to which the narrative on which many of us grew up no longer applies.' The situation now seemed very exotic, as exotic as the world in which she went to college. This little piece of personal experience, seemingly meaningless, was Didion's point of reference when Berkeley and many other campuses were shut down because of the student disorders.<sup>12</sup> And when she wrote about the protests, it made her feel just how far away the Berkeley of her adolescence now was.

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<sup>10</sup> Frank Ankersmit, *De sublieme historische ervaring* (Groningen, 2007), pp. 412, 414.

<sup>11</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, pp. 135-136, 139-140.

<sup>12</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 205-206.

Didion's way of writing is extremely personal. She claims that whatever she writes reflects what she feels because she is neither 'a camera eye' nor prepared to writing pieces that do not interest her. Since the age of five, she kept a notebook in which she wrote how things happening around her 'felt to me.'<sup>13</sup> She confessed that in troubled times, such as when she wrote 'Slouching towards Bethlehem', 'working did to the trouble what gin did to the pain', making writing an indispensable activity for her well-being.<sup>14</sup> Her 'sensitivity' is legendary. 'The voice is always precise, the tone un sentimental, the view unabashedly subjective. She takes things personally,' journalist Michiko Kakutani analyzes.<sup>15</sup> Didion believed that she should tell her readers about her personal life, because she felt it was necessary to know who she was and what was on her mind to understand her perspective on the world. She described herself as someone who is separated from most of the ideas and beliefs that interested other people and held society together.

Quite often during the past several years I have felt myself a sleepwalker, moving through the world unconscious of the moment's high issues, oblivious to its data, alert only to the stuff of bad dreams.<sup>16</sup>

Didion's identity as a reporter therefore directly relates to the inherent paradox of journalistic objectivity: is there more truthfulness to be found in the as-objective-as-possible, seemingly neutral view of the invisible journalist, or in the authentic experience of the eyewitness reporter?<sup>17</sup> Didion's reporting style appears to be a forerunner of the 1990's personal journalism. Spokesman Walt Harrington defines this movement as the writing of 'stories with action taking place around the journalists', creating 'insight into a subject or place' as well as 'self-discovery in the journalists themselves and, by extension, in their readers.'<sup>18</sup> According to Harrington personal journalism is 'news you can feel' instead of 'news you can use', a statement Didion would surely confirm to.

The goal of personal journalism is 'to understand people's worlds from the inside out, to understand and portray people as they understand themselves', says Harrington.

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<sup>13</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>15</sup> Kakutani, 'Joan Didion', p 31.

<sup>16</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 133-134.

<sup>17</sup> Rosalind Coward, *Speaking personally. The rise of subjective and confessional journalism* (Basingstoke, 2013), p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Walt Harrington ed., *The Beholder's Eye. A collection of America's finest personal journalism* (New York, 2005), p. xvii.

Not the way they *say* they understand themselves but the way they really understand themselves. The way, as a subject once told me, you understand yourself “when you say your prayers in a quietroom.”

Using one’s own experiences is for a writer of personal journalism the key vehicle for unlocking and involving those of their subjects and readers.<sup>19</sup> While Didion’s rhetoric is primarily about the foregrounding of her own inner life and the use of writing as a means of (personally) understanding the world, her success in touching upon the special atmosphere of the Sixties might be due to exactly this intertwinement between personal experience, portraying subjects from within, and emotionally involving readers.

In *Speaking personally* Rosalind Coward links up New Journalism with the recent rise of subjective and confessional journalism:

along with problematising the conventions of traditional journalism, one of New Journalism’s most striking aspects is the centrality of the personal voice, either through direct use of ‘I’ or by employing such distinctive style it presents as the personal identity of the author.

New Journalists often included themselves in their stories, and used their emotional issues and reactions as subject matter, Coward analyzes.<sup>20</sup> Among the New Journalists, Didion is seen as one of the ‘most self-absorbed’ writers. In Coward’s words, she applies an ‘introspective and mournful’ tone, ‘foregrounding her own emotions and involvement.’<sup>21</sup>

David L. Eason divides New Journalism as a movement in ethnographic realism (Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Truman Capote) on the one side, and cultural phenomenology (Joan Didion, Hunter S. Thompson, Norman Mailer) on the other. The ethnographic realists describe a world in which image and reality are intertwined. However, traditional models of interpretation and expression, especially the story style, can still be used to describe the real. The cultural phenomenologists refer to a journalism in which reporting itself is under siege. Narrative practices and personal reflection call attention to storytelling as a cultural practice, joining together writer and reader in the creation of reality.<sup>22</sup> This aspect of cultural phenomenology inspired Dutch literary scholar José van Dijk to highlight

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<sup>19</sup> Walt Harrington, *Intimate Journalism. The art and craft of reporting everyday life* (Thousand Oaks, 1997), pp. xx, xxx, xxxv.

<sup>20</sup> Coward, *Speaking personally*, p. 52.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 65.

<sup>22</sup> David L. Eason, ‘The New Journalism and the Image-World. Two modes of organizing experience’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1 (1984), pp. 51-65, 53-55.



New Journalism's culture-critical purpose. New, more ambivalent, narrative structures and a personal, literary style were used to give meaning to a society in transition, she argues, as traditional journalistic forms were no longer able to represent reality in a meaningful way. New Journalism criticized traditional journalism by using 'meta-language': a linguistic reflection on writing itself as a semantic process.<sup>23</sup>

According to Coward, Didion's personal topics and style also reflected and foresaw the 'gender-quake' of the 1970's and 1980's. As more female journalists entered the profession, personal and intimate subjects like home, emotions, and relationships became more prominent, thus connecting feminization and featurization.<sup>24</sup> Personal matters and the so-called 'female voice' were closely related to political commitment. During the 1960's and 1970's private and daily life were seen as political in itself, and activists tried to raise awareness about the political meaning of choices made implicitly and unconsciously on every single day. 'The personal is political' was a well-known slogan, especially used in feminist discourse.<sup>25</sup>

Joan Didion's writing on the Sixties surely fits into New Journalism's engaging and personal way of reporting. She most certainly highlights the personal as political, and her subjects and style reflect the rise of a more female voice in journalism. However, there seems to be more to her struggle with this decade. In her writings no explicit commitment to politics nor feminism is to be found, and Didion voted rarely:

I never had faith that the answers to human problems lay in anything that could be called political, (...) I thought the answers, if there were answers, lay someplace in man's soul.

She did not believe in 'the particular vanity of perceiving social life as a problem to be solved by the good will of individuals.'<sup>26</sup>

Didion had no patience at all with the 'escapist' ideas and attitudes of members of the woman's movement, complaining of being observed by 'construction workers on Sixth Avenue', as 'fragile flowers being "spoken to," and therefore violated, by uppity proles.' Nor was she convinced that 'everywoman' was 'raped on every date, raped by her husband, and raped

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<sup>23</sup> José van Dijk, 'Cultuurkritiek en journalistiek. De discursieve strategie van new journalism', *Feit & Fictie* II (1994), pp. 66-78; David L. Eason, 'New Journalism, metaphor and culture', *Journal of Popular Culture* 15 (1982), no.4, pp. 142-149.

<sup>24</sup> Coward, *Speaking personally*, pp. 71, 87.

<sup>25</sup> See Ilja van den Broek, 'De persoonlijke politiek van New Journalism', *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 6 (2003), no. 1, pp. 108-123; Coward, *Speaking personally*, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 89, 208; Kakutani, 'Joan Didion', p. 35.

finally on the abortionist's table' because male gynaecologists had refused to give her contraceptives. And in the accounts of lesbian women she was:

constantly struck (...) by the emphasis on the superior "tenderness" of the relationship, the "gentleness" of the sexual connection, as if the participants were wounded birds.<sup>27</sup>

Didion's struggle with the Sixties was, at least in her own perception, a purely personal one. Still, the connection between her private experiences of loss and the collapse of the social world around her is very present.

### *A World at Loss*

At age twenty-two Didion had left California for New York, the city of her dreams. During the first years of the 1960's she was suffering from a breakdown: 'I cried until I was not even aware when I was crying and when I was not, cried in elevators and in taxis and in Chinese laundries.' In 1963 she married her husband in the midst of her depression, in 1964 they went to live in Los Angeles, and in 1966 they adopted their daughter Quintana.<sup>28</sup> While living in New York, Didion had always kept the possibility of return open. She kept a map of Sacramento County on the bedroom wall 'to remind me who I was' and flight schedules in her drawer. She made the trip home four or five times a year, trying to prove she had not meant to leave,

because in at least one respect California (...) resembles Eden: it is assumed that those who absent themselves from its blessings have been banished, exiled by some perversity of the heart.<sup>29</sup>

She returned to her 'real' home in Sacramento when she had to finish a novel. She could easily work in her old room, painted in 'carnation-pink', with Bougainville and ivy growing over the windows, giving it a cave-like character: 'My concentration can be total because nobody calls me. I'm not required to lead a real life. I'm like a child, in my parent's house.'<sup>30</sup>

In California Didion was looking for her home and childhood safety, but she found a changing society full of chaos and uncertainty. 'The ceremony of innocence is drowned,' she quoted Yeats at the beginning of *Slouching towards Bethlehem*.<sup>31</sup> The disappearance of the world and the

<sup>27</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 113, 115-116.

<sup>28</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, pp. 237-238; Kakutani, 'Joan Didion', p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, pp. 176, 232.

<sup>30</sup> Sara Davidson, 'A visit with Joan Didion', in Ellen G. Friedman, *Essays and Conversations*, pp. 13-21; Kakutani, 'Joan Didion', p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. xi.

social networks of her youth destabilized her life and personality further. 'Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;' Yeats continues. During the second half of the Sixties, Didion suffered from serious depressions and ongoing relationship problems. Her husband was living in a motel in Las Vegas for eighteen months. In 1969 they spent a holiday together in Honolulu but were still contemplating divorce:

I avoid his eyes, and brush the baby's hair. In the absence of natural disaster [there had been an earthquake and there had been warnings for a tidal wave, IvdB] we are left again to our own uneasy devices. We are here in this island in the middle of the Pacific in lieu of filing for divorce.<sup>32</sup>

To Didion the world around her was increasingly losing sense. Her desparation might have been caused by, or might have caused, the breakdown she had in the summer of 1968. She was tested in the outpatient psychiatric hospital St. John's in Santa Monica after she got an attack of 'vertigo and nausea.' The diagnosis stated that Didion was withdrawing emotionally from the world and the people around her, relying on defence mechanisms like 'intellectualization, obsessive-compulsive devices, projection, reaction-formation, and somatization.' Quotation from the report:

It is as though she feels deeply that all human effort is foredoomed to failure, a conviction which seems to push her farther into a dependent, passive withdrawal. In her view she lives in a world of people moved by strange, conflicted, poorly comprehended, and, above all, devious motivations which commit them inevitably to conflict and failure...

In *The White Album* Didion printed the diagnosis report and then commented 'that an attack of vertigo and nausea does not now seem to me an inappropriate response to the summer of 1968.' In her opinion it was not a coincidence that her personality and the world around her were falling apart at the same moment.<sup>33</sup> She also had severe migraine attacks and a few years later she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. In her mind the 'startling fact' was: 'my body was offering a precise physiological equivalent to what had been going on in my mind.'<sup>34</sup>

Didion had returned home, but 'home' had irrevocably changed. In the Valley her great-aunts still told the tales that she grew up with, but during the Sixties, Didion's childhood California became a different place. The traditional rural society made place for aerospace technology and its

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<sup>32</sup> Kakutani, 'Joan Didion', p. 37; Didion, *White Album*, p. 133.

<sup>33</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 46-47, 168-169.

employees were almost exclusively immigrants that would never fit in with the closed society of the Valley towns: 'the outside world was moving in, fast and hard. At the moment of its waking Sacramento lost, for better or for worse, its character.' Didion helplessly watched history speed up and rapidly fade out the place she loved so much: 'All that is constant about the California of my childhood is the rate at which it disappears.'<sup>35</sup>

The understanding that the world of her forefathers was lost, drenched her writings on California with nostalgia. Ankersmit argues that the nostalgic remembrance belongs to the individual rather than to the collective domain, and refers to the world of moods and emotions.<sup>36</sup> 'The study of nostalgia inevitably slows us down', scholar Svetlana Boym states in her book on nostalgia. 'There is, after all, something pleasantly outmoded about the very idea of longing.' However, longing is what makes art possible and life worth living, as Marcel Proust already stated.<sup>37</sup> Didion's nostalgic writing was slow writing, guided by her emotions, moving cautiously around her subjects. She was at the same time longing to be her lost self again and daydreaming about a world that no longer existed.

Nostalgia focuses on a previous period rather than on a place, but it is almost always intimately connected to one. 'Certain places seem to exist mainly because someone has written about them,' Didion wrote in *The White Album*. In her opinion Kilimanjaro belonged to Ernest Hemingway, Oxford, Mississippi, to William Faulkner, and Honolulu to James Jones. 'California belongs to Joan Didion,' journalist Kakutani extended this line of authors.<sup>38</sup> Didion's hometown Sacramento, where five generations of her mother's side had lived, was the center of the Valley, the large agricultural landscape that Didion and others compared to the Garden of Eden. In 'Notes from a Native Daughter' she repeated the line children learnt on Sunday mornings:

- Q. In what way does the Holy Land resemble Sacramento Valley?  
A. In the type and diversity of its agricultural products.<sup>39</sup>

The landscape was flat and its central road completely straight, passing through 'the richest and most intensely cultivated agricultural region in the world, a giant outdoor hothouse with a billion-dollar crop'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, pp. 173, 176.

<sup>36</sup> Ankersmit, *De sublieme historische ervaring*, p. 415.

<sup>37</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (Basic Books 2001) p., xix.

<sup>38</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 146-147; Kakutani, 'Joan Didion', p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 33; Didion, *Slouching*, p. 174.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 181.

Scholar David Wyatt, another Californian, describes his fatherly home as a representation of this Garden of Eden:

There was a house here once, white stucco with palms out front and a good piece of land out back, shaded by persimmon trees. (...) Dairy farms surrounded it, and anything would grow there. (...) It was a favored spot of earth, a humanly nurtured landscape, and people came back to it. (...) The California I grew up in was a beautiful, now vanished garden.

Upon its first settlers this land evoked ‘a biblical nostalgia.’<sup>41</sup> The American settlement of California marked the end of Western man’s colonial adventures in Northern America. According to Wyatt the beauty of the land was so impressive that the completion of the quest of settlement was also perceived as a return to a privileged source: ‘As the sense of an ending merged with the wonder of beginnings, California at last chance merged with California as Eden.’<sup>42</sup>

California’s abundant nature figures widely in Didion’s nostalgia. She remembered swimming in the Valley’s rivers as a child: the Sacramento, rich with silt; the American, full of melted snow from the Sierra’s.<sup>43</sup> When she came home from the East Coast, the scent of jasmine was the first thing she noticed. It made Didion and her husband decide that they did not need to hold on to their apartment in New York. In their first Los Angeles house on Franklin Avenue ‘in the evenings the smell of jasmine came in through all the open doors and windows.’<sup>44</sup>

However, Didion did not lose sight of ‘the impermanence of things in California, the chimerical nature of the great western dream’ nor did she accept uncritically the thought that ‘western experiences produced an ideal American character.’<sup>45</sup> According to Didion Americans were driven to the Pacific Ocean in the nineteenth century trying to fulfil the desire to find a restaurant open in case they wanted a sandwich in the middle of the night.<sup>46</sup> She criticized the materialistic American Dream, showing how it could lead to violence and immoral behaviour. *Slouching towards Bethlehem* opens with the story of Lucille Miller who in 1964 presumably killed her husband by setting to fire their Volkswagen in which he was sound asleep, drugged by tranquilizers. Like in a *film noir* Didion described the circumstances of

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<sup>41</sup> David Wyatt, *The fall into Eden. Landscape and imagination in California* (Cambridge, 1986), p. XV.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. xvi.

<sup>43</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 173.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 238; Didion, *White Album*, p. 41.

<sup>45</sup> Ph. S. Kropp, *California vieja. Culture and memory in a modern American place* (Berkeley, 2008), p. 8-9; Weingarten, *The gang that wouldn’t write straight*, p. 117.

<sup>46</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 71-72.

Miller's life and the death of her husband on Banyan Street in the San Bernardino Valley, where at midnight there is no light at all, and no sound 'except the wind in the eucalyptus and a muffled barking of dogs. There may be a kennel somewhere, or the dogs may be coyotes.'<sup>47</sup>

Miller was the prototype of a girl next-door, the daughter of Seventh-Day Adventists. She came off the prairie to California 'in search of something she had seen in a movie or heard on the radio, for this is a Southern California story', wanting a better life and maybe too much. 'The future always looks good in the golden land, because no one remembers the past,' Didion commented. 'Here is the last stop for all those who come from somewhere else, for all those who drifted away from the cold and the past and the old ways.'<sup>48</sup> Miller's lover Arthwell Hayton, appeared to have been involved in the death of his wife, a few months before the death of Miller's husband Cork, and with Lucille Miller present in the house. A few months after Miller's trial he married his young and beautiful Norwegian au pair. He might or might not have suffered from the events, Didion wrote sarcastically, 'for time past is not believed to have any bearing upon time present or future, out in the golden land where every day the world is born anew.'<sup>49</sup>

Didion described the families inhabiting Sacramento as a closed society, connected by economic and marital ties, and most of all by numerous stories about the hard experience of the frontier and the homecoming in rural California. Didion's remembrance of California was by definition a social one, and this bothered her:

It is hard to *find* California now, unsettling to wonder how much of it was merely imagined or improvised; melancholy to realize how much of anyone's memory is no true memory at all but only the traces of someone else's memory, stories handed down on the family network.<sup>50</sup>

The shared experience of 'homecoming' was ambivalent: it *should* be a homecoming, as beyond California was only the Pacific Ocean. Melancholia was inherent in the history of settlement: 'my own childhood was suffused with the conviction that we had long outlived our finest hour.' Life in Sacramento was troubled by 'some buried but ineradicable suspicion that things had better work here, because here, beneath that immense bleached sky, is where we run out of continent.'<sup>51</sup> For Didion Sacramento

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<sup>47</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 4, 7, 15.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 177.

<sup>51</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 172.

was ‘a place in which a boom mentality and a sense of Chekhovian loss meet in uneasy suspension.’<sup>52</sup>

*Eden’s Fall or the Experience of Rupture*

The essence of Didion’s loss was the disappearance of her childhood California as a mythical Eden to which she could always return, as a myth protecting her from growing up, or in a broader sense as a way of ‘refusing history.’ ‘If the ideal version of man’s life is placed outside ordinary time, then we have a way of protecting ourselves against the incessant suffering that human history offers,’ scholar Laurence Lerner writes.<sup>53</sup> This was a personal strategy that became highly relevant during the Sixties. According to Svetlana Boym the twentieth century ‘began with a futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia. Optimistic belief in the future was discarded like an outmoded spaceship sometime in the 1960s.’<sup>54</sup>

Nostalgia has a bad reputation as being escapist, overly romantic, and kitsch.<sup>55</sup> However, those are not words that come to mind reading Didion’s Californian stories. Boym offers a slightly different perspective. She defines nostalgia as a yearning for ‘the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams’, and in a broader sense as ‘rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress.’ However, she argues there are two different categories of nostalgia.

Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately.

In Boym’s analysis, reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of the longing itself, taking into account the inherent ambivalence of modernity.<sup>56</sup> It respects the distance between the present and the past, this distance being the actual object of the nostalgic remembrance: the painful awareness and direct experience of the uncoverable gap dividing past and present.<sup>57</sup>

Didion’s nostalgia can be characterized as ‘reflective.’ In her family’s house in Sacramento, Didion was constantly and unavoidably in touch with the remains of her past. ‘Paralyzed by the neurotic lassitude engendered by meeting one’s past at every turn, around every corner, inside every

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 172.

<sup>53</sup> Laurence David Lerner, *The uses of nostalgia: studies in pastoral poetry* (London, 1972), p. 72.

<sup>54</sup> Boym, *The future of nostalgia*, p. xiv.

<sup>55</sup> Ankersmit, *De sublieme historische ervaring*, p. 417.

<sup>56</sup> Boym, *The future of nostalgia*, pp. xv, xviii.

<sup>57</sup> Ankersmit, *De sublieme historische ervaring*, p. 419.

cupboard, I go aimlessly from room to room,' she wrote in 'On Going Home.' She tried to empty drawers and to clean up, but she was not capable of throwing away a bathing suit she wore when she was seventeen, a letter of rejection from *The Nation* or snapshots of her father.<sup>58</sup> According to Lerner, Marcel Proust in his massive opus *À la recherche du temps perdu* argued that you can look for the past in two ways, 'with memory, and in some mysterious manner with your whole self, and to find it could be to remember your childhood or to return to it.'<sup>59</sup> In Sacramento Didion's critical and intellectual attitude prevented her from losing herself in this experience. Her nostalgic longing was grounded in the awareness that she should let go of the images of her Sacramento childhood, but that she would never be completely capable of this. She contemplated that memory might inevitably concern 'the things we lose and the promises we break as we grow older.'<sup>60</sup> Or, in Kakutani's words: 'Joan Didion's California is a place defined not so much by what her unwavering eye observes, but by what her memory cannot let go.'<sup>61</sup>

Didion might have been unable to move on, because of the traumatic character of her experiences. As Ankersmit argues:

The traumatic experience is forgotten as far as it *can* be pushed out of conscious memory; but at the same time it is *remembered* as far as the subject having the traumatic experience is psychologically put off his stroke.<sup>62</sup>

Remembering the past is essential for the construction of individual as well as collective identity. If the world changes so fast as it did in the Sixties (in the experiences of contemporaries), even the 'luxury' of keeping an unconscious memory of traumatic experiences, with the possibility of reintegrating this memory in (hi)story later on, becomes impossible. A former identity is really lost and has to be replaced by a new one. This new identity consists for a large part of the actual trauma and the awareness of what is lost. This has been called the 'pain of Prometheus', a cultural suffering that makes a society constantly realize the idyl of a world forever lost.<sup>63</sup> Didion seems to have experienced this traumatical pain in a very personal way, psychologically and physically.

The traumatic disorder of the Sixties was for Didion most of all symbolized by 'casual killings', invoking her constant fear.<sup>64</sup> *The White*

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<sup>58</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 166.

<sup>59</sup> Lerner, *The uses of nostalgia*, p. 50.

<sup>60</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 186.

<sup>61</sup> Kakutani, 'Joan Didion', p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> Ankersmit, *De sublieme historische ervaring*, p. 356.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 355, 357-359.

<sup>64</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 84.



*Album* was roughly written in the years that Didion and her young family lived on Franklin Avenue, Hollywood. This neighborhood with large houses had once been rich, but now the place was deteriorating, waiting to be torn down and replaced by apartment buildings. One of Didion's acquaintances called Franklin Avenue a 'senseless-killing neighborhood' and she was always awaiting disaster over there.<sup>65</sup> Sometimes people walked into her home uninvited – claiming they represented 'Chicken Delight' when they noticed her husband on the stairs – and she was always writing down 'license numbers of panel trucks' and keeping them in the dressing-table drawer, easily to be found by the police 'when the time came.' Not too far away from her house the Ferguson brothers killed Ramon Novarro in the night of October 30, 1968, and Didion followed their trial closely.<sup>66</sup>

In 1968 and 1969 a 'demented and seductive vortical tension was building in the community,' Didion wrote. 'The jitters were setting in. I recall a time when the dogs barked every night and the moon was always full.' On August 9, 1969, she heard about the Manson murders, sitting with her sister-in-law at her swimming pool. They received several phone calls from friends, who told 'garbled and contradictory' reports on the murders of six people at Sharon Tate Polanski's house on Cielo Drive. 'I remember all of the day's misinformation very clearly, and I also remember this, and I wish I did not: *I remember that no one was surprised.*'<sup>67</sup> Roman and Sharon Polanski were acquaintances of Didion's, and she and Polanski were godparents of the same child. She wrote an article about Linda Kasabian, star witness for the prosecution. She met her several times and bought the dress she would testify in.<sup>68</sup>

The hard reality of life, then, was that Eden was doomed, as it was in Milton's poem.<sup>69</sup> Didion went one step further and forced upon herself an even harder truth, that the paradise of her childhood was not only disappearing, but in fact never 'really' existed. She realized that her youth was ambiguous and so were the emotions attached to this period. She named her family situation 'normal' and 'happy', yet she was almost thirty 'before I could talk to my family on the phone without crying after I had hung up.' She wrote that 'some nameless anxiety colored the emotional charges between me and the place I came from.'<sup>70</sup> After she had wandered through her parent's house and unsuccessfully tried to clean up her past, she

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<sup>65</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 17, 19.

<sup>67</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 18, 44-45, 48.

<sup>69</sup> Lerner, *The uses of nostalgia*, p. 207.

<sup>70</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 165.

sat down to have another coffee with her mother. 'We get along very well, veterans of a war we never understood.'<sup>71</sup>

Clues to this awareness in a broader sense were the harsh Californian landscape and the ominous stories of her childhood. In Sacramento 'the summers are hot and plagued by drought' and 'the winters are cold and menaced by flood.' It was 'a landscape of extremes.'<sup>72</sup> The other side of the Garden of Eden, was the wild landscape of the Californian coast, where Didion lived from January 1971 in a large house looking out on the Pacific: 'Wild mustard and cactus grow on the hills and the ocean front is no longer a protected bay, it is a seacoast,' journalist Sara Davidson wrote about Didion's home in Trancas.<sup>73</sup>

The rough sides of the Californian climate figure prominently in Didion's writings. 'Joan never writes about a place that's not hot,' her husband John Dunne told a journalist. 'The day she writes about a Boston winter will be a day it's all over.'<sup>74</sup> The beast approaching Bethlehem from Yeats' poem had a 'gaze blank and pitiless as the sun' and moved in the 'shadows of the indignant desert birds.'<sup>75</sup> Didion was fascinated by the Santa Ana wind, a 'foehn' wind like in Austria and Swiss that blows a few weeks a year in Los Angeles, whining down hot and dry from the leeward slope of the mountains. The wind dried 'the hills and the nerves to the flash point', causing fires and casualties: murders, suicides, traffic accidents. Whenever the Santa Ana blows, headaches, nausea, allergies, nervousness and depression occur more frequently. Didion quoted writer Raymond Chandler about its relation to violence: 'every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks. Anything can happen.'<sup>76</sup> In her piece on Lucille Miller Didion mentioned the Santa Ana blowing in the San Bernardino Valley and the extremely long and dry summers over there; 'It is the season of suicide and divorce and prickly dread, wherever the wind blows.' The wind showed 'how close to the edge we are.'<sup>77</sup>

After seven years Didion and her family left the house at Pacific Coast Highway, when the highway had collapsed under rains and a friend of Quintana had drowned at Zuma Beach. Some months after they had sold the house a bush fire, pushed by a Santa Ana wind, reached the Pacific Highway and jumped over it: 'Horses caught fire and were shot on the beach, birds exploded in the air. Houses did not explode but imploded, as in

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 166.

<sup>72</sup> Kakutani, 'Joan Didion', p. 33; Didion, *Slouching*, p. 183.

<sup>73</sup> Davidson, 'A visit', p. 13.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. xi.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 217-220.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 3, 221.

a nuclear strike.’ As by miracle the fire stopped or was beaten 125 feet from their former property.<sup>78</sup>

As a child Didion already feared the rattlesnakes that sunned themselves on the rocks in the American river. They were the same rattlesnakes that symbolized Eden’s fall in Didion’s debut novel *Run, River* (1963). The same snakes inhabited the lemon groves sunken down the walls on Banyan street where Lucille Miller’s husband was set to fire in his car: ‘too lush, unsettlingly glossy, the greenery of nightmare; the fallen eucalyptus bark is too dusty, a place for snakes to breed.’ Rattlesnakes also inhabited the driveway of her house at the Pacific coast. A black snake filled Didion with fear when she once ran over it on her way to the supermarket, as well as a rattlesnake she saw in the grass while visiting the family graveyard.<sup>79</sup>

Didion was a fearful child and the stories of her youth invoked seriousness and a sense of morality. Didion’s great-great-grandmother was a member of the original Donner party, but she had left the group earlier. Faced with starvation in the Sierras, the members ate their own dead.<sup>80</sup> According to Ellen Friedman the truth that the story of the Donner-Reed party claimed, was ironic: ‘On the one hand, it implies that the survivors must have built Eden to justify such sacrifice. On the other hand, such an act pollutes and dooms the goal for which it is committed.’<sup>81</sup> Didion however, interpreted this story as one of the many ‘graphic litanies of the grief awaiting those who failed in their loyalties to each other.’ The ‘cautionary tales’ of her childhood stated that the Jayhawkers were not killed by the desert, nor was the Donner-Reed party killed by the mountain winter:

we were taught instead that they had somewhere abdicated their responsibilities, somehow breached their primary loyalties, or they would not have found themselves helpless in the mountain winter or the desert summer, would not have given way to acrimony, would not have deserted one another, would not have *failed*.<sup>82</sup>

For Didion morality existed only in this most basic form: ‘one of the promises we make to one another is that we will try to retrieve our casualties, try not to abandon our dead to the coyotes.’ She thought that the Californian frontier mentality had given her an ‘ineptness at tolerating the

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<sup>78</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 222-223.

<sup>79</sup> Kakutani, ‘Joan Didion’, p. 35; Katherine U. Henderson, ‘Run River: Edenic vision and wasteland nightmare’, in: Friedman, *Essays and Conversations*, pp. 91-104; Didion, *Slouching*, pp. 5, 139, 167, 173; Didion, *White Album*, p. 222.

<sup>80</sup> Kakutani, ‘Joan Didion’, p. 34.

<sup>81</sup> Friedman, ‘The Didion sensibility’, p. 83.

<sup>82</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 159.

complexities of post-industrial life.’ Any other kind of morality than this responsibility of individuals towards each other in matters of life and death was dangerous and should be avoided. Didion wrote:

Because when we start deceiving ourselves into thinking not that we want something or need something, not that it is a pragmatic necessity for us to have it, but that it is a *moral imperative* that we have it, then is when we join the fashionable madmen, and then is when the thin whine of hysteria is heard in the land, and then is when we are in bad trouble. And I suspect we are already there.<sup>83</sup>

Didion ceaselessly and mercilessly investigated her own memories, critically going over and over them again. This made her writings go in circles, repeating events and details she was still struggling with and trying to reconnect with by making sense of them. Didion further destabilized her own accounts by occasionally suggesting that she merely relives common age-related feelings. In New York she heard a song that went like ‘but where is the school-girl who used to be me.’ Immediately after describing how she was wondering this herself, she ruined its romantic connotations by mentioning that ‘everyone wonders something like that, sooner or later, and no matter what he or she is doing, but one of the mixed blessings of being twenty and twenty-one and even twenty-three is the conviction that nothing like this, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, has ever happened to anyone before.’<sup>84</sup>

According to Ankersmit, traumatic experience is such a huge threat that it cannot actually be experienced consciously. This makes it impossible to construct meaningful stories about our experiences. Narrative becomes pointless and what is left is dissociation.<sup>85</sup> In the California Didion had returned to, families disintegrated and children ran away from home. They thus got disconnected from a future they never anticipated and minimized their ability to experience the world around them by doing drugs and losing language as a way of giving sense and structure to their lives. In her own account, Didion wrote her best-known reportage ‘Slouching towards Bethlehem’ to come to terms with this changed society. When she went to San Francisco she had not been able to work for some months, ‘paralyzed by the conviction that writing was an irrelevant act, that the world as I had understood it no longer existed. If I was to work again at all, it would be necessary for me to come to terms with disorder.’<sup>86</sup> The fast historical changes and the traumatic loss of the California of her youth manifested

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<sup>83</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, pp. 158, 163.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 226.

<sup>85</sup> Ankersmit, *De sublieme historische ervaring*, p. 369.

<sup>86</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. xiv; Kakutani, ‘Joan Didion’, p. 37.

itself in Didion's psychological suffering. Her accounts of this experience resisted narrative, but she remained determined to find a way to capture them in language.

*The Child in Time*

Loss is a condition that is intimately connected to the experience and the literature of postmodernism. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard mentions the 'missing contents' and the 'unpresentable' in the literature of this period. The effacing of truth and authority was connected to the diminishing role of fathers.<sup>87</sup> Ellen Friedman states that the Oedipal preoccupation with fathers is a recurring theme in the modernistic writings of male authors. A variation of this search for fathers is 'the profoundly nostalgic conviction that the past has explanatory or redemptive powers.'<sup>88</sup> According to Friedman, women's works of modernity showed little nostalgia for fathers nor for the authorities they used to represent, their narratives looking forward rather than backward. Their literary style represents this rejection of authorities: their writing 'repeatedly falls to pieces, refuses to organize itself according to nostalgic scripts, and, in spite of the author herself, moves with unconscious daring toward something she cannot name,' Friedman writes.<sup>89</sup>

During the Sixties Didion was on a deperate quest for linguistic tools to come to terms with the fall from paradise. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* the myth of Eden centers round fallen sexuality, which differed from unfallen by being *real*.<sup>90</sup> In Didion's writings, grown-up sexuality and a sometimes ruthless perception of what 'real' life is or should be, is paramount. Didion denied that 'self-respect' had anything to do with chastity, being 'a kind of charm against snakes, something that keeps those who have it locked in some unblighted Eden, out of strange beds, ambivalent conversations, and trouble in general.'<sup>91</sup> Her loathing for the women's movement was founded in its 'aversion (...) to adult sexual life': 'how much cleaner to stay forever children.' In feminist discourse, a relationship should be about 'wisecracking and laughing' and 'lying together and then leaping up to play and sing the entire *Sesame Street Songbook*.' According to Didion these women were just trying to fulfil as grown-ups their childish desires. She concluded dismissively:

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<sup>87</sup> Quoted in: Jean Pickering and Suzanne Kehde eds. *Narratives of nostalgia, gender and nationalism* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 159.

<sup>88</sup> Ellen Friedman in Suzanne Kehde (ed.) *Narratives of nostalgia, gender and nationalism*, p. 161.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 162, 164, 170.

<sup>90</sup> Lerner, *The uses of nostalgia*, p. 202.

<sup>91</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 144.

All one's actual apprehension of what it is like to be a woman, the irreconcilable difference of it – that sense of living one's deepest life underwater, that dark involvement with blood and birth and death – could now be declared invalid, unnecessary, *one never felt it at all*.<sup>92</sup>

In *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter and Joan Didion* Janis P. Stout analyzes Didion's style as one of reticence. Although she has no 'maiden modesty' and is free to address any subject, contrary to female writers of time past, she 'refrains from spreading out her fictive world in all its abundance.' 'She gives us outlines, a sharp detail here or there, a broken-off phrase from our conversation, no more. The rest we must fill in ourselves (...) with active engagement,' Stout comments. However, Didion's 'terseness is aggressive. She assaults the reader, in effect, with four-letter words yelling out of blankness. Her prose is bluntly, tersely angry, and the great spaces of blank paper surrounding it do nothing to soften that anger. Didion hurls silence back into the face of patriarchy.' Therefore, Stout argues, Didion should be considered a feminist after all, like the other female writers she discusses: 'I believe (them to be) intentionally subversive feminists, working to overturn the encrusted structures of gender by the mockery or the assault of what they don't say.'<sup>93</sup>

Stout links Didion's 'curtailed' style in the novels *Play It As It Lays* (1970), *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977) and *Democracy* (1984) with her perceiving 'a world in disorder, morally bankrupt, aesthetically debased, relationally broken (the world anatomized in her essays).' In her fictive works Didion represented her experiences by depicting disordered actions and emotional states, and by blanks, that 'serve as representations of negative moral assertions – assertions of hopelessness, of futility, of meanness, of the failure of meaning.'<sup>94</sup> Stout continues:

Emotionally, the effect is a sense of futility combined with a great weariness (an effect sustained by the flattening tone of virtually all interrogatives by ending them with periods rather than question marks). By constructing her fiction around blanks, Didion asserts that there is nothing worth putting there.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Didion, *White Album*, pp. 116-118.

<sup>93</sup> Janis P. Stout, *Strategies of Reticence: silence and meaning in the works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion* (Charlottesville and London, 1990), pp. 22-23.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 149.

In addition, the women in Didion's novels share a reluctance to speak, 'a sense that full, easy conversation in the accepted manner betrays their selfhood; a wish to deny troubling realities by refusing to give them verbal acknowledgement; and a sense of futility, a hopelessness about ever being able to make sense of life or change it.' It shows itself in verbal inexpressiveness 'though they may at times throw up a fountain of words as a diversionary tactic or engage in the kind of terse verbal aggression that characterizes Didion as a narrator.'<sup>96</sup>

Indeed, Inez Victor, the principal character in *Democracy*, is a woman of little words. She spoke only when necessary, or when she was provoked. After a diner party at which her husband had an argument with a colleague, she criticized him by remaining silent when he tried to get her approval.

'Unless there's something behind us I don't know about,' Harry said as she turned into San Luis Road, 'you might try lightening up the foot on the gas pedal.' 'Unless you're running for something I don't know about,' Inez heard herself say, 'you might try lightening up the rhetoric at the dinner table.' Another silence followed. Then her husband accused her of being 'palpable unhappy' and they go to bed in silence. The next morning Inez spent hours thinking about this phrase and its possible truth, reconstructing 'the details of occasions on which she recalled being happy.'<sup>97</sup>

When talking, Inez Victor uses blanks as well as words to get her message across. A therapist questioned her when her daughter got in trouble because of her heroin addiction.

'I notice you smoke,' the therapist said, still smiling. 'I do, yes,' Inez answered. She was thinking about her daughter's problems and replied after a while: 'I also drink coffee.' The therapist kept staring at her as Inez watched her daughter on the other side of the glass partition. 'What I don't do is shoot heroin,' Inez said.<sup>98</sup>

Didion appears to weight every word the narrator and her characters speak. In *Democracy* she plays with fact and fiction, representing her real self ('call me the author') in 'a fictive world that includes events, people, and places we also recognize from the daily newspaper.' In this way she constructs a bridge between the fictional story and general experience. She visibly struggles with telling the story, carrying its burden: 'a stringent objection to the ebbing of traditional values, family values, and a moral horror at the spectacle of America's role in Vietnam.'<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151.

<sup>97</sup> Joan Didion, *Democracy* (New York, 1995, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1984), pp. 58-59.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 63.

<sup>99</sup> Stout, *Strategies of Reticence*, pp. 184-185.

Between the blanks resisting meaning, recurring themes can be found in Didion's novels. Sexuality is one of them. According to Didion it oppresses women, as they are trapped in a vision of romantic femininity on the one side, and the idealization of marriage and motherhood on the other. Reconciliation between the two seems impossible, resulting in a lack of both authenticity and autonomy. 'Marriage and sex are an inevitability,' Stout writes about Didion's novel *Run, River* (1963) 'as fated as the exile from Eden.'<sup>100</sup> Didion's heroines 'resort to sex, often promiscuous sex, as a means of filling the emptiness of their lives.' Yet pursuing sex prevents them from developing the stable relationships they actually desire, and are already hard to find in a world where men are often domineering and even physically abusive.<sup>101</sup> Although there is some self-respect and autonomy to be gained in the sexual escapades of Didion's heroines, and although they certainly express their anger towards patriarchy and show the loss of structure and morality in the American society during the Sixties, Didion's fictional stories show clearly that no real solutions are to be found in this way. As on many occasions, restraint is the best option. In *Democracy* Didion constructs a sober love affair of about thirty years around stolen looks and seemingly meaningless words. As the words are used sparingly, their power of expression increases. When Inez' sister Janet is dying, she arrives at Honolulu airport. 'She had not yet slept. She had not yet eaten. She had not yet seen Jack Lovett, although Jack Lovett had seen her.' His few words are as poignant as they can be: 'Get her out of the goddamn rain, Jack Lovett had said.'<sup>102</sup>

According to Stout, Didion's heroines tend to direct their emotional allegiance backward, to the love of their mothers or sometimes their fathers. They try to centre their adult lives around their children, 'as a re-enactment of the ideal parental love they yearn for.'<sup>103</sup> Didion appears to have the opinion that more moral certainties are to be found in women's role as mothers, although many mistakes have to be made to come to an understanding with this position. In *Democracy* Inez Victor's children get in trouble often and appear to suffer from the lifestyle and unstable relationship of their parents. However, after her lover dies at the end of the story, Inez stays in Malaysia helping refugees, trying to find a moral resolution for his actions during the Vietnam war and maybe for her own inertness as a politician's wife. Her former drug-addicted and wandering daughter becomes a writer, another construction of closure.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Stout, *Strategies of Reticence*, p. 153.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 150.

<sup>102</sup> Didion, *Democracy*, p. 158.

<sup>103</sup> Stout, *Strategies of Reticence*, p. 150.

<sup>104</sup> See Didion, *Democracy*.



While Didion was exploring in her fiction the possibilities of sexuality and motherhood to come to terms with femininity in a rapidly changing world, she most possibly investigated ‘through writing’ her own experiences too. In the end, she is most concerned with the children of the decade, loosening themselves from family ties, but at the same time deserted by fathers in defense and mothers on the run themselves. If, following Ankersmit, traumatic historical crises are the ones forcing a society and his members to adopt another identity and leaving their old one behind, it can be imagined how difficult it must be to be a youngster in a period like this. C. John Sommerville analyzes in *The Rise and Fall of Childhood* that ‘our children are having a hard time growing up because our civilization itself is experiencing an identity crisis. (...) Neither parents nor the wider society offer children the guidance they need, want, and deserve.’<sup>105</sup> Sommerville states that the generation born after World War II ‘has no unifying goals or values which could hold a culture together.’ The youth revolt of the Sixties ‘is best understood as a reaction to this cultural decay.’<sup>106</sup>

Yeats’ beast approaching Bethlehem was ‘vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle.’<sup>107</sup> In the counter culture, children were abandoned and hurt, even physically. In ‘Slouching towards Bethlehem’, Didion was worried about a three-year-old child, Michael, who was living with a lot of people in the ‘Warehouse’, a kind of theatre, ‘a continual happening.’ The boy was either rocking on a rocking horse in a blue spotlight, or trying to light joss sticks. Didion tried to teach him ‘Frère Jacques.’ One day the boy started a fire and burned his arm badly. ‘I was terribly worried,’ Didion told a journalist afterwards, ‘because my child was almost that age.’ While the child’s mother was screaming, nobody reacted, because everybody was busy looking for some ‘very good Moroccan’ hash that had been dropped behind a floorboard damaged by the fire.<sup>108</sup> Another child Didion met, was a five-year-old girl, sitting on the living-room floor reading a comic book. ‘She keeps licking her lips in concentration and the only thing about her is that she’s wearing white lipstick.’ The girl turned out to be on drugs, like at least three of her friends. ‘Five years old,’ Didion’s acquaintance Otto said. ‘On acid.’<sup>109</sup>

Reading the papers, Didion found more disturbing stories of maltreatment of young children. In several essays she mentioned a baby left alone in a locked car on a hot parking space, burned alive. On the third page

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<sup>105</sup> John Sommerville, *The rise and fall of childhood* (Beverly Hills, 1982), p. 228.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 230-231.

<sup>107</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. xi.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 95-96, 116, 128; Susan Stamberg, ‘Cautionary tales’ in Friedman, *Essays and Conversations*, pp. 22-28.

<sup>109</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 128.

of *The White Album* Didion told the story of a five-year-old girl who was left 'to die' on the centre divider of the Interstate 5 road by her 26-year-old mother. 'The child, whose fingers had to be pried loose from the Cyclone fence when she was rescued twelve hours later by the California Highway Patrol, reported that she had run after the car carrying her mother and stepfather and brother and sister for "a long time."' Didion stated that this was one of the images that did not fit 'into any narrative I know.'<sup>110</sup> Everywhere in the United States she found wandering 'children', for example the sailors in Honolulu on Hawaii, twenty and nineteen and eighteen years old and 'drunk because they are no longer in Des Moines and not yet in Danang.'<sup>111</sup> Sommerville reads the protest movement as a doomed quest for family, symbolized by their major topic of conversation, 'relating.' 'Some of the stars of their "happenings"- Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin – took their own lives, whether intentionally or not. And the crowd of runaways that were attracted to the movement sank in a morass of drugs, violence, and prostitution. They had not found the family love they were looking for.'<sup>112</sup>

In her personal life Didion was struggling to give her own, adopted daughter the family she deserved. Quintana's first birthday was celebrated 'home', in Didion's parents' house in Sacramento. It was difficult for Didion to reconcile the 'home' of her small family with the 'home' of five generations of relatives in the Valley. Her husband, apparently not present at the birthday, 'likes my family but is uneasy in their house.' He did not understand the way Didion and her family communicated, 'difficult, oblique, deliberately inarticulate.'<sup>113</sup> On the evening after the birthday party, Didion knelt beside her daughter's crib. She was an 'open and trusting child', Didion mused, 'unprepared for and unaccustomed to the ambushes of family life, and perhaps it is just as well that I can offer her little of that life.' Still, Didion would like to give her daughter more. She wished she was able 'to promise her that she will grow up with a sense of her cousins and of rivers and of her great-grandmother's teacups, would like to pledge her a picnic on a river with fried chicken and her hair uncombed, would like to give her *home* for her birthday.'<sup>114</sup> Didion dedicated *Slouching towards Bethlehem* to Quintana.

Was the dream of the Sixties, of youth and innocence and a new world, completely non-existent in Didion's vision of the world? Didion pities the lost children and their abandoned homes alike. The adolescents living in Haight Street had never been taught to connect to society and the games and

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<sup>110</sup> Didion, *White Album*, p. 13.

<sup>111</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, p. 195.

<sup>112</sup> Sommerville, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 233.

<sup>113</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, pp. 164-165.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 168.

ties that held it together. In their own jargon they were living free ‘of all the old middle-class Freudian hang-ups.’ They drifted from city to city, ‘sloughing off both the past and the future as snakes shed their skins.’ Didion described their empty existence, meticulously reporting the drugs they did and the comments they had on that. (‘Wow.’)<sup>115</sup> This brings to mind Sommerville’s dismissive words on the youth movement: ‘There was an infectious silliness in these Flower Children that appealed to Americans especially.’<sup>116</sup>

Didion reported on the ‘Institute for the Study of Nonviolence in Camel Valley’, owned by the folk singer Joan Baez. She described Baez as naïve, but radiantly so. As a folk singer she did not want to entertain, but to ‘move’ people, ‘to establish with them some communion of emotion.’ She is ‘the girl who “feels” things, who has hung on to the freshness and pain of adolescence, the girl ever wounded, ever young.’ By the end of 1963 Baez found in the protest movement something upon which she could focus her emotion, and in her school the canon of non-violence was studied and meditated upon in an atmosphere of love, peace and happiness.<sup>117</sup> The students – no requirements except to be at least eighteen years old – were ‘very young, very earnest, and not very much in touch with the larger scene, less refugees from it than children who do not quite apprehend it.’ Baez herself tried ‘perhaps unconsciously, to hang on to the innocence and turbulence and capacity for wonder, however ersatz or shallow, of her own or of anyone’s adolescence.’<sup>118</sup> Didion wanted to give Baez the benefit of the doubt, but in general, she equated childlessness with a lack of sense of reality and a refusal to grow up and face the world like it was.

Neurotically as this might be, Didion held on to the lost dreams and moralistic stories of her Californian youth and the words she learned from studying literature and being a writer. This experience filled her life with a direction that the runaways of San Francisco missed. Didion asked a runaway couple, Jack and Debbi, to think back of their childhoods, and tell her what they had wanted to be when they were grown up, how they had seen their future. Jeff could not remember he ever thought about it. Debbi had wanted to be a veterinarian once. ‘But now I’m more or less working in the vein of being an artist or a model or a cosmetologist. Or something.’<sup>119</sup>

Didion would not give way to the Sixties and preferred holding on to personal and collective trauma to obliviousness. She regarded the child in herself with unmerciful eyes and forced herself with relentless effort to ‘grow up.’ When she was thirty-one she was sent to Hawaii, to have a break

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 84-85, 87-88, 106, 123.

<sup>116</sup> Sommerville, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 232.

<sup>117</sup> Didion, *Slouching*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 49, 57.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 92.

from her fears and migraine, 'a recalcitrant thirty-one-year-old child' as she called herself. 'There I could become a new woman,' Didion commented.<sup>120</sup> She disconnected herself from her roots by her marriage to a man from Connecticut – her brother referred to her husband, in his presence, as 'Joan's husband' – and by the adoption of her daughter.<sup>121</sup> Didion experimented with language as much as she could, but she held on to its inherent meaning and its ability to clarify. She criticized the hippies for their lack of linguistic interest and skills, their only 'proficient vocabulary' being 'society's platitudes.' She wrote the following about her perspective on language: 'As it happens I am still committed to the idea that the ability to think for one's self depends upon one's mastery of the language.'<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 187.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 165.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 123.



# POLITICAL CONVENTIONS AND LITERARY CONVENTIONS

## MAILER'S ART OF REPORTAGE

Markku Lehtimäki

### *Introduction*

The conventions of journalism and the novel are historically changing. Therefore, the distinction between history and fiction depends on various writing practices and ideological or aesthetic choices in given cultural contexts. A prominent feature in Tom Wolfe's definition of the New Journalism is its relation to the techniques of the realistic novel. The literary journalists of the sixties eagerly adopted those classic novelistic techniques, which were rejected by the contemporary fabulists and absurdists.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, in his rather complicated study of the postwar American nonfiction novel, Mas'ud Zavarzadeh envisions that the form and meaning of the 'traditional' (realistic and liberal-humanist) novel was all but eliminated with the emergence of 'new forms of narrative, especially the nonfiction novel and various modes of transfiction'. In Zavarzadeh's weighty phrasing, this kind of new 'fiction' is able to record accurately the absurd contemporary reality and to radically react to the current epistemological crisis.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore rather ironic that Tom Wolfe's main work of literary journalism, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968), should qualify as a representative of postmodernist fabulation in Zavarzadeh's sense. In that psychedelic text, 'everybody's life becomes more fabulous, every minute, than the most fabulous book.'<sup>3</sup>

In Jacques Rancière's words, 'there is an essential connection between politics as a specific form of collective practice and literature as a well-defined practice of the art of writing.'<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, despite his 'pyrotechnic' innovations in the journalistic form Wolfe remains politically conservative; and it has been asked whether 'the postmodernists are hesitant

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfe, T., 'The New Journalism', in: Wolfe, T. and Johnson, E. W. eds., *The New Journalism: An Anthology* (New York, 1973), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Zavarzadeh, M., *The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel* (Urbana, 1976), pp. vii, 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfe, T., *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York, 1999), p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Rancière, J., *The Politics of Literature*, transl. Julie Rose (Cambridge, 2011), p. 3.

to undertake any political action.<sup>5</sup> Proposing a kind of alternative between realism and postmodernism, T. V. Reed coins the concept of ‘postmodernist realism’, which is ‘at once a mode of writing and a mode of reading, one that features self-reflexive, realism-disrupting techniques but places those techniques in tension with “real” cognitive claims and with “realistic,” radically pragmatic political needs.’<sup>6</sup> According to this argument, literary texts should no longer be fetishized as autonomous art but rather be analyzed as part of a rhetorical continuum where different kinds of writing produce different kinds of textual and political power. The fact that Reed discusses postmodernist realism and self-reflexive literary nonfiction in the case of Norman Mailer’s *The Armies of the Night* (1968), among other works, gives me one starting point for my delineation of literary and political practices in Mailer’s writing.

In my essay, I will especially focus on the development of Mailer’s literary journalism in the 1960s and its forms. My special concern is how Mailer represents the *political conventions* from 1960 to 1972 with the help of those *literary conventions* partly derived from his fiction and imagination and how the presidential figures such as Kennedy and Nixon are made meaningful through self-consciously novelistic characterization. While writing his literary journalism about the Republican and the Democratic conventions Mailer is also, in my view, bridging the virtual gap between politics and literature. In Mailer’s art of reportage, the political conventions are always already shot through with the literary style and meaning in the form of speech and rhetoric – but it still takes a novelist, Mailer’s ideal figure, disguised as a journalist, to body forth the essential senses, details, and impulses of a given time.

#### *Mailer’s Literary Journalism*

There is a large body of theoretical work that emphasizes the complex mode of literary nonfiction as deriving from the New Journalism of the sixties, especially from the reportage of Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote’s famous coinage of the ‘nonfiction novel’ in *In Cold Blood* (1965), as well as from Norman Mailer’s several experiments with the form. In addition, it appears to be a distinctly American phenomenon of the postmodern age.<sup>7</sup> This mode

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<sup>5</sup> Doležel, L., *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History: The Postmodern Stage* (Baltimore, 2010), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Reed, T. V., *Fifteen Jugglers, Five Believers: Literary Politics and the Poetics of American Social Movements* (Berkeley, 1992), p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, there were literary-journalistic approaches to social and political realities in various countries in the 1960s, including Finland, where figures like Jörn Donner already started developing their “new journalistic” techniques in the late 1950s. What is more, even the seemingly postmodernist, self-reflexive, and

of writing was characterized three decades ago in a rather simplistic way: 'The terms of "new journalism" and "nonfiction novel" both serve as names for a contemporary genre in which journalistic material is presented in the forms of fiction.'<sup>8</sup> But as theorists of literary nonfiction are themselves ready to admit and sometimes even eager to emphasize – so as to preempt the fiercest attacks on their would-be positivism – 'there is an enormous gap between any event and any linguistic version of that event', and 'any literary text, whether fiction or nonfiction, (...) is arbitrated of "crafted" in important ways, rendering impossible the single equation of "actuality" with nonfiction.'<sup>9</sup> This is merely a pragmatic notion, foregrounding as it does the nonfiction writer's considerable problems in transforming actual events into literary texts. Richard Walsh gives justice to the complexity of the issue when suggesting that 'the categorical difference between real and imagined events is overwhelmed by the artificiality of narrative representation in either case.'<sup>10</sup> In my view, the fiction/nonfiction distinction appears to be more pragmatic (dealing with conventions, contexts, and reading/writing practices) than textual (which would call for narrative, rhetorical, and linguistic patterns), because on the textual level fiction and nonfiction often look alike.

Harold Bloom, the 'canonical' critic of modern American letters, suggests that Mailer, more than any other writer, has broken down the distinction between fiction and journalism. Interestingly, Bloom regards this kind of breaking down generally as 'an aesthetic misfortune', but not necessarily in Mailer's individual case, since 'the mode now seems his own.'<sup>11</sup> Another critic suggests that Mailer has, across his long and winding career, 'insistently described himself as a novelist rather than a nonfiction artist, despite the fact that in both quantity and quality his greater contribution has been to literary nonfiction.'<sup>12</sup> Thus, whereas Mailer's position as a nonfiction artist is close to canonical, there has been continuing disagreement concerning his stature as a novelist. It has been thought that Mailer has always faced difficulties in shaping and

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novelistic mode of nonfiction was represented early on in American literature, exemplified by James Agee and Walker Evans's great photo-documentary book on the depression era, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941).

<sup>8</sup> Hellmann, J., *Fables of Fact: The New Journalism as New Fiction* (Urbana, 1981), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Heyne, E., 'Toward a Theory of Literary Nonfiction', *Modern Fiction Studies* 33 (1987), no. 3, pp. 488-489; Lehman, D. W., *Matters of Fact: Reading Nonfiction over the Edge* (Columbus, 1997), p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Walsh, R., *The Rhetoric of Fictionality: Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction* (Columbus, 2007), p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Bloom, H., 'Introduction', in: idem., *Norman Mailer* (New York, 1986), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Lounsberry, B., *The Art of Fact: Contemporary Artists of Nonfiction* (New York, 1990), p. 139.



transforming his literary style and imagination into the achieved works of *fiction* but has been more successful in transfiguring his factual narratives into works of *literature*.<sup>13</sup> However, instead of approaching his work through firm categories of factual and fictional writing, we need – in the following pages – to grasp Mailer’s self-reflection upon his ‘peculiar form of non-fiction’, as defined in the middle of the narrative of *Oswald’s Tale*.<sup>14</sup>

In the foreword to his 1972 collection of essays *Existential Errands* Mailer reflects on his method and ideology, seeing that ‘the moot desire to have one’s immediate say on contemporary matters kept diverting the novelistic impulse into journalism.’<sup>15</sup> In Mailer’s literary journalism the author’s subjectivity emerges from the background to the foreground in the recognition that given a phenomenological world’s infinite indeterminacy, the selection of facts and details involves the actions of individual cognition and ‘shaping consciousness’.<sup>16</sup> Stating that ‘objective reporting is a myth’, Mailer expresses his discovery in those early days of his creative work of reportage that ‘the personality of the narrator was probably as important as the event’.<sup>17</sup>

Mailer’s actual work of reportage starts with three important pieces in the early sixties, namely ‘Superman Comes to the Supermarket’ (1960), ‘Ten Thousand Words a Minute’ (1962), and ‘In the Red Light’ (1964). As Robert Merrill argues, these essays allow us to trace the growth of Mailer’s unique approach to nonfiction. However, it is only in the last mentioned (about the 1964 Republican convention in San Francisco) that ‘Mailer’s interpretive presence is felt throughout’ for the first time, thus creating a basis for his ‘novelistic’ nonfiction.<sup>18</sup> Merrill also emphasizes the centrality of the often neglected piece ‘Ten Thousand Words a Minute’ in the Mailer canon, seeing it as the real breakthrough of Mailer’s self-reflexive, both participatory and interpretive reportage in a literary, semi-fictionalized mode. The essay, depicting the weird Liston-Patterson championship fight, reveals its self-consciousness already in its title: Mailer is writing approximately 20,000 words about a two-minute fight – thus, ten thousand words a minute.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Glenday, M. K., *Norman Mailer* (London, 1995), p. 138; Underwood, D., *Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700-2000* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 186.

<sup>14</sup> See Lehtimäki, M., *The Poetics of Norman Mailer’s Nonfiction: Self-Reflexivity, Literary Form, and the Rhetoric of Narrative* (Tampere, 2005), pp. 1, 23; Mailer, N., *Oswald’s Tale* (London, 1995), p. 353.

<sup>15</sup> Mailer, N., *Existential Errands* (Boston, 1972), p. xi.

<sup>16</sup> Hartsock, J. C., *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, 2000), p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> Mailer, N., *The Spooky Art: Some Thoughts on Writing* (New York, 2003), p. 187.

<sup>18</sup> Merrill, R., *Norman Mailer Revisited* (New York, 1992), pp. 93, 98.

The essay also lays bare Mailer's typical convention of self-theorizing nonfiction, with its critical edge always pointed toward conventional newspaper reportage. It begins with an ironic remark:

Taken one by one, it is true that reporters tend to be hardheaded, objective, and unimaginative. Their intelligence is sound but unexceptional and they have the middle-class penchant for collecting tales, stories, legends, accounts of practical jokes, details of negotiation, bits of memoir – all those capsules of fiction which serve the middle class as a substitute for ethics and/or culture. Reporters, like shopkeepers, tend to be worshipful of the fact which wins and so covers over the other facts.<sup>19</sup>

Mailer's skepticism about daily journalism derives from his sense that it deadens human perception and imagination in its pre-packaged images and falsely created facts; for him, 'writing is of use to the psyche only if the writer discovers something he did not know he knew in the act itself of writing'.<sup>20</sup> As Morris Dickstein comments on 'Ten Thousand Words a Minute', Mailer 'shapes his immensely long piece as an attack on journalism, with its "excessive respect for power" and its failure to find the truth amid "a veritable factology of detail."' <sup>21</sup> Mailer's journalism is accordingly always written against the conventions of traditional, 'objective' journalism, which only tries to collect and state the 'facts' without an intent to go deeper into the workings of the events or the human mind. In his early (1966) analysis of Mailer's literary journalism, Dan Wakefield suggests that this kind of reporting is 'imaginative' because the author has 'brought out the sights, sounds, and feel surrounding those facts' and connected them with facts of history, society, and literature 'in an artistic manner that does not diminish but gives greater depth and dimension to the facts.'<sup>22</sup>

Although Tom Wolfe has himself confirmed his status as the leading paragon of the New Journalism in the sixties America, some recent criticism has pointed out the importance of Mailer's 'Superman Comes to the Supermarket' as the real starting point of this mode. As one critic puts it, albeit a bit harshly to my mind, 'from a literary point of view' Wolfe's new journalistic work 'is of relatively minor interest', especially as there 'is nothing in Wolfe to match the sheer intuitiveness' of Mailer's journalism. Consequently, the critic argues that Mailer 'went much deeper into the

<sup>19</sup> Mailer, N., *The Presidential Papers* (New York, 1963), p. 215.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 219.

<sup>21</sup> Dickstein, M., *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction 1945-1970* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 155.

<sup>22</sup> Wakefield, D., 'The Personal Voice and the Impersonal Eye', in: Weber, R. ed., *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy* (New York, 1974), p. 41.

possibilities released by the undermining of traditional distinctions between fact and fiction.<sup>23</sup> In his ‘Superman’ piece Mailer is seeking for the right literary form to cover John F. Kennedy’s presidential election in 1960, filling the actual scene with the imagery of Hip ideology and figuring Kennedy as his potential real-life hipster: ‘Yes, this candidate for all his record, his good, sound, conventional liberal record has a patina of that other life, the second American life, the long electric night with the fires of neon leading down the highway to the murmur of jazz.’<sup>24</sup> However, instead of following the rules of factual reportage, Mailer forges Kennedy’s real image to suit his own narrative purposes: ‘It was a hero America needed, a hero central to his time, a man whose personality might suggest contradictions and mysteries which could reach into the alienated circuits of the underground, because only a hero can capture the secret imagination of a people.’<sup>25</sup> Kennedy thus becomes a hero Mailer himself needs, a complex romantic character in the service of his novelistic imagination.<sup>26</sup>

In what follows, Mailer contemplates ways of approaching the candidate through literary allusions, until a colleague of his makes a useful reference: “Well, there’s your first hipster,” says a writer one knows at the convention, “Sergius O’Shaugnessy born rich,” and the temptation is to nod, for it could be true.<sup>27</sup> What makes the reporter’s approach explicitly ‘literary’ and self-ironically somewhat inept as journalistic groundwork, is the boasted ‘significance’ and ‘meaning’ of the fact that Kennedy has probably ‘read an author’s novel’.<sup>28</sup> ‘Superman Comes to the Supermarket’ demonstrates Mailer’s optimistic belief in the potentiality of Kennedy on the eve of his election, so that there are romantic possibilities in the air. However, the subsequent 1963 collection *The Presidential Papers* (which

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<sup>23</sup> Menand, L., ‘Beat the Devil’, *The New York Review of Books* 45 (1998), no. 16, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Mailer., *The Presidential Papers* (New York, 1963), p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 42

<sup>26</sup> See D’Amore, J., *American Authorship and Autobiographical Narrative: Mailer, Wideman, Eggers* (New York, 2012), pp. 78-82.

<sup>27</sup> Mailer., *The Presidential Papers* (New York, 1963), p. 44; Mailer’s subsequent political reportage is also filled with literary allusions; ‘In the Red Light’, for instance, includes quotations from Edmund Burke, Nathaniel West, William Blake, and John Donne. As in ‘Superman Comes to the Supermarket’, with its allusion to Mailer’s novel *The Deer Park* (1955), there is a reference to *An American Dream* (1965) in Mailer’s first book-length reportage of a political convention, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*: ‘While they debated, the reporter was having psychic artillery battles with the Mafia at the next table. (One might take a look at *An American Dream*, Chap. IV.)’ (Mailer, N., *Miami and the Siege of Chicago: An Informal History of the Republican and Democratic Conventions of 1968* (New York, 1986), p. 215.

<sup>28</sup> Mailer., *The Presidential Papers* (New York, 1963), p. 46-47.

includes the 'Superman' essay) is written in the aftermath of the assassination, just like Mailer's next novel *An American Dream*, which begins with a romantic note to Kennedy but ends in a dark apocalypse. Mailer's early Kennedy romanticism also contrasts with irony and pessimism that governs his book-length narratives about the less romantic figure of Richard Nixon.

#### *Nixon and Rhetoric*

As I have suggested above, the artistic basis of Mailer's literary nonfiction can be found in his early collections and the separate pieces included in them. What is significant, however, is that Mailer's more clearly autobiographical 'I' of these essays and collections is transformed into an apparently more novelistic 'he' or 'Mailer' in his book-length nonfiction narratives of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Next, I will mainly focus on *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (1968), in which Mailer uses a device he developed to a high craft, third-person storytelling based on first-person participation. As it has been noted, in *Miami and Chicago* Mailer reports the political conventions 'via his patented third-person, self-inclusive narrative', seeing the events 'through the eyes of this journalistic/subjective admixture.'<sup>29</sup> While *Miami and Chicago* has been, in much Mailer criticism, overshadowed by its direct predecessor *The Armies of the Night*, the later book still presents a new invention in the author's self-reflexive style of reportage. In *Armies* Mailer is not a *reporter* participating in the event (the March on the Pentagon); in *Miami and Chicago*, however, his assignment is to cover and report the political conventions for *Harper's Magazine*. Both *Miami and Chicago* and its 'sequel', *St. George and the Godfather* (1972), express 'a genuine bewilderment as to which role this writer should assume: that of the passive and observing reporter or that of the literary man who participates in several of the events he witnesses.'<sup>30</sup> The idea seems to be reverse to that of *Armies*; if the March on the Pentagon appears afterwards to provide the writer with good material to be transformed into the mode of the 'novel/history', in *Miami and Chicago* (and, even more dramatically, in *St. George*) Mailer has to write an article or two about conventions which are devoid of any imaginative interest. Here, the hard work of producing something worthwhile out of nothing emerges as a new motif in Mailer's nonfiction.

The first part of *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, entitled 'Nixon in Miami', deals with the reporter Mailer's forced attempt to find an angle and approach to the 1968 Republican convention held in that sunny city. At the

<sup>29</sup> Keener, J. F., *Biography and the Postmodern Historical Novel* (Lewinston, 2001), p. 136.

<sup>30</sup> Bailey, J., *Norman Mailer: Quick-Change Artist* (London, 1979), p. 101.

very beginning we are told that ‘the reporter had moved through the convention quietly, as anonymously as possible, wan, depressed, troubled.’<sup>31</sup> This detached stance appears to reflect the unimaginative dreariness of the Republican convention itself; indeed, ‘the complaints were unanimous that this was the dullest convention anyone could remember.’<sup>32</sup> Consequently, the convention does not seem to promise such narrative spice to a reporter’s skills as those previous conventions of 1960 and 1964 (with the romantic Kennedy in ‘Superman Comes to the Supermarket’ and the colorful Barry Goldwater in ‘The Red Light’), conventions and situations that ‘had encouraged his [Mailer’s] very best writing.’<sup>33</sup>

By adopting a detached position, Mailer as a reporter-character silently observes media people and politicians, as if gradually finding some narrative form and figurative explanation for the complex happenings surrounding the convention: ‘From a distance one could always tell exactly where the candidate was situated, for a semicircle of cameras crooned in from above like bulbs of seaweed breaking surface at high tide, or were they more like praying mantises on the heads of tall grass – a bazaar or metaphor was obviously offered.’<sup>34</sup> Mailer’s technique here not only foregrounds optical and metaphorical vision, but also aims to capture the smells and sounds of the spectacle. While adopting self-conscious literary techniques for his narrative, Mailer also makes allusions to classical novelistic representation of characters: ‘She [Nixon’s daughter] had an extraordinary complexion – one would be forced to describe it with the terminology of the Victorian novel, alabaster and ivory could vie for prominence with peaches and cream.’<sup>35</sup>

The culmination point of the book’s Miami section is, undoubtedly, the long-awaited appearance of Richard Nixon, a character not exactly close to Mailer’s deepest sympathies. However, the most memorable part of the whole section is the revelation that the reporter is obliged to revise his previous prejudices toward ‘Tricky Dick’. Recognizing that he is ‘obsessed’ with the candidate, Mailer also reflects that ‘he has never written anything nice about Nixon’.<sup>36</sup> There seems to be a new Nixon here in Miami, and

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<sup>31</sup> Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 14

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem.*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem.*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 29; This ‘Victorian’ framing of a female character is recalled in Mailer’s novel *Harlot’s Ghost* (1991), as Harry Hubbard sees Kittredge through similar imagery. On the other hand, the description of Nixon’s other daughter (‘a perfect soubrette for a family comedy on television. She was as American as Corporate Bakeries apple pie’ (Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 29) is reminiscent of Stephen Rojack’s way of objectifying Cherry in *An American Dream*.

<sup>36</sup> Mailer., *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 41.

Mailer needs to contemplate that 'it was obvious something was wrong with the reporter's picture', for 'either the man [Nixon] had changed or one had failed to recognize some part of his character from the beginning.'<sup>37</sup> Once again, the reporter sees his own personality as well as his larger ideas about America reflected in the mirror image provided by the presidential candidate. While Kennedy eight years ago was a 'hero' well suited to Mailer's hipster romanticism, Nixon now is a representative of a successful middle-aged family man, not altogether different from Mailer at the height of his literary career. Indeed, 'nothing in [the reporter's] view of Nixon had ever prepared him to conceive of a man with two lovely girls', and because the reporter has 'four fine daughters' himself, even Nixon cannot be all bad.<sup>38</sup> Nixon's persona has an effect on the reporter's focus, which must change, because Mailer 'had not allowed for the possibility of the phoenix rising from the ashes of political defeat.'<sup>39</sup> Mailer, himself a kind of phoenix rising from the ashes of literary disasters, can therefore understand Nixon whose experiences are closer to his own than those of the rich golden boy Kennedy.

Nixon, whether really a new person or still the old devil in disguise, emerges as a complex character that cannot be represented through strict binary logic. From a different angle of interpretation we can grasp how Mailer constructs this 'new' Nixon through self-conscious figuration of facts. This is because not only the actual political convention but the *narrative text* itself requires complexities, surprises, and mysterious possibilities provided by Nixon's character: 'New and marvelously complex improvement of a devil, or angel-in-chrysalis, or both – good and evil now at war in the man, Nixon was at least, beneath the near to hermetic boredom of his old presence, the most interesting figure in the convention.'<sup>40</sup> In other words, Mailer has to make something interesting out of the dull event, and he does it by framing the political convention with literary conventions, transforming the non-narrative happenings of reality into a novelistic narrative with dramatic moments and colorful characters.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 42.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 30.

<sup>39</sup> Bailey, *Norman Mailer*, p. 103.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 50.

<sup>41</sup> Similarly in *Oswald's Tale* Mailer foregrounds his 'novelistic approach' (Mailer, N., *Oswald's Tale* (London, 1995), p. 682) to Kennedy's alleged murderer, making Lee Harvey Oswald 'a protagonist, a prime mover, a man who made things happen – in short, a figure larger than others would credit him for being' approach' (Mailer, N., *Oswald's Tale* (London, 1995), p. 605). In an aesthetically motivated but ethically problematic way, the narrative *requires* an individual human character at its center, not a 'patsy' who would only demonstrate the ultimate absurdity of reality itself.

In what follows, through a closer analysis of Nixon's new media rhetoric and his developed skills of public performance, Mailer is able to 'deconstruct' the most positive images suggested by the candidate's first appearance:

So, now he talked self-consciously how the members of his staff, counting delegates, were 'playing what we call "the strong game."' SMILE said his brain. FLASH went the teeth. But his voice seemed to give away that, whatever they called it, they probably didn't call it 'the strong game,' or if they did, he didn't. So he framed little phrases. Like 'leg-up.' Or 'my intuition, my "gut feelings," so to speak.' Deferential air followed by SMILE-FLASH.<sup>42</sup>

Mailer's analysis of Nixon's political rhetoric suggests that the old Nixon may after all lurk behind the sunny surface of the new one: 'In the old days, he [Nixon] had got his name Tricky Dick because he gave one impression and acted upon another – later when his language was examined, one could not call him a liar.'<sup>43</sup> But Mailer appears to be equally critical toward the political rhetoric of the Democratic Party as analyzed in the Chicago section of the book. Here, in the final speech of Hubert Humphrey, it is the question of pushing the rhetorical buttons and evoking the right sentiments in the audience:

If sentiment made the voter vote, and it did! and sentiment was a button one could still prick by a word, then Humphrey was still in property business because he had pushed 'Testament' for button, 'America' for button, 'each and every one of us in our own way' – *in our own way* – what a sweet button is that! and 'reaffirm' – pure compost for any man's rhetoric, 'our posterity,' speaks to old emotion from the land of the covered loins, 'we love this nation' – pure constipation is now relieved – 'we love America.'<sup>44</sup>

In his subsequent reportage of political conventions, *St. George and the Godfather*, Mailer continues his analysis of Nixon's rhetoric, including its calculated aims at 'making an authentic move which gets authentic audience response.'<sup>45</sup> Finally, in *Miami and Chicago*, the reporter's aim at seeing some fruitful dialectics in Nixon's persona almost collapses, because the candidate still transmits the message of technological America that Mailer deeply objects to: '[H]e indeed did not know if he was ready to like Nixon,

<sup>42</sup> Mailer., *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 47.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 70.

<sup>44</sup> Mailer., *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 210; Mailer's collection of his reportage of political conventions from 1960 to 1976, *Some Honorable Men* (1976), alludes in its title to those 'honourable men' (Brutus and other political conspirators) that Mark Antony's rhetoric famously ironizes in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

<sup>45</sup> Mailer., *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 199.

or detested him for his resolutely non-poetic binary system, his computer's brain, did not know if the candidate was real as a man, or whole as a machine.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, according to Mailer's romanticism, even people like Nixon have now transformed into 'machines in the garden.'<sup>47</sup>

As Mailer's confrontation with Kennedy in 'Superman Comes to the Supermarket' had some 'literary' flavor (the author being delighted at the fact that the candidate had read one of his novels), the reporter's interest in Nixon in *Miami and Chicago* has a similar tone. By self-ironically implying his amateurish work as a reporter and simultaneously foregrounding his literary preferences, the reporter, standing within two feet of Nixon at one point in the middle of the convention, is only able to conduct a hypothetical question in his mind: "'What, sir, would you say is the state of your familiarity with the works of Edmund Burke?'"<sup>48</sup> The reader recalls that Mailer's reportage of the 1964 convention in his piece 'In the Red Light' is filled with quotations from Burke's classic work of historiography, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In fact, the figurative and literary means used by Burke in his narrative of the French Revolution, like his narrative rhetoric – 'I must see the things; I must see the men' (quoted by Mailer in *Cannibals and Christians*) – are employed by Mailer in his reportage.<sup>49</sup> Burke's and Mailer's political histories work both on a historical-referential level and a mythical-metaphorical level, and myths and their reproduction also provide invaluable coherence models for human beings in our modern technological world.<sup>50</sup> What both writers also believe is that history must be cast in a narrative form and that facts need to be interpreted. On this basis, in one of his best-known reflections on nonfictional writing Mailer speaks for the importance of a 'nuanced' history: 'It was a confrontation the reporter should not have missed. Were the Reagan girls livid or triumphant? Were the Negro demonstrators dignified or raucous or self-satisfied? It was a good story but the *Times* was not ready to encourage its reporters in the thought that there is no history without nuance.'<sup>51</sup> While Mailer's 'reporter-self' criticizes the cold, detached, seemingly objective fact-gathering of his fellow journalists in the convention, his 'author-self' simultaneously constructs an aesthetic-ethical manifesto according to which history must be told in detail and from

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 81-82

<sup>47</sup> See Marx, L., *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (London, 1964).

<sup>48</sup> Mailer., *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> Mailer, N., *Cannibals and Christians* (London, 1969), p. 23

<sup>50</sup> See Booth, W. C., *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 326-334.

<sup>51</sup> Mailer., *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 56.



various perspectives in order to reach at least a sense of its ultimate complexity.

However, once again Mailer's journalistic practice contains its own self-critique here, even pointing toward self-negation, since the paragraph above opens with the reporter's reflection that he should not have missed that confrontation with Ronald Reagan. Indeed, the ethical and practical shortcomings of the reporter Mailer's journalistic work are ironically suggested throughout *Miami and Chicago*: 'If he had been more of a reporter (or less of one), he would have known that the Reagan forces were pushing an all-out attack to pry, convert, cozen, and steal Southern delegates from Nixon'; '[Reagan] did not know, he really did not know. Nor did the reporter'; 'It occurred to the reporter on reflection that Nixon had not made the worst of moves for himself'; 'The reporter was 1,500 miles away by then and could hardly have covered [the riot]'; 'But since the reporter was not there, let us quote from the *Washington Post*'; 'The reporter did not know that the worst battle of the week had taken place not an hour ago.'<sup>52</sup> Mailer's reporter persona is occasionally 'like a character in a picaresque novel'.<sup>53</sup> Mailer thus plays with classic literary conventions in his reportage of political conventions, constructing his reporter-self as a partially comic character who is clearly less informed than he should be.

The closest companion piece for *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* in Mailer's work is to be found not in its famous precursor, *The Armies of the Night*, but in its much less-known sequel *St. George and the Godfather*, a report of the Republican and Democratic conventions of 1972. In *St. George* Mailer takes again the disguise of Aquarius, who is his *alter ego* in *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1970), and works hard to produce an interesting narrative. The events themselves do not provide sufficiently captivating material for storytelling and plotting; instead it 'promises to be an exhibit without suspense, conflict, or the rudiments of narrative line.'<sup>54</sup> In the very beginning of the narrative, Mailer-Aquarius reflects that the convention is 'dismaying in its absence of theater', and when compared to the Democratic gathering of 1968 ('martial, dramatic, bloody, vainglorious, riotous, noble, tragic, corrupt, vicious, vomitous, appalling, cataclysmic') depicted in *Miami and Chicago*, this convention is 'tedious, boring, protean, and near to formless.'<sup>55</sup> When trying to find some narrative form and visionary angle for this problem-ridden non-dramatic event, Mailer self-reflexively foregrounds his choice of character role and narrative approach:

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 57, 73, 74, 81, 149, 151.

<sup>53</sup> Hollowell, J., *Fact & Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel* (Chapel Hill, 1977), p. 103.

<sup>54</sup> Mailer, N., *St. George and the Godfather* (New York, 1972), p. 125.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 3.

So Norman Mailer (...) was still obliged to call himself Aquarius again for he had not been in Miami two days before he knew he would not write objectively about the Convention of '72. (...) He would be obliged to drift through events, and use the reactions of his brain to evidence. A slow brain, a muddy river, and therefore no name better suited to himself again than the modest and half-invisible Aquarius.<sup>56</sup>

*St. George and the Godfather* is a rewriting of *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*; both narratives comprise Mailer's (or his reporter-self's) meetings with political candidates in a circus-like atmosphere and his reflections upon how to write his story about the conventions. In Jennifer Bailey's believable analysis, *St. George* succeeds in its own right, transforming Mailer's role as a reporter into that of 'an appreciative critic of the public performance', so that for him 'a convention must be a dramatic performance in order that an understanding of its participants might be reached'.<sup>57</sup> As in *Miami and Chicago*, Mailer-Aquarius foregrounds his literary approach to the events of the convention, partly even fictionalizing his factual materials, as it were: 'The calendar never being so orderly as the requirements of literary form, Aquarius has his conversation with McGovern on the day after an interview with Henry Kissinger, but in memory the occasions were reversed.'<sup>58</sup> Mailer aims at giving some form and meaning to 'that world of the unendurably complex', which makes him (or Aquarius) 'think again of focus'.<sup>59</sup>

While the Republican and Democratic conventions themselves remain 'complex', 'warped', 'formless', and without any 'narrative line', Mailer-Aquarius still finds some 'artistic design' with the help of his own vision, searching for hidden mysteries behind the surface of random happenings. Aquarius thus wants to see the dull convention as a work of art: '[a]s if one were studying a huge canvas inch by square inch through the glow of a pencil light, a composition of splendid grasp began to reveal itself (...) it had been a work of such complexity that it would yet take the closest study

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<sup>56</sup> Mailer, *St. George and the Godfather* (New York, 1972), p. 3; In his reportage of the 1990s Mailer still repeats his characteristic journalistic principles when depicting political conventions. In 'The War of the Oxymorons' (1996) he reflects that 'it might be that only a novelist could hope to understand this particular Republican candidate [Bob Dole]' (Mailer, N., *The Time of Our Time* (New York, 1998), p. 1137; 'How the Pharaoh Beat Bogey' (1997), focusing on Bill Clinton's victory, opens with the remark that '[h]e had never taken an assignment as a reporter without looking to give himself a name' (Mailer, N., *The Time of Our Time* (New York, 1998), p. 1151).

<sup>57</sup> Bailey, *Norman Mailer*, p. 104.

<sup>58</sup> Mailer, *St. George and the Godfather* (New York, 1972), p. 113.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem.*, 120.

of the design.<sup>60</sup> Mailer, through the mask of Aquarius, argues that it is actually Richard Nixon who is the primary 'artist' behind the convention, so that Nixon 'had conceived of a convention which would possess *no* history', for 'the [media] communication itself would be the convention'.<sup>61</sup> It is then Nixon's own media convention, because 'Nixon had succeeded in composing an artwork', and 'his own script became the one which would finally be filmed.'<sup>62</sup> From his reportorial standpoint Mailer is able to narrate the process by which Nixon is swallowed up by his own 'dehumanized image', but still Mailer is unable (or unwilling) to truly 'reach' the real Nixon – in other words, 'there is a tangible "screen" between Mailer's narrative and its mimetic referent.'<sup>63</sup> Mailer-Aquarius's disappointment with politics in general and Nixon in particular becomes highlighted in the ending of the narrative, as he refuses to shake hands with the President even though given the opportunity, and thus he continues to see Nixon only 'whole as a machine', as in his earlier judgment of the candidate in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*.

Whereas in the Miami section of his previous book Mailer showed some unexpected sympathy toward Nixon's new, admittedly calculated role as a family man, in the closing pages of *St. George and the Godfather* he presents his harshest criticism of the President. The book's title suggests a figurative battle between Governor George McGovern, the 'Saint George' of the Democratic Party, and Nixon, the 'godfather' of the Republican Mafia. This figuration is reminiscent of the mythical pattern governing *An American Dream*, where the evil Deborah 'had to be slain for the same reason that Saint George had to slay the dragon.'<sup>64</sup> This time, however, in the real world of politics, the dragon wins the battle. Eventually, what makes the convention especially boring in Aquarius's mind is the nausea produced by the advance knowledge that Nixon will again be nominated. The deep subtext in *St. George and the Godfather* is, obviously, the War in Vietnam, and Mailer constructs its continuing horrors as, among other things, a negative reflection of Nixon's successful media rhetoric.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 137-138.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 178.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 178-179

<sup>63</sup> Keener, *Biography and the Postmodern Historical Novel*, p. 137.

<sup>64</sup> Gerson, J., 'Sex, Creativity, and God', in: Bloom, H. ed., *Norman Mailer* (New York, 1986), p. 172.

<sup>65</sup> The narrative as a whole ends by juxtaposing Nixon's sentimental speech about a Russian girl's diary of the World War II ("Let us build a peace that our children and all the children of the world can enjoy for generations to come") with a diary of a Vietnamese girl of today's war: 'For the last five weeks the airplanes have been coming over. All are dead. Only T'Nayen writes this' (Mailer, N., *St. George and the Godfather* (New York, 1972), p. 228. While Mailer records Nixon's speech about the Russian girl Tanya, he provides his own, apparently allegorical tale about

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The practice of writing both fiction and nonfiction has been a part of many American writers' careers, especially those writers who have excelled in the realistic mode, including important figures from Mark Twain to Theodore Dreiser.<sup>66</sup> This deep tradition in American literature also reveals the fact that literary journalism is not a phenomenon born out of the blue in the sixties. Indeed, Shelley Fisher Fishkin suggests that what connects many of the classical and modernist American writers is that they have written both factual newspaper journalism and imaginative fiction or poetry, sometimes bringing these realms together. Accordingly, 'as artists they could rearrange familiar facts and visions, cast them in new lights, place them in larger contexts' and challenge 'the reader's comfortable habits of thought and ways of understanding the world.'<sup>67</sup>

Fisher only briefly connects Mailer to this tradition, but much more could be made of connections between literary journalists from different eras. It has been quite rare for Mailer scholars to consider his intertextual links to Ernest Hemingway in the field of journalism, especially in the sense that Hemingway's practice of reportage contains some of those patterns which we find in the later Mailerian nonfiction.<sup>68</sup> In any case, in some reportages of Ernest Hemingway the very process of textual production is brought to the surface of the text – or, in the words of Tom Wolfe, the author 'suddenly introduces himself, the reporter, as character' and emphasizes the making of *this* piece of journalism.<sup>69</sup> Obviously, for Hemingway, the writing of a story is a hard job, and for Mailer it is likewise something difficult, almost disagreeable, as he often explicitly states it in his books and shorter pieces. This kind of meta-commentary is visible in *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, as 'the reporter' has to carry out his assignment for *Harper's Magazine* to cover the political conventions of 1968: 'He had an early plane in the morning, he was done, the job was done but for the writing. The reporter knew he had much to write about, but could

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the Vietnamese girl T'Nayen. Here Mailer transcends the topical theme of the War in Vietnam and makes it universal, concerning children's suffering in any war.

<sup>66</sup> See Underwood, *Journalism and the Novel*, pp. 84-134.

<sup>67</sup> Fishkin, S. F., *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism & Imaginative Writing in America* (Baltimore, 1985), p. 217.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Merrill, however, makes a comparison between Hemingway's *Green Hills of Africa* (1935) and Mailer's *The Armies of the Night*, arguing that Hemingway's book clearly anticipates later works of literary nonfiction in its self-conscious discussion of its own aims and means through its paratextual framing. Merrill, *Norman Mailer*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>69</sup> Wolfe, 'The New Journalism', p. 127; see Frus, P., *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative: The Timely and the Timeless* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 99.

he now enjoy writing it?'<sup>70</sup> We may also recognize Mailer's looming writer's block in terms of sheer quantity, as compared to Hemingway: Mailer tries to transfigure his factual materials into book-length narratives, whereas Hemingway's reportages are sometimes very short stories.

In the structural division of *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* the superficial circus atmosphere of the Republican convention is situated in Miami, with its 'materialism baking in the sun', whereas the convention of the Democratic Party takes place in Chicago, the hard, cold, and windy city 'where nobody could ever forget how the money was made', for 'it was picked up from floors still slippery with blood.'<sup>71</sup> In the conclusion of the book there is a sense that Chicago, Dreiser's 'great American city', provides the author with more novelistic material than Miami, and apparently the second section of the book is richer in tone than the first. According to one critique, the book 'is organized around an implausible contrast' between Chicago as an honestly brutal, violent, and therefore authentic city, and Miami Beach as something plastic, antiseptic, and therefore life-denying, and this contrast is 'typical of arbitrary schematism', a sign of Mailer's 'forced mythology'.<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, of course, this kind of mythical dualism between the 'natural' and the 'artificial' is a central part of Mailer's personal philosophy with its Manichean dimensions. Thus, Mailer's seemingly harsh juxtaposition of two cities (and two political parties) also reflects his prevailing notions about distinct American values.

In the opening sections of 'The Siege of Chicago', the second part of the book, Mailer's detailed description of the Chicago slaughterhouses obviously constructs a figurative parallel with the subsequent violence in the streets as the young demonstrators are beaten by a random attack of the police. Missing the opportunity to participate in the demonstration, the reporter Mailer watches an astonishing scene from the safe position of his hotel room in the nineteenth floor, as 'there was something of the detachment of studying a storm at evening through a glass.'<sup>73</sup> Mailer is both a narrating voice and the experiencing focalizer of this account:

The police attacked with tear gas, and Mace, and with clubs, they attacked like a chain saw cutting into wood, the teeth of the saw the edge of their clubs, they attacked like a scythe through grass, lines of twenty and thirty policemen striking out in an arc, their clubs beating, demonstrators fleeing. Seen from overhead, from the nineteenth floor, it was like a wind blowing dust, or the edge of the waves riding foam on the shore.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 213.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 14, 89.

<sup>72</sup> Graff, G., *Literature against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago, 1979), pp. 219-220.

<sup>73</sup> Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 169.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 169.

The stance of the reporter as spectator here conflicts with that of an involved literary man; as a result 'the narrator describes [the events, their shock and horror] with the detachment of a theatre spectator'.<sup>75</sup> The 'literariness' of Mailer's subjective sight is here conveyed by his characteristic fiction and his active use of metaphors and parables, mainly taken from the natural world, which reveal the violent character of the scene.

By adopting the detached position of observation throughout the narrative, Mailer at the same time foregrounds his figurative rendition of the actual events; it is as if he were replacing his temporary assignment as a journalist with his permanent profession as a novelist. This is emphasized as Mailer finally abandons the newspaper accounts and their failed attempt to give an objective picture of chaotic events, whose 'true' nature is only partially captured by other distinguished writers on the scene (William Burroughs, Jean Genet, Allen Ginsberg, and Terry Southern). Instead, Mailer tries to find a larger vision:

[Y]es, there before the eyes of half the principals at the convention was this drama played, as if the military spine of a great liberal party had finally separated itself from the skin, as if, no metaphor large enough to suffice, the Democratic Party had here broken in two before the eyes of a nation like Melville's whale charging right out of the sea.<sup>76</sup>

As in Mailer's next book, *Of a Fire on the Moon*, Melville's *Moby-Dick* serves here as a quintessential American metaphor, even though it is not altogether clear what the function of the metaphor is in this context. Mailer actually needs to reflect that there is no coherent image or symbol in his Chicago section, which would bring together the absurd sense of actuality. In lieu of a unifying metaphor, he composes a list, almost a catalogue: '[a]n air of outrage, hysteria, panic, wild humor, unruly outburst, fury, madness, gallows humor, and gloom hung over the nominating night at the convention.'<sup>77</sup>

Yet the search for a solid narrative approach to the 'Days of Rage' yields an embedded plot in the second part of *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*. While trying to describe the Democrats, Mailer refers to his earlier pieces about political conventions ('He had written about it with the metaphor of a bullfight' and alludes to novelistic devices in his presentation of real-life characters: 'One would have to be a great novelist to dare to put this last remark in the mouth of a character so valuable as [Hubert]

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<sup>75</sup> Bailey, *Norman Mailer*, p. 108.

<sup>76</sup> Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 172.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem.*, 176.

Humphrey'.<sup>78</sup> However, as with Miami, there seems to be few novelistic possibilities in Chicago, and here Mailer notes the symbolic treasure-trove of the March on the Pentagon the previous year, the event that provided him with the narrative basis for his most successful book. It has been argued that 'whereas *Armies* proceeds from comic display to modest heroic action, "Chicago" moves from guilty inaction to comic anticlimax, with Mailer's ambivalence and self-questioning dominating the mood.'<sup>79</sup> In *The Armies of the Night*, then, the image of the power of the Pentagon (a beast with five eyes) provides a strong symbolic center for the protest – as well as the narrative – whereas no such symbol is present in Chicago:

The reporter was a literary man – the symbol had the power to push him into actions more heroic than himself. The fact that he had been marching to demonstrate against a building which was the living symbol of everything he most despised – the military-industrial complex of the land – had worked to fortify his steps. The symbol of the Pentagon had been a chalice to hold his fear; in such circumstances his fear had even flavored his courage with the sweetest emotions of battle. But in Chicago, there was no symbol for him.<sup>80</sup>

Mailer's nonfiction following *The Armies of the Night* seems to be lacking 'the most crucial *fictional* technique' that has given the former book its 'conscious shaping of the given materials to the form of dramatic action'.<sup>81</sup> Of course, even a creative shaping of the materials does not necessarily mean fiction-making. In any case, the problem with *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* appears to be structural, because the narrative lacks a literary center and hence feels less like a novel and more like journalism. Therefore, for Robert Merrill, 'the real problem is that "The Siege of Chicago" reads very much like *three* separate narratives, all related by time and place but insufficiently united by an encompassing narrative structure.'<sup>82</sup> But as I would argue, *Miami and Chicago* self-reflexively comments on its own problems as a narrative that lacks both artistic narrative sequence (metonymy, syntagm) and symbolic structure (metaphor, paradigm). Indeed, it seems to me that the 'unfavorable' comparison with *Armies* is written into the narrative itself.

Mailer's pessimism about contemporary America is shown in the Chicago section in ways clearly reminiscent of *The Armies of the Night*. His disappointment is characteristically connected to the lost possibilities of the modern novelist:

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem.*, 96, 124.

<sup>79</sup> Wenke, J., *Mailer's America* (Hanover, 1987), p. 173.

<sup>80</sup> Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 144.

<sup>81</sup> Merrill, *Norman Mailer*, p. 133.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 136.

[He] was still enough of a novelist to have the roots of future work in every vein and stratum he had encountered, and a profound part of him (exactly that enormous literary bottom of the mature novelist's property!) detested the thought of seeing his American society – evil, absurd, touching, pathetic, sickening, comic, full of novelistic marrow – disappear now in the nihilistic maw of a national disorder.<sup>83</sup>

*Miami and the Siege of Chicago* is, therefore, a strongly self-reflexive text, one that discusses the narrative, symbolic, and novelistic possibilities (present or absent) which would give form and meaning to this particular book. In this sense, I regard it as one of the paradigmatic texts in Mailer's poetics of nonfiction. As I have suggested, Mailer's literary journalism about the Republican and the Democratic conventions also demonstrates his style of bringing politics and literature together.

### *Conclusion*

The modes of the New Journalism and the nonfiction novel represent a specific kind of literary response to the political, social, and cultural phenomena of the American sixties (and partly also the seventies), to events like the civil rights movement, political assassinations and political conventions, the drug culture and the counter culture, the Women's Liberation, the space program and the moon flight, and the War in Vietnam. As some critics have persuasively argued, self-conscious literary nonfiction is 'a response to an epistemological crisis' and it has become a textual form or 'voice' for challenging 'taken-for-granted assumptions' concerning our phenomenal world.<sup>84</sup> A similar kind of conclusion concerning the issues of literature, politics, and reality is reached by a host of American writers in the sixties, both journalists and novelists.

In the middle of the decade Mailer reflected upon 'a literature which grappled with a peculiarly American phenomenon – a tendency of American society to alter more rapidly than the ability of its artists to record the change.'<sup>85</sup> Mailer here clearly precedes Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's notion of the hopeless situation of the traditional realistic and liberal-humanist novel in the midst of a postmodern media reality. However, in contrast to Zavarzadeh's overblown theory, Mailer's final conclusion amounts not to an optimistic celebration of new literary forms but rather to a grim and baffled sense that literature had failed in the age of the electronic mass media. The vision of the absurd and schizophrenic situation in contemporary America is taken by Zavarzadeh (and many others) for the

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<sup>83</sup> Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, p. 187.

<sup>84</sup> Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, p. 15.

<sup>85</sup> Mailer, N., *Cannibals and Christians* (London, 1969), p. 221.



reality, which can be accurately reflected and recorded with the help of experimental fabulation. Mailer is, however, speaking of the failure of the American novelist to depict and comprehend the complex vision of the nation while, at the same time, still searching for those new literary forms to bridge the gap.

# HARRY MULISCH WITNESSING THE SIXTIES

## LOOKING THROUGH THE EYES OF THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL AND THE LITERARY CELEBRITY

Sander Bax

### *Introduction*

More than any other Dutch literary writer Harry Mulisch witnessed the cultural revolution of the sixties.<sup>1</sup> The important historical transformations that took place in these years had a deep influence on Mulisch's literary choices. For a while, he did not write any fictional work.<sup>2</sup> Instead, he manifested himself as a journalist or a reporter writing books that have been characterised as 'documentaries' or 'reports'.<sup>3</sup> The question to what extent Mulisch can be considered a 'new journalist', is closely related to the development of Mulisch's authorship in these decades.<sup>4</sup> Mulisch did not only witness the sixties, he did so from the particular point of view of a literary writer. And literary writers in the sixties became part of the developing media system as well-known media figures, the same way leading journalists did.

In the 1960s we recognize an important change in the relationship between journalism and literature. In this chapter, I will try to gain insight in the intertwining discourses of literature and journalism that are used to capture the turbulent nature of this "revolutionary" era. What we will see is that both journalists and writers enter the public sphere as media figures. Where journalists start to use literary techniques in theirs, literary writers start to incorporate journalistic styles and techniques in their work. The

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<sup>1</sup> Righart, H., *De Eindeloze Jaren Zestig: Geschiedenis van een Generatieconflict* (Amsterdam, 1995); Kennedy, J., *Nieuw Babylon in Aanbouw: Nederland in de Jaren Zestig* (Amsterdam, 1995); Ruiter, F. and Smulders, W., 'Van Moedwil tot Misverstand, van Dorleijn tot Vaessens: Kritische Kanttekeningen uit het Veld', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 126 (2010-1), no. 1, pp. 63-85.

<sup>2</sup> Buurlage, J., *Onveranderlijk Veranderlijk* (Amsterdam, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> Bax, S., 'The Loneliest Spot on Earth: Harry Mulisch's Literary Experiment in Criminal Case 40/61', *Werkwinkel* 7 (2012), no. 1, pp. 33-60.

hybrid genres that derive from this development are often labelled as ‘New Journalism’.<sup>5</sup> In this essay, I would like to elaborate on the consequences of this development for the position of the literary writer. As a result of the aforementioned changes two models of authorship arise: that of the writer as a ‘public intellectual’ and that of the writer as a ‘literary celebrity’. These two models of authorship were regarded to be a serious threat to the conventions of autonomous authorship that dominated the literary field from the tradition of modernism onwards.

In the course of the 1960s, we witness the economic boom of post-war capitalism, the rise of new media (radio, television, and popular newspapers and magazines) and the democratization of the education system.<sup>6</sup> For the first time, ‘high literature’ became a product on what Pierre Bourdieu would later call the market of economic goods. The books by young writers Gerard Reve, Jan Wolkers and Harry Mulisch began to sell well and this commercial success was accompanied by the appearance of these writers on nationally broadcast television and radio shows. As a result, a young generation of writers became leading figures in the (restricted) literary field as well as in the public sphere. Literary writers increasingly left the ‘closed’ literary domain and started functioning in the public domain. By doing that, they entered the domains traditionally reserved for journalists.

The societal role of the journalist changed too in these years. Some leading journalists became known as media figures, which meant that their personal views and opinions interfered with their objective reports on news facts.<sup>7</sup> According to media historian Huub Wijffjes the ‘functions of marketing news, providing background information and analysis of the news’ became ‘one journalistic function.’<sup>8</sup> Journalist no longer looked at themselves solely as the facts researchers working objectively in the background, but they began to put more emphasis on their personalities and their (subjective) opinions. Using a ‘personal style’ (for instance the

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson, Michael L., *The New Journalism: The Underground Press, the Artists of Nonfiction and Changes in the Established Media* (Kansas, 1971); Wolfe, T., *The New Journalism* (New York, 1973); Van den Broek, I., ‘De Persoonlijke Politiek van New Journalism’, *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis* 6 (2003), no. 1, pp. 108-121; Van Manen, R., ‘De Tekst als Experiment: De Zaak 40/61 en New Journalism’, *Masterthesis* (Tilburg, 2010); Bax, S., *De Taak van de Schrijver: Het Poëtische Debat in de Nederlandse Literatuur* (Den Bosch, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Bax, S., *De Taak van de Schrijver*.

<sup>7</sup> Van den Broek, I., ‘De Persoonlijke Politiek van New Journalism’; Harbers, F., ‘Defying Journalistic Performativity: The Tension Between Journalism and Literature in Arnon Grunberg’s Reportage’, *Interférences Littéraires / Littéraire Interferenties* 7 (2011), pp. 141-163.

<sup>8</sup> Wijffjes, H., *Journalistiek in Nederland, 1850-2000: Beroep, Cultuur en Organisatie* (Amsterdam, 2004), p. 335. (My translation)

controversial 'I-form'), Wijffes claims these new journalists went searching for 'real reality', not for the reality of the authorities and opinion leaders.<sup>9</sup>

These changes in the journalistic field were encouraged by the growing popularity of television. Leading journalists didn't just write in the newspaper, but they were regularly appearing in the field of media (radio and television).<sup>10</sup> In a sense, writers and journalists became competitors in striving for attention in the same field of newspapers, radio shows and television programs. Writers move in the public domain because of the prestige they derive from their authorship, journalists operate there naturally because of their journalistic expertise. What happened in the sixties and seventies was that the journalists took over some of the prestige of the writers (that is why they manifested themselves as public figures), while the writers partly took over the role of the journalists, in focusing on the social world of everyday life.<sup>11</sup>

This important transformation in the role literary writers and journalists played or had to play in the public sphere, resulted in the development of new ideas on literary authorship, that no longer made a strong distinction between 'real' literary writers on the one hand and journalists on the other. First of all there is the model we can trace back to the French intellectual and philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, the writer as a committed and critical public intellectual.<sup>12</sup> This public intellectual, however, is always accompanied by his less detached counterpart: the literary celebrity.<sup>13</sup> In the Netherlands the most famous example would be Jan Cremer: the first writer who fully recognized the possibilities of literature as a marketing tool. The fact that from the 1960s onwards literary writers operated in the literary field as well as in the field of the mass media can be held responsible for the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 349.

<sup>10</sup> Heynders, O., *Voices of Europe: Literary Writers as Public Intellectuals* (Tilburg, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Hagen, P., *Journalisten in Nederland: Een Persgeschiedenis in Portretten 1850-2000* (Amsterdam, 2002), p. 83; formulates the same tension slightly different: "Writers envy journalists for the speed with which they cover daily life, whereas journalists envy writers because they supersede the superficiality of everyday life."

<sup>12</sup> Denis, B., 'Criticism and Engagement in the Belle Époque: The Autonomy of Literature and the Social Function of the Writer During the Third Republic', in: G.J. Dorleijn, ed., *The Autonomy of Literature at the Fins de Siècles (1900 and 2000): A Critical Assessment* (Leuven, 2007), pp. 29-40.

<sup>13</sup> Glass, L., *Authors Inc: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* (New York, 2004); Franssen, G., 'Literary Celebrity and the Discourse on Authorship in Dutch Literature', *Journal of Dutch literature* 1 (2010), no. 1, pp. 91-131; Galow, T. W., 'Literary Modernism in the Age of Celebrity', *Modernism / Modernity* 17 (2010), no. 2, pp. 313-329; Praat, E., *Verrek, het is Geen Kunstenaar: Gerard Reve en het Schrijverschap* (Amsterdam, 2011).

fact that many writers of the post-war generation in one way or another have been connected to both the concept of the public intellectual (or committed writer) and the concept of literary celebrity. Well-known journalists of the sixties and seventies (one can think of Renate Rubinstein, Henk Hofland or Jan Blokker) had to deal with the same dilemmas that derive from what I will call public authorship.

### *Public Authorship*

In the course of the twentieth century literary writers have become public figures, awarded with much societal prestige. They are welcomed in television shows to debate the actual political developments; they speak at political conferences and write polemical essays on societal developments. As a result, literary writers can no longer only be judged by the value of their literary works. Their reputation also builds on the reception of the whole variety of their public performances. One could say that before the 1960s literary writers primarily operated within the boundaries of an autonomous literary field. This meant that their work was judged according to the dominant norms in the literary field, the norms that are associated with the autonomous or objectivist conception of literature.<sup>14</sup> From the 1960s onwards, authors started playing on (at least) two different fields. Although changing itself, the literary field and its autonomous norms still exists (even today), but these writers had to operate within the broader public sphere of the mass media as well.<sup>15</sup>

In that public sphere, they were evaluated and judged according to a completely different set of norms. Literary writers had to change their strategies of self-presentation, as well as their literary strategies, in order to gain status in both fields at the same time. For many writers this led to a very difficult position. The same holds for other players in the literary field: critics, publishers, educators and literary scholars. The difficulties that result from playing on two (sometimes) incompatible fields at the same time often evokes a sense of crisis in the players: there we find the reason for the endless acclamations of the death, the end or the suicide of literature. Not literature died, but a certain way of *doing literature* was replaced by a newer, more difficult one.

This means that the public author has to deal with two classification and canonization processes. The first process follows the rules of the norm

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<sup>14</sup> Dorleijn, G., Grüttemeier, R. and Korthals Altes, L., “‘The Autonomy of Literature.’ To be Handled with Care”, in: idem. eds., *The Autonomy of Literature at the Fin de Siècles (1900 and 2000): A Critical Assessment* (Peeters, 2007); Ruiter, F. and Smulders, W., ‘Van Moedwil tot Misverstand, van Dorleijn tot Vaessens’.

<sup>15</sup> See: Dorleijn, G. J. and Van Rees, C. J. eds., *De Productie van Literatuur: Het Literaire Veld in Nederland 1800-2000* (Nijmegen, 2006).

system that takes place inside the literary field, the second process follows the rules of the norm system of the public media. And more than once these two norm systems tends to exclude each other. These observations are formulated against the background of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory.<sup>16</sup> This theory implies that the literary field functions in a relatively autonomous way, which means that the classification process works independent from what happens in the fields of politics, journalism or science.<sup>17</sup> The career of a writer is formed by his behavior in the field of literary magazines, publishers and bookstores and by the reception of his work by critics and literary historians.<sup>18</sup> But as a result of the developments I mentioned earlier, we can wonder whether the literary field did still function in such an autonomous way after the 1960s.<sup>19</sup> The processes of production and reception of literature increasingly take place outside the literary field, in newspapers, on television and in social media on the Internet. This development results in a clash between the traditional conventions within the literary field and the conventions of the popular media.<sup>20</sup> To gain success in the mass media, an author has to do something totally different than what he has to do to gain reputation in the literary field.<sup>21</sup>

This new way of doing literature thus means that – in order to gain success - the literary writer has to perform his own specific version of public authorship as a posture that deals with the specific tensions that come with public authorship.<sup>22</sup> Recent research in the field of Dutch literature has brought forward two almost entirely different forms of public authorship, that have to do with two completely different ways of evaluating the fact that authors went public. Let's start with the most positive one. From one

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<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu, P., *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge 1984); Bourdieu, P., *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> Zie ook: Schmidt, S., *Die Selbstorganisation des Sozialsystems Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 1989), pp. 408-438.

<sup>18</sup> Zie bijvoorbeeld: Dorleijn en Van Rees 2006; Verdaasdonk, H., *Snijvlakken van de Literatuurwetenschap* (Nijmegen, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> I formulated this thought in Bax, S., *De Taak van de Schrijver*; see: Praat, E., *Verrek, het is Geen Kunstenaar* (Amsterdam, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Dorleijn, G., Grüttemeier, R. and Korthals Altes, L., "The Autonomy of Literature."; Ruiter, F. and Smulders, W., *Alleen Blindgeborenen Verwijten de Schrijver dat hij Liegt* (Amsterdam, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Smith, A. ed., *Television: An International History* (Oxford, 1998).

Budd, Craig en Steinman 1999; Marshall 1997; Glass, L., *Authors Inc*; Galow, T. W., 'Literary Modernism in the Age of Celebrity'; Franssen, G., 'Literary Celebrity and the Discourse on Authorship in Dutch Literature'

<sup>22</sup> Meizoz, J., 'Modern Posterities of Posture: Jean-Jacques Roussau', in Dorleijn, G. J., Grüttemeier, R. and Korthals Altes, L. eds., *Authorship Revisited: Conceptions of Authorship Around 1900 and 2000* (Leuven, 2010), pp. 81-94.

perspective, some literary writers have been regarded as public intellectuals (some say from the 1880s onwards, some say that I have become so just recently).<sup>23</sup> Although the writer is no specialist in political sciences or history, his opinions on politics and society are considered to be relevant for the discussion in the public sphere.<sup>24</sup> From this perspective, literary writers play an important role in our media culture, and it is important that they do so as literary writers.

From another perspective, public authors are regarded as literary celebrities.<sup>25</sup> When one calls a writer a 'celebrity', one mostly has a rather negative opinion on his public performances: the writer operates in the public sphere to become famous and being famous helps him selling his books. By performing in the public media they blur the differences between the specificity of literary authorship and the public performances of other types of celebrity (journalists, movie actors, former soccer players, etc.). In recent years, the concept of the literary celebrity is gaining more attention in literary studies. Researchers point at the controversial status of this model of authorship. Gaston Franssen points at the fact that the literary celebrity embodies a clash of two different socio-aesthetic configurations: literary authorship and public celebrity'.<sup>26</sup> Classical (modernist, autonomist) conventions of authorship are sometimes opposed to the actions a public celebrity has to undertake. In Franssen's account of the literary celebrity we

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<sup>23</sup> See Heynders, O., *Voices of Europe: Literary Writers as Public Intellectuals* (Tilburg, 2009); Heynders, O., 'De Romanschrijver als Publieke Intellectueel, Desanne van Brederode (1970)', in: Bel, J. and Vaessens, T. eds., *Schrijvende Vrouwen: Een Kleine Literatuurgeschiedenis van de Lage landen 1880-2010* (Amsterdam, 2010), pp. 289-293; Heynders, O., 'The Public Intellectual as Autobiographer: The Case of Ayaan Hirsi Ali', [Tilburg 2011; unpublished]; Heynders, O., 'The European Public Intellectual: The Case of H. M. Enzensberger', *Lezing 'Literary Scholarship and Social Sciences: Opportunities for Dialogue'*, (Moscow, March 15-17, 2012); Vaessens, T., 'Dutch Novelists Beyond 'Postmodern Relativism'', *Journal of Dutch literature* 2 (2011-1), no. 1, pp. 5-34; Vaessens, T., 'Dutch Literature: Stripping the Novel of its Harmlessness', in: Vaessens, T., and Van Dijk, Y., eds., *Reconsidering the Postmodern* (Amsterdam 2011-2), pp. 59-76.

<sup>24</sup> Melzer, A. M., 'What is an Intellectual?' in: Melzer, A. M., Weinberger, J., and Zinman, M. R. eds., *The Public Intellectual: Between Philosophy and Politics* (Harvard, 2003); Di Leo, J. R., 'Public Intellectuals, Inc', *Symploké* 14 (2006), no. 1-2, pp. 183-196; Posner, R. A., *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (Cambridge, 2003); Fuller, S., 'The Public Intellectual as Agent of Justice: In Search of a Regime', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 39 (2006), no. 2, pp. 147-156.

<sup>25</sup> Glass, L., *Authors Inc*; Franssen, G., 'Literary Celebrity and the Discourse on Authorship in Dutch Literature'; Galow, T. W., 'Literary Modernism in the Age of Celebrity'; Praat, E., *Verrek, het is Geen Kunstenaar*.

<sup>26</sup> Franssen, G., 'Literary Celebrity and the Discourse on Authorship in Dutch Literature'.

can recognize the tension between the two fields in which the author has to operate.

If we look at the postures of Harry Mulisch as a public author in the sixties, we can see that he constantly struggles with three dilemmas resulting from the tension between the (autonomous) norms that governed the literary field on the one hand and the norms and conventions in the mass media on the other.<sup>27</sup> One of these autonomous norms is that the 'true literary writer' doesn't write to gain money.<sup>28</sup> This implies that a literary writer has to take distance from the commercial market. The field of restricted production has to be his main playfield.<sup>29</sup> To put it differently, the writer has to gain symbolic capital (i.e. a good reputation among the literary critics) instead of economic capital. The public authors of the sixties, however, undermined this convention by making clear they wanted to gain money – in order to be really (that is financially) independent.<sup>30</sup> They didn't only use the media to sell their books, they also acquired their reputation in this domain. This lead to Mulisch's first dilemma: how can a public author keep the balance between the conventions of independence and disinterestedness on the one hand and the need to sell his work to the mass public on the other?

As a committed writer in the sixties Mulisch stumbled across another norm: the autonomous writer should not take an explicit political stand or should not submit himself to the ideas of one political movement.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Dorleijn, G. J., and Van den Akker, W., 'De Zelfprofilering van Albert Verwey als Moderne Auteur', *Spiegel der Letteren* 50 (2008), no. 4, pp. 433-461; Dorleijn, G. J., 'De Plaats van Tekstanalyse in een Institutioneel-Poëtische Benadering', *Nederlandse Letterkunde* 14 (2009), no. 1, pp. 1-19; Meizoz, J., 'Modern Posterities of Posture: Jean-Jacques Rousseau'.

<sup>28</sup> Heinich, N., *Être Artiste: Les Transformations du Status des Peintres et des Sculpteurs* (Paris, 1996); Heinich, N., *Être écrivain: Creation et Identité* (Paris, 2000); Heinich, N., *Het Van Gogh-effect en Andere Essays over Kunst en Sociologie* (Amsterdam, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Bourdieu, P., *Distinction*.

<sup>30</sup> Ruiter, F & W. Smulders, *Literatuur en moderniteit in Nederland 1840-1990* (Amsterdam, 1996); Bax, S., *De Taak van de Schrijver*; Praat, E., *Verrek, het is Geen Kunstenaar*.

<sup>31</sup> Denis, B., 'Criticism and Engagement in the Belle Époque', pp. 29-40; Korthals Altes, L., 'Aesthetic and Social Engagement in Contemporary French literature: The Case of Francois Bon's Daewoo', in: Dorleijn, G. J. ed., *The Autonomy of Literature at the Fins de Siècles (1900 and 2000): A Critical Assessment* (Leuven, 2007), pp. 261-284; Ruiter, F. and Smulders, W., 'Van Moedwil tot Misverstand'; Ruiter, F. and Smulders, W., *Alleen Blindgeborenen Verwijten de Schrijver dat hij Liegt*; Sapiro, G., 'Authorship and Responsibility: The Case of Emile Zola's Commitment in the Dreyfus Affair', in: Dorleijn, G., Grüttemeier, R. and Korthals Altes, L. eds., *Authorship Revisited: Conceptions of Authorship Around 1900 and 2000* (Leuven, 2010), pp. 1-11; Bax, S., 'De Man die Carré ging Bezetten: Het



Although it is in the nature of the literary writer to get involved with political matters, he has to do so from an independent position. For his reputation is partly build on the fact that he operates from the sideline, which he comments on the world from the position of the outsider. When a literary writer identifies himself with one political position too much, he leaves this outsiders position and with that his independence to become a player in the political field. This almost inevitably results in severe criticism from within the literary field, but also outside that field people start doubting the disinterestedness of the writer. This brings us to the second dilemma: how can a public author keep the balance between the conventions of disinterestedness and detachment on the one hand and the need to take a stand in public debates on the other?

The third problem we encounter has to do with what literary theorists tend to call the autonomy of the literary text. This autonomist conception of literature dominated the literary field from the twentieth century onwards, Literature can no longer be regarded as a direct expression of feelings and ideas, nor can it be considered to be a reliable representation of the world. The literary work ought to be seen as an ‘object in itself’, an autonomous organism, that stands apart from author and reality.<sup>32</sup> It is up to the reader to deal with the mystery of the text. At first sight, Mulisch seems to be a writer that underlines this autonomist conception of literature. But when we take a closer look, we see this is at odds with two of his main literary ambitions as a public author: his wish to write autobiographically and his wish to write about the historical and actual political reality. This leads to the third dilemma: how can a public author keep the balance between the dominant autonomist conception of literature on the one hand and the other roles he has to play in the public sphere?

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Beeld van Harry Mulisch als Geëngageerd Schrijver’, *Vooy*s 28 (2010), no. 2, pp. 58-73; Bax, S., and Beeks, S., ‘Een Artistieke Guerillagroep: Hugo Claus, Harry Mulisch en de Opera Reconstructie’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 127 (2010), pp. 390-419.

<sup>32</sup> Abrams, M. H., *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York, 1953); Goedegebuure, J., and Heynders, O., “‘Het Breekbare Ligt Open’: Een Beschouwing over Impliciete Poeticaliteit en Problemen van Interpretatie”, *De Nieuwe Taalgids* 84 (1991), no. 6, pp. 527-538; Bax, S., *De Taak van de Schrijver*; Franssen, G., ‘Literary Celebrity and the Discourse on Authorship in Dutch Literature’; Smulders, W., “‘Polemisch Mengelwerk’: Hermans Geeft een Lesje in Autonome Literatuur”, in: Ruiter, F. and Smulders, W. ed., *Alleen Blindgeborenen kunnen de Schrijver Verwijten dat hij Liegt: Over het Schrijverschap van Willem Frederik Hermans* (Amsterdam, 2010), pp. 81-136; Van Rooden, A., ‘Magnifying the Mirror and the Lamp: A critical Reconsideration of the Abramsian Poetical Model and its Contribution to the Research on Modern Dutch Literature’, *Journal of Dutch literature* 3 (2012), no 1, pp. 65-87.

These three problems are not strictly reserved for literary writers. We can witness similar problems in every societal field that deals with autonomous norms on the one hand and the norms of the public sphere on the other.<sup>33</sup> This holds for instance for scientists or politicians operating in the public sphere, or for societal discussions on law cases. Journalists too have to deal with some of these tensions. Within the journalistic field we can witness norms such as ‘disinterestedness’ and ‘independence’. We expect from journalists that they do not write articles because the subject will attract a lot attention from readers, but because the subject is intrinsically important. Furthermore, we expect from journalists that they are independent towards political parties and worldviews. It is mostly the third problem that works out quite differently for journalists than it would for writers. Whereas writers deal with the conventions of fictionality and autonomy, journalists may take over stylistic dimensions of literature, but their writings are obliged to maintain a referential relationship with the facts they contain.

*‘An exceptional phenomenon.’ Harry Mulisch as a Literary Celebrity*

In the remainder of this article, I will show the complexity of public authorship by focusing on the self-presentation of Harry Mulisch in the 1960s. In this self-presentation we come across the aforementioned dilemmas of public authorship. In this outline I will focus on the first two dilemmas – the dilemmas that work out quite similar for journalists and writers. At the beginning of the sixties, Mulisch transformed into a literary celebrity. Mulisch not only presented himself as a popular young star, he actually became one in the early sixties. We can illustrate this by taking a look at the television show *Litteraire Ontmoetingen* (Literary encounters), in which Mulisch appeared in 1963. In this television show, Mulisch presented to the Dutch viewers his ideas on authorship, his political views derived from the Eichmann trial and his complete autobiography. In a taped interview, fellow-writer Cees Nooteboom compares Mulisch’s enormous popularity, to that of the famous female television host Mies Bouwman, speaking of Mulisch’s ‘Open het dorp-achtige populariteit’ (a reference to the overnight massive popularity Mies Bouwman gained after hosting a 24-hour charity show to collect money to build a village specially designed for the physically challenged). In the same period, Mulisch is involved in putting on the market the so-called ‘Litteraire Reuzenpocket’ (giant literary

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<sup>33</sup> Bourdieu, P., ‘Universal Corporatism: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World’, *Poetics Today* 12 (1991), no. 4, pp. 655-669; Bourdieu, P., *On television* (New York, 1996); Bourdieu, P., *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (Cambridge, 2001); Bourdieu, P., *Firing back: Against the Tyranny of the Market 2* (London, 2003).

paperback'), a new book format Mulisch claims to have introduced in the Netherlands.

This came on the market in a new form in July, which yours truly entirely originally and without help from anyone stole from America: the paperback. It could not be a book costing seven or eight guilder ninety-eight. My readers can't afford that. Now we're already into the third impression.<sup>34</sup>

Mulisch points out that 'his readers' cannot afford to buy expensive books. It is important to notice that Mulisch explicitly states here that his readers are the young adults of the post-war generation. He claims to be a writer for a young and obviously large cohort of readers. And it is true: between 1959 and 1961, Mulisch's novels start selling really well. So in the sixties, Mulisch becomes a writer enjoying economic success, appearing regularly in newspapers, and on radio programs and television shows. On the television show 'The Circle' Mulisch appeared alongside Hella Haasse, Godfried Bomans and Alfred Kossman. He also took part in the controversial satirical television show *Zo is het toevallig ook nog eens een keer* (1963).<sup>35</sup> And from 1966 onwards Godfried Bomans, Simon Carmiggelt and Mulisch appear on the Mies Bouwman show 'Mies-enscène'.<sup>36</sup> Looking back on his television career, Mulisch states that he had ambivalent feelings about it:

When the show [radio show *Hou je aan je woord* (Keep Your Word), SB] got more and more popular, it was decided to transfer it to television. I was not too crazy about the idea, feeling it was nice the way it was and that it shouldn't get too big, and I was afraid I would enter the public eye in a way that had nothing to do with my work. This was exactly what happened, and that's why I left the show a few months later, - I'm not saying this after the event, it was the exact motivation I gave them at the time.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Keller, H., 'Als je zo Begint Eind je als Schrijver', in: Mathijsen, M. ed., *De Mythische Formule* (Amsterdam, 1981), p. 20; original text: Dat kwam in juli op de markt in een nieuwe vorm, die ik hoogst persoonlijk en geheel origineel en op eigen houtje van Amerika heb gestolen: de paperback. Het kon geen boek van zeven- of acht-negentig worden. Dat kan mijn publiek niet betalen. Nu zijn we al aan de derde druk toe.

<sup>35</sup> See: Blom, O., *Zijn getijdenboek* (Amsterdam 2002), p. 162-163.

<sup>36</sup> See: Haarsma, M., Staal, E. and Salverda, M. ed., *De Onderkant van het Tapijt: Harry Mulisch en zijn Oeuvre 1952-1992* (Den Haag, 1992), p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> Mulisch, H., 'Hij Minder en Minder: Bij de Dood van Godfried Bomans', in: *Paniek der Onschuld*, (Amsterdam, 1979), p. 76; original text: Toen het programma [radioprogramma *Hou je aan je woord*, SB] steeds populairder werd, besloot men om het naar de televisie over te hevelen. Ik was daar niet zo voor, vond dat het een aardigheidje moest blijven en ik was bang dat ik een bekendheid zou krijgen, die niets met mijn werk te maken had. Dat gebeurde dan ook, en daarom ging ik er na

This quote clearly shows that Mulisch felt that his emergence as a literary celebrity could have a negative impact on his literary career. Here we stumble across the first dilemma of the public author. For an autonomous writer this amount of popularity was quite uncommon. Mulisch now ran the risk of losing his independence and disinterestedness, which would bring harm to his credibility as a literary writer. And this is exactly what happened: more than once, Mulisch was criticized for being a 'sell-out'. When alongside the appearance of his 1970 novel *De verteller* (The narrator) he arranged for a cover story in the Dutch weekly *Haagse Post*, almost all reviewers alluded to Mulisch's popularity and media personality in their mostly negative reviews. Literary critic Jacq. Firmin Vogelaar accused Mulisch of sacrificing his literary writing for his status as a media figure:

Then on top of that an extensive story about Mulisch appears in the *Haagse Post*, where he has himself blown up into a conjuring genius. When HP does a cover story on the personage of Mulisch they are depicting an exceptional phenomenon; writing is an interesting special characteristic of Mulisch only to the extent that it is a gift that others do not have. The content of his literary writings is not discussed.<sup>38</sup>

Mulisch developed a two-track strategy to solve this credibility problem. First, he accompanied his emergence as a literary celebrity by playing a dominant role in the literary field (which is exactly what a leading autonomous writer would do): between 1958 and 1960 he became an editor of the avant-garde magazine *Podium*, from 1961 he founded a new and slightly different avant-garde magazine *Randstad* (together with fellow-writers Hugo Claus, Simon Vinkenoog and Ivo Michiels) and in 1965 he became an editor of a more canonical and perhaps more influential magazine, the age-old *De Gids* (The Guide). This strategy assured Mulisch of the necessary artistic reputation and credibility within the literary field that made it possible to put his independence and disinterestedness at risk in the field of popular media.

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een paar maanden uit, - ik zeg dit niet nu achteraf, maar ik motiveerde het ook destijds zo.

<sup>38</sup> Vogelaar, J. F., 'Literaire Retoriek en Politieke Mythologie', *De Groene Amsterdammer* (February 6, 1971); original text: Bovendien verschijnt er een uitgebreid verhaal over Mulisch in de *Haagse Post*, waarin hij zichzelf tot een geniale goochelaar laat opblazen. Als de H.P. een cover-story van het personage Mulisch maakt beschrijft ze een uitzonderingsverschijnsel; het schrijven is alleen een interessante bijzonderheid aan Mulisch omdat het een gave is die anderen niet bezitten. De inhoud van zijn literatuur komt niet ter sprake.

*'One was among friends'. Harry Mulisch as a Public Intellectual*

Within that literary field however, Mulisch didn't take up the role of the autonomous writer. In the sixties and seventies, he became a member of an intellectual group that consisted of writers, journalists and politicians. He worked together with his friends Ed. Hoornik, journalist and writer, and Cees Nootboom, who refined the genre of travel writing.<sup>39</sup> The three of them regularly frequented the Amsterdam club 'The Circle'. There they met journalists like W. L. Brugsma, Hans Gruijters, Henk Hofland, Han Lammers, and Hans van Mierlo. In The Circle they discussed the politics of everyday life. Later on Lammers and Van Mierlo founded the influential new political party D66.

In these years, Mulisch not only was good friends with several leading journalists, he also worked with them. He did this mostly in the two aforementioned literary magazines: *Randstad* and *The Guide* [De Gids]. A lot of journalists and essayists contribute to these journals, which results in thematic issues full of political considerations. The driving force behind this cross-fertilization was chief editor Ed. Hoornik. This journalist and writer brought people from different backgrounds together. He wanted his literary magazine to change character. By doing so, he intended to close the gap between the autonomous literary field and the public domain:

Great literature always paints a picture of the time in which it came into being – beside all the other things literature does. [...] A good writer never lags behind, he is always up to date, albeit in a different plan than the newspaper. The magazine takes an intermediate position. The era of the 'pure' literary magazine is over, it now covers a much wider area. It is therefore not only made by writers, but by a collective of intellectuals belonging to a wide range of professions. Together we know what is going on and in which areas we need more information. The aim is a better-informed public opinion, which is able to speak out in the fields of science and technology. For democracy to have a future, this is necessary.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Van Nuenen, T., 'How to Get Lost: Reflections on Contemporary Tourism and Travel Writings by Cees Nootboom', *Masterthesis* (Tilburg, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Auwera, F., *Schrijven of schieten: Interviews* (Utrecht 1969); original text: Grote literatuur geeft altijd - behalve wat ze nog meer geeft - een beeld van de tijd, waarin ze is ontstaan. [...]. Een goed schrijver hinkt nooit achteraan; hij is altijd actueel, zij het op een ander plan dan de krant. Het tijdschrift neemt een tussenpositie in. De tijd van het zuiver-literaire tijdschrift is voorbij; het bestrijkt tegenwoordig een veel ruimer vlak. Het wordt dan ook niet meer door uitsluitend schrijvers gemaakt, maar door een collectief van schrijvende intellectuelen, behorend tot een breed scala van beroepen. Met elkaar weten we wel ongeveer wat er gaande is en op welke gebieden informatie nodig is. Doel is een beter geïnformeerde publieke opinie, die zich ook op de terreinen van wetenschap en techniek moet kunnen uitspreken, wil de democratie toekomst hebben.

Being an editor of *The Guide*, Mulisch thus participated in an authors collective that was on a mission to change and improve the public debate. According to Hoornik a “pure” (read: independent and disinterested) literary journal is only relevant for the specialists in the literary field. Hoornik wanted his magazine to have a wider range (a broader public) and a bigger influence. His main reason for that was his large commitment with the global political developments of these decades.

This brings us to the second strategy that Mulisch used to maintain his reputation as a writer. He started playing another role, for which he needed to be well-known and popular, but that had a higher ethical value than the literary celebrity. From 1961s onwards, Mulisch became a public intellectual. Between 1961 and 1972, Mulisch is involved in several current and political developments. He travels to Jerusalem to write about the Eichmann trial taking place in 1961, three years later he gets involved in the public debate surrounding the provocative Dutch television show *Zo is het toevallig...*, and in 1965 and 1966 he takes part in the cultural revolution (initiated by the so called Provo Riots) in Amsterdam at the time and he gives lectures on Cold War Politics and the threat of nuclear war, between 1967 and 1969 he visits Fidel Castro’s Cuba three times, in 1968 he witnesses the May Revolution in Paris and in 1969 he is involved in a writers’ protest against the Vietnam War and he works on the opera *Reconstructie* (Reconstruction), alongside Hugo Claus and five composers.<sup>41</sup>

Being a public intellectual for Mulisch thus means traveling (to Jerusalem, Paris, Cuba), writing in the printed media (much of his writing in the sixties was first published in newspapers or weeklies), working collectively with other writers, artists, composers, journalists and politicians (with the editors of *The Guide*, with the Reconstruction-group) and sometimes it simply means planning meetings or founding committees (such as the committee for solidarity with Cuba). This list of activities shows that the writer as a public intellectual has to leave the ivory tower of his writing room and go out onto the streets to actively play a public role. In doing so, the public intellectual is bound to stumble across the problem of detachment (independence, disinterestedness). First of all, to be a *public* intellectual, one has to be a public figure and for that one has to be a literary celebrity to a certain extent. Being a public figure constitutes a serious threat to one’s independence.

A second threat is bound up with the first: being committed to current political events means taking a stand and speaking out on the issue. In doing so, the literary writer runs the risk of losing his disinterestedness. If we go through the reports Mulisch wrote on several of the political events, we time

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<sup>41</sup> Bax, S. and Beeks, S., ‘Een Artistieke Guerillagroep’.

and again notice the struggle between detachment and commitment. When Mulisch attends the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem as a journalist, he feels like a ‘stranger in Babylon’:

Journalists and military men are racing in and out of the building, girls are carrying crates of orange juice, and laborers are hoisting incomprehensible machines into the windows. Inside too, there are carpenters at work everywhere. Post, telegraph and telephone offices have already been installed; in the press hall, which looks like a classroom for four hundred pupils, television sets are being installed that will show the trial without interruption. I’m walking around like a stranger in Babylon.<sup>42</sup>

At the beginning of the text, the writer presents himself as a ‘foreigner’ who does not quite fit into the scene where he finds himself. Yet, in the passages that follow, he presents a comprehensive report of the trial. He behaves like other journalists. He speaks with colleagues about the progress of the trial and he occasionally manages to speak to main actors (such as Eichmann’s assistant solicitor and prosecutor Hausner). In June, he seems to feel completely fine: “I am quickly becoming a real reporter: I can now even offer a world premiere. As one will see in a moment, it may even be called a cosmic premiere. I have succeeded in obtaining a half-hour access to Eichmann’s autobiography, which he wrote during his time in prison”.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike the average journalist, Mulisch reserves a lot of room in his diaries for controversial observations, such as political and philosophical interpretations and for autobiographical accounts of his experiences alongside the trial. These diary passages create the picture of a writer teetering between his old identity as a writer and his ‘new’ identity as a reporter. This development doesn’t take place overnight. Mulisch shows this by doing what we expect from a writer: he reports on his wonder from a distance.

In 1965, Amsterdam is the scene of the Provo Riots. Literary writer Harry Mulisch, living in the Dutch capital, literally witnesses the events there. In recent years, he has grown in his role as a public intellectual. In his 1966 report on the Provo Riots (*Bericht aan de rattenkoning*, Message to

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<sup>42</sup> Mulisch, H., *De Zaak 40/61* (Amsterdam, 1961), p. 37; original text: Journalisten en militairen hollen het gebouw in en uit, meisjes sjouwen met kisten sinaasappelsap, arbeiders hijsen onbegrijpelijke machines de ramen in. Ook binnen wordt overal nog getimmerd. Post-, telegraaf- en telefoonkantoor zijn al ingericht; in de perszaal, die er uitziet als een schoolklas voor vierhonderd leerlingen, worden televisietoestellen geïnstalleerd, waarop het proces onafgebroken zichtbaar zal zijn. Ik loop rond als een vreemdeling in Babylon.

<sup>43</sup> Mulisch, H., *Criminal Case 40/61. The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: An Eyewitness Account* (Pennsylvania, 2005) [Trans. Robert Naborn. Foreword by Deborah Dwork], p.133.

the Rat King) we find Mulisch constantly balancing between being a detached witness of the events and becoming involved in the riots himself. This field of tension remains important throughout the book. At the end of the documentary, Mulisch drives his speedy car to the Dutch parliament in The Hague to hand over a petition signed by a group of important intellectuals. In this part of the book, Mulisch no longer presents himself as the detached witness, but creates the impression of having played a key role in the cultural revolution.

At that moment I was already on my way to The Hague with the list of names in my superfast automobile. Because everybody was at home watching TV, the roads were deserted, and at a speed of 90 miles an hour I ventured into Holland. On entering The Hague I began to sing national anthems at the top of my lungs so that no-one would notice I was from Amsterdam. On Binnenhof square, smack in the Dutch lion's mouth, I did experience a few anxious moments. I gave the list to a messenger telling him the Prime Minister couldn't wait to get his hands on it, at which, alarmed, he rushed off with the list.<sup>44</sup>

Committed literary writers and many other important young writers use the public media to vent their social criticism and their political opinions. In the scene I just quoted, Mulisch even travels to the center of power in the Netherlands to try to influence the politicians. This Harry Mulisch has definitely become an important public intellectual. But when these writers are asked to found a 'committee', Mulisch declines the honor. He refuses to become a political figure.<sup>45</sup>

In 1968 and 1969, Mulisch definitely transformed from witness to political activist. In his reports on the communist revolution in Cuba he positions himself as an explicitly committed public intellectual who promotes the Cuban Revolution without reserve. While in Cuba, Mulisch is constantly accompanied by the Cuban political elite. In his 1968 essay *Het woord bij de daad* (Preaching what you Practice). Mulisch describes all the good things the Cuban politicians show him. In doing so, he paints a positive picture of the country after the revolution. In this book, Mulisch

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<sup>44</sup> Mulisch, H., Bericht aan de Rattenkoning (Amsterdam, 1966), pp. 193-194; original text: Op dat moment was ik al met de lijst namen op weg naar Den Haag in mijn pijlsnelle automobiel. Omdat iedereen naar de TEEVEE zat te kijken waren de wegen verlaten, en met een vaart van 150 kilometer per uur waagde ik mij Nederland in. Bij het binnenkomen van 's-Gravenhage begon ik luidkeels volksliederen te zingen, opdat niemand zou merken dat ik een amsterdammer was. Op het Binnenhof, in het hol van de Nederlandse Leeuw, heb ik wel enkele angstige minuten doorstaan. Ik gaf de lijst aan een bode, met de mededeling, dat de minister-president er om zat te springen, waarop hij er geschrokken mee wegsnelde.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 194.



uses the word ‘we’ very often. But now it seems that this ‘we’ does point at a political collective. Mulisch explicitly positions himself as part of the Cuban community:

One was among friends. How to put this into words? A few days before, the Vietnamese had thrown a farewell lunch outside of Havana; in the table arrangement under the loggia we were seated in alternating fashion: a poet, a girl from the national Liberation Front, a painter, a boy from the Front, a singer, a girl, a Vietnamese colonel, a *commandante*...; Old Carlos Puebla, ‘the voice of the revolution’ came on with his guitar and sang about the *ley de reforma urbana*, and about Ernesto Che Guevara, still alive at that moment. Who would not be moved?”<sup>46</sup>

By turning into a public intellectual, the literary writer becomes a political figure and a public figure. As a result of this transformation the writer runs the risk of losing his independence as well as his disinterestedness – and with that his credibility. This is of course not only true for literary writers. Journalists who engage themselves with a specific political position have to deal with the same problem: too much commitment might harm their status within the journalistic community. At the end of the sixties, Mulisch reached the height of his fame (as is apparent also in the quote by Vogelaar cited above) and his commitment takes on the form of a rigid Anti-Americanism that goes hand in hand with a jubilant propagation of Cuban Communism. Mulisch became the spokesman of one specific political movement, which means that we can no longer speak of disinterestedness, independence or detachment. One could say that in the course of the sixties Mulisch transformed from a public intellectual into a political activist.

His case shows the complexity of the position of the public intellectual. To play that role successfully, one has to balance carefully between traditional values (independence, disinterestedness, detachment) and modern values (commercial success, media popularity, political commitment). During the sixties, Mulisch managed to keep three balls in the air for most of the time. When the seventies approached, it seems that he

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<sup>46</sup> Mulisch, H., *Het Woord bij de Daad* (Amsterdam, 1968), p. 229; original text: Men was onder vrienden. Hoe moet ik het uitdrukken? Een paar dagen eerder hadden de vietnamezen buiten Havana een afscheidslunch gegeven: om en om waren wij onder de loggia aan de tafels gerangschikt: een dichter, een meisje van het Nationaal Bevrijdingsfront, een schilder, een jongen van het Front, een zanger, een meisje, een vietnamese kolonel, een comandante...; de oude Carlos Puebla, ‘de stem van de revolutie’, kwam met zijn gitaar en zong over de ley de reforma urbana, en over Ernesto Che Guevara, op dat moment nog in leven. Wie zou niet ontroerd worden?

lost the balance. We can tell that by the very severe criticism that he received in the second part of the 1960s.

At the time, the critics mostly accused Mulisch of using his commitment as a way to gain more commercial success. In the late 1960s, Mulisch becomes a highly controversial figure. After his 1959 novel *Het stenen bruidsbed* (The stone bridal Bed) he did not publish any novels until the 1970 novel *De verteller* (The narrator). Literary critics openly start to doubt Mulisch's literary credibility. As in the Willem Brandt quote, other critics, such as literary writer Gerard Reve, comment on the combination of commercial success (which accompanies the literary celebrity) and public commitment (which is central to the public intellectual). Reve pins the problem down in one catchy phrase. According to Reve, Mulisch is a 'gemotoriseerde relletjesvoyeur', ('a motorized riots voyeur'). By using the word 'voyeur' Reve is saying that Mulisch merely witnesses the events, without showing any real commitment to what is happening in Amsterdam, without even being seen himself. The word 'motorized' obviously refers to the sports car Mulisch mentioned in his report. The subtext of Reve's humorous phrase is that Mulisch's commitment is not authentic, but that it is all just part of the facade of the literary celebrity. Others expressed the same criticism with regards to Mulisch's enthusiasm for Castro's Cuba. They asked him why he didn't cut sugarcane in Cuba, implying he only witnessed the sunny side of Cuba the politicians showed him, without bothering about the working classes in Cuba who had to suffer for a living.

### *Conclusion*

In the sixties, the former autonomist writer Harry Mulisch suddenly becomes a famous Dutchman. He changes his public performances and becomes a public intellectual and a literary celebrity at the same time. Whereas his performance as a public intellectual served as a counterpart for his performance as a literary celebrity, Mulisch's role as a public intellectual in its turn was undermined by his role as a literary celebrity. This makes clear that both the public intellectual as the literary celebrity are in some kind of way 'impossible figures' resulting from severe battle for acknowledgment in the public domain.

In this article, I have repeatedly emphasized that both literary writers and journalists enter the public sphere of mass media in the sixties and seventies as famous media figures on the one hand and politically engaged public intellectuals on the other. This case study might teach us something about what it takes to function either as a celebrity or as a public intellectual. The writer (whether he calls himself a literary writer or a journalist) has to keep an eye on the autonomous conventions of the field from which he originates (the literary field or the journalistic field). The public roles they are able to play are always legitimized by their status in

the relatively autonomous field. It may therefore seem as if the literary celebrity and the public intellectual form a serious threat to 'classic' autonomous authorship or to the classic roles of journalism, but if we take a closer look we can still see these autonomous conventions of authorship playing an important role in the classification and evaluation of authors' careers.

## A MESSAGE TO THE POPULATION\*

### THE PUBLIC POEMS OF HUGO CLAUS IN THE 1960S

Sarah Beeks

#### *Introduction*

‘Even our poets keep longing for the moon, as is proven by this “ode to Sputnik” by Hugo Claus, that we are allowed to publish exclusively’.<sup>1</sup> These are the words of the editor of Belgium’s socialistic newspaper *Vooruit* on October 12, 1957. Only eight days earlier, on October 4, the world’s first satellite had been launched. Sputnik was celebrated as the first victory of the space age and of the space race. With this milestone, the Soviet Union had beaten the United States and the Cold War rivalry continued. *Vooruit* must have published several accounts of this global news event. However, the paper did not only discuss the mere facts, it also gave a literary account of the happening. On October 12 a poem by the famous Flemish writer and poet Hugo Claus was published. His ode to Sputnik was called: ‘Lied van de jongeling in oktober’ [‘Song of the youngster in October’].<sup>2</sup> This youngster is fascinated by the reach of the satellite: ‘His fragmented eye now unlimitedly comprises / the cities, seas, continents.’<sup>3</sup> And he is aware of the impact the satellite will have on (for instance) political affairs: ‘Because in the violence of the iron wind / Council and State and Defence will change / oh, so humble’.<sup>4</sup> Despite these radical changes, the young man considers the satellite as a (temporary) release: ‘and I, a youngster, can escape for one moment / from strangulation, from the metal smell / of society, from her rubber terror.’<sup>5</sup> He

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\* With special thanks to Janneke Hoedemaekers and Marthe Dijk for their help with the translation.

<sup>1</sup> Wildemeersch, G. ed., *Het Teken van de Ram 3: Bijdragen tot de Claus-Studie* (Amsterdam, 2000), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Claus, H., ‘Lied van de Jongeling in October’, in: Wildemeersch, G. ed., *Het Teken van de Ram 3: Bijdragen tot de Claus-studie* (Amsterdam, 2000), p.17.

<sup>3</sup> Original text: ‘Zijn versplinterend oog omvat nu grenzeloos / de steden, zeeën, continenten.’

<sup>4</sup> Original text: ‘Want in het geweld van de ijzeren wind / veranderen Raad en Staat en Verdediging / o, zo gedwee’

<sup>5</sup> Original text: ‘en ik, een jongeling, ontkom één ogenblik / aan wurging, aan de metalen geur / der maatschappij, aan haar rubberen terreur’

celebrates this obtained freedom by calling out into space: 'Bye fast, bye crazy Sputnik'.<sup>6</sup>

A few years later, Hugo Claus wrote another poetic ode to a similar object: the communication satellite Telstar, which had been launched by the American NASA on July 10, 1962. The poem is about a man who fantasizes the satellite will help him to spy on his lover:

Telstar that trills and sends images from America,  
I pray you, penetrate her room,  
that I may observe her

also in that other city  
where like a smooth and dark animal  
she lies trembling under another

Telstar, keep me awake with your angry waves  
that scan her groaning contours.<sup>7</sup>

The first-person narrator sees Telstar as an extension of himself and he believes it will help him to put an end to his romantic insecurities. In that way, the satellite is his lifesaver. At the same time, Telstar poses a threat, because it's 'angry waves' can penetrate anyone's life.<sup>8</sup> According to these two poems, the groundbreaking new techniques of satellites like Telstar and Sputnik caused mixed feelings to Claus: they symbolize the infinite possibilities and freedom because of technical progress and they form a threat to safety and stability. The poems are his direct response to two major world events, and they are his literary account of the start of a new age of technology.

Both the ode to Sputnik and the ode to Telstar can be typified as 'public poems'. This is what Hugo Claus called the type of poems he wrote in the late fifties and the sixties. As a writer he tried to transform himself in order to deal with the changes and responsibilities of a new age: the 1960s. Writers, both in the literary and in the journalistic field, had to adapt to the rapid changes of this decade. This caused for a new relation of facts and

<sup>6</sup> Original text: 'Dag snelle, dag dolle Spoetnik'

<sup>7</sup> Claus, H. and Sannes, S., *Oog om Oog* (Amsterdam, 1964); Original text: 'Telstar die trilt en beelden zendt uit Amerika, / ik bid je, dring in haar kamer binnen, / dat ik haar gadesla / ook in die andere stad waar zij / als een glad en donker beest / onder een ander licht te beven / Telstar, houd mij wakker met uw kwade golven / die loeren naar haar grommend lijf'; Transl. Claus, H. and Sannes, S., 'The Erotic Eye', in: *New Dutch Writing & Art, The Busy Bee Review 2* (Amsterdam, 1965).

<sup>8</sup> See also: Buelens, G., 'Iets Publieks: De Poëzie van Hugo Claus in de Jaren Zestig', in: Wildemeersch G. ed., *Het teken van de Ram 4: Bijdragen tot de Claus-studie* (Amsterdam, 2005), p. 179.

fictions. Many journalists chose to adopt more literary techniques and turned to the so-called 'literary journalism'. In literature the contrary occurred: many writers felt reality had to be accounted for and for this fiction and poetry no longer felt sufficient. In this paper I will investigate the differences between these two strategies of writing by focusing on the field of literature. I will argue that although literary writers had the same goal as journalists (adapting to the cultural changes of the 1960s), their solutions were very different. The case of Hugo Claus will exemplify the urge for literary writers to deal with the changes of a revolutionary decade.

*To Write or to Shoot?*

'A jumble of exuberance and discontent, idealism and arrogance, freedom and excess'.<sup>9</sup> These are a few of the contradictory elements that characterize the turbulent 1960s. It was the age of increasing prosperity, secularization, greater sexual freedom and a renewed youth culture. But also the age of political changes, student protests and riots, the Cold War and the Vietnam war. Both in America and Western Europe people became more empowered and tried to shape the world according to their own beliefs. As was the case in the Low Countries. In Amsterdam the so-called Provo's led the way. These youngsters personified 'more than any other contemporaneous group the creative unity of art and politics precisely at the moment when the combined explosive force of the cultural and the generational revolt erupting throughout industrial societies turned into an open political revolt.'<sup>10</sup> With their playful happenings and defiance of authority, the Provo's appealed not only to young people, but also to older generations. Their criticism and ideals received great imitation in The Netherlands and abroad.<sup>11</sup> Also in neighboring country Belgium the Provo methods found adherents, with an 'unusually visible role of artists'.<sup>12</sup> The Belgium variant of May '68 took place on May 28, 1968 when students and artists – among them was Hugo Claus – occupied the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.<sup>13</sup> Several meetings were organized on themes like censorship, budget for

<sup>9</sup> Maga, T., *The 1960s* (New York, 2003), p. ix.

<sup>10</sup> Horn, G.-R., 'The Belgium Contribution to Global 1968', *Revue Belge d'Histoire Contemporaine* 4 (2005), p. 604.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the Provo's see: Pas, N., *Imaazje! De Verbeelding van Provo 1965-1967* (Amsterdam, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Horn, 'The Belgium Contribution to Global 1968', p. 606.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 606-607.

culture, education and commercialization of art. The occupation – that was supposed to last three days – took in fact three months.<sup>14</sup>

So, not only students and youngsters led the way to change society, artists and writers were also eager to get involved. Hugo Brems (in his history of modern Dutch literature) emphasizes that in the late sixties many writers felt they had to ‘kick some sense into mankind’:

Even without demonstrable influence, around 1970 there were many writers whose work dealt with political or social themes or whose prose and poetry was put in the service of politics. The themes they adopted were the same as those of the broad protest movement: democracy, free speech, poverty and exploitation of the Third World, anti-capitalism, anti-militarism, the war in Vietnam, the Soviet invasion of Prague.<sup>15</sup>

To write or to shoot? This was the dilemma many literary writers had to deal with in the 1960s. On the one hand social and political developments motivated them to actively take part in changing society, on the other hand they were hesitant to put their literary work in the service of their political ideals.

This dilemma of literary commitment was the topic of a famous collection of interviews called *Schrijven of schieten?* [*To write or to shoot?*], published in 1969. In this book several fiction writers and poets were interviewed by the Flemish writer Fernand Auwera. In his experience it was inevitable writers were influenced by the contemporary problems of social conflict, racism, hunger, censorship, nuclear threats, oppression, and war. And so he questioned them on concepts like democracy, dictatorship, individuality, mass, proletariat, elitism, pacifism, violence, conservatism, progressiveness, engagement, and isolation.<sup>16</sup> Hugo Claus was among the interviewed and he made some interesting statements regarding the degree of his political commitment:

There is a gap in my production and this gap is due to my uncertainty towards the level of commitment I can integrate in de structure of my work. But that I write from commitment is quite obvious. I do not have ready-made solutions. My books are no manuals of political thought.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For more on Belgium in the 1960s, see: Horn, ‘The Belgian Contribution’; Hooghe, M. and Jooris, A., *Golden Sixties: België in de Jaren Zestig 1958-1973*. (Amsterdam, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Brems, H., *Altijd weer Vogels die Nesten Beginnen: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur 1945-2005* (Amsterdam, 2006), p. 272.

<sup>16</sup> Auwera, F., *Schrijven of Schieten: Interviews* (Utrecht, 1969), p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 90.

Claus seemed especially concerned with the technical aspects of his writing. He was worried he would not be able to find a suitable form for his committed viewpoints: ‘The technique of the revolution has to be technically integrated in the text, otherwise you keep muddling along with a self-satisfied reactionary type of art, even if you keep calling conjuringly towards Vietnam.’<sup>18</sup> To him – as it was to many other writers – the sixties were a decade in which he critically reviewed his own profession and position.

Hugo Claus, who was born in 1929 and passed away in 2008, is generally accepted to be one of the finest and most influential Dutch-language writers of the twentieth century. Not only was he well known for his literary works, he was also famous for his public role. For many decades, he has been a taboo-breaking writer and media figure. Especially the 1960s seem to be a period in his career in which he was struggling with this public role he wanted to play as a writer. On the one hand he did not want to stand aloof, because ‘it’s indecent to only think about eternity.’<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, he wanted to guarantee the autonomy of his works and did not want to be restricted: ‘I do have certain opinions on some matters, and whether I like it or not, these are expressed in my work. But it is not my “duty” to express them’.<sup>20</sup> Still Claus did try to find ways to express his need for clarity and directness in his works. He looked for ways to ‘break through the isolation of his authorship and to do something public.’<sup>21</sup>

#### *Literary Journalism, Journalistic Literature*

Before focusing on the specific case of Hugo Claus, it is fruitful to go into some of the changes both literature and journalism have undergone in the 1960s. Both disciplines had to stretch the limits of their fields in order to adapt to the changes of the new decade. Journalism had to deal with some large-scale shifts, due to the changing position of traditional and segregated media forms. Both the depillarisation of society and the commercializing of the journalistic field caused great impact.<sup>22</sup> But the social changes of the decade also caused a change of ideals: individuals started to realize which invisible powers were controlling their lives. This resulted in a decline of the trust in established institutions and cultivated values. This social criticism was reflected in the journalistic field: the core of old journalism –

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 91.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> Anthierens, J., ‘Humo Sprak met Hugo Claus’, *Humo* (January 18, 1962).

<sup>21</sup> Sluysmans, C., ‘Hugo Claus’ Wens: Theaterdirecteur Worden! “Schrijven blijf ik tóch wel”’, *De Telegraaf* (May 14, 1964).

<sup>22</sup> Wijffjes, H., *Journalistiek in Nederland 1850-2000: Beroep, Cultuur en Organisatie* (Amsterdam, 2004), pp. 329-330.



objectivity – no longer seemed justifiable. Journalists started to develop a more individualistic approach and wanted to account for their own opinions.<sup>23</sup> As John C. Hartsock states: ‘Mainstream journalism, objectifying in nature, failed to adequately account for and make meaning out of the transformations and crisis.’<sup>24</sup>

In response to the significant social and cultural transformations a new approach to journalism started blooming in the 1960s: ‘new journalism’ or ‘literary journalism’. David Eason has typified this as ‘a style of reporting characterized by the narrative techniques associated with the novel and the short story’.<sup>25</sup> What was at stake was the relationship between facts and fictions, as Eason notes:

Although often raised only implicitly in the heated debate, the central issue in the New Journalism controversy was the relationship of narrative technique to empirical validity. In raising questions about its own status as nonfiction, New Journalism foregrounded journalism as the practice of writing and called attention to the epistemological foundation of writing strategies.<sup>26</sup>

The main incentive for the new journalists was dissatisfaction with the limited recourses of journalistic writing to capture the complex world in words. By adopting literary techniques, journalists were able ‘to create in one form both the kind of objective reality of journalism and the subjective reality that people have always gone to the novel for,’ as was stated by Tom Wolfe, one of the groundbreaking writers of the New Journalism in America. Central focus became the writers’ subjectivity, in order ‘to narrow the distance between subject and object.’<sup>27</sup> Journalism was revealed as a specific mode for seeing and knowing the world, and reporting was revitalized as ‘a form of storytelling while giving shape to many of the cultural changes occurring.’<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 335-339.

<sup>24</sup> Hartsock, J., *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, 2000), p.193.

<sup>25</sup> Eason, D. L., ‘New Journalism, Metaphor and Culture’, *Journal of Popular Culture* 4 (1982), p.142.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem.*, p.142.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in: Dennis, E.E. and Rivers, W.L., *Other Voices: The New Journalism in America* (New Brunswick, 1974), p. 6; Hartsock, J., *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, 2000), p. 198.

<sup>28</sup> Eason, D.L., ‘The New Journalism and the Image World: Two Modes of Organizing Experience’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1 (1984), p.52. Not only in America, but also in Europe, these new ideas took ground. In The Netherlands the liberal news magazine *Haagse Post* was the first to adopt the style of new journalism, by printing reportages that were ‘written as a literary story, build up from scenes and dialogues, with great attention to the entourage.’ Jansen van

While there was a literary turn in journalism, in the field of literature the opposite occurred. Literary writers became more critical of society and tried to find forms to express their committed views. In order to do so, they had to deal with questions like: how to change society by the means of literature? How to be concrete by using a type of language that is by definition ambiguous and polyphone? So while journalists turned away from objectivity, literary writers tried to be more objective and less lyrical. More than before they addressed current issues on social and political themes. This caused for a shift from fiction to nonfiction: genres like the reportage and the documentary were popular because of their factual and descriptive nature. Some literary writers even took jobs in journalism. As did the Dutch novelist Cees Nooteboom: during the 1960s he worked for the Dutch paper *De Volkskrant* and in May 1968 he was even sent to Paris to report on the student protests.<sup>29</sup> His colleague-novelist Harry Mulisch took even more drastic decisions: in the 1960s he swore off after all fictional literature. Referring to Vietnam he stated in an interview: 'It's war. And in wartime, one must not engage in the writing of novels. Then there are more important things to do.'<sup>30</sup> Instead of fiction, Mulisch started writing journalistic pieces called 'documentaries', in which he dealt with current issues like the Provo happenings in Amsterdam, the Eichmann-trial in Jerusalem; and the Cuban revolution. In these documentaries Mulisch did not merely give an account of the facts: he wrote personal reports mixed with historical and philosophical observations. As a reporter he tried to be part of the action himself in order to actively change society.<sup>31</sup>

Hugo Claus was not as explicit as his friend Mulisch was. He kept worrying about the literariness of his works. The journalistic genres his friend had used, like documentary, reportage or essay, were not an option to him, since he articulated he was simply not able to communicate through these genres: 'I cannot do that, I work on a different wavelength'.<sup>32</sup> As he said in another interview: 'I am not a rationalist, but a lyricist. I have never written essays or critiques – I distrust my own thinking. I do believe in the

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Galen, J. and Spiering, H., *Rare Jaren: Nederland en de Haagse Post 1914-1990* (Amsterdam, 1993, p. 319).

<sup>29</sup> His columns on the Parisian student protests have been collected in: Nooteboom, C., *De Parijse Beroerte* (Amsterdam, 1968). Nooteboom even received a Dutch price in journalism for this reportage in 1960 (Prijs voor de Nederlandse dagbladjournalistiek).

<sup>30</sup> Auwera, *Schrijven of Schieten?*, p. 96.

<sup>31</sup> For more on the documentaries of Harry Mulisch see: Buurlage, J., *Onveranderlijk Veranderlijk: Harry Mulisch Tussen Literatuur, Journalistiek, Wetenschap en Politiek in de Jaren Zestig en Zeventig* (Amsterdam, 1999); Wijffjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland*, pp. 347-348.

<sup>32</sup> Veenstra, J., 'Op Bezoek bij Hugo Claus in Blaricum', *Vrij Nederland* (February 29, 1964).

construction afterwards, – to do first, then to think.<sup>33</sup> So Claus kept writing poetry, because he had ‘to channel his impressions and emotions through a poem.’<sup>34</sup> However, in the 1960s he managed to develop a new poetic style that matched his needs. As mentioned above, Claus characterized his poems as ‘public poems’: they were directed at an audience, they were meant to be recited or published in public media forms, and they dealt with social and political subject matters. Not only did he publish such poems in newspapers, he also used the newspaper as a source of inspiration: ‘When I open a newspaper and I read three lines, I’m immediately able to transfer these lines. I give them a twist and use them.’<sup>35</sup> Moreover, Claus was eager to share his sources with his audience. To the poem ‘Herfst van een loodgieter’ [‘Autumn of a Plumber’] he added the following line: ‘with the help of page 12 of *Het Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*’, which is a local Dutch newspaper.<sup>36</sup>

Most of Claus’ public poems have been collected in a volume called *Van horen zeggen* [*Hearsay*] (1970). Unfortunately they have received little scholarly attention; most researchers preferred to study Claus’ hermetic and autonomist poetry. Consequently, the strategies and techniques he used in his public poems have not often been looked into. One could argue that in this period we can see a shift from the fictional to the factual. Claus used all kinds of ‘objective’ news facts in his poems and tried to reflect on current (political and social) issues. It is certain that these poems differ both thematically and technically from his earlier works. While some of his literary colleagues turned to nonfiction, Claus found a way to use poetry to take into account the rapid changes of the 1960s.

#### *Hallowed Be Your Bomb*

On January 1, 1962, Hugo Claus took the stand during a big protest manifestation in Amsterdam. He was part of the so-called Anti Atomic Bomb Demonstration that took place in four cities in The Netherlands and was organized by the Committee for Peace 1962. A group of Christian,

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<sup>33</sup> Van der Pol, D.F., ‘Het Tienjarenplan van Hugo Claus: Filmen Levert Schrijver Nieuwe Perspectieven’, *Het Vaderland* (October 14, 1967).

<sup>34</sup> Auwera, *Schrijven of Schieten?*, p. 92. Claus did not only use poetry to express his committed viewpoints. In the 1960s he was also regularly writing and directing plays, which enabled him to directly address his audience. Prose writing however, did not seem to fulfill his needs and faded into the background for a while.

<sup>35</sup> Jessurun d'Oliveira, H.U., *Scheppen Riep Hij Gaat van Au* (Amsterdam, 1965), p.138.

<sup>36</sup> Published in: Wildemeersch, G. ed., *Het Teken van de Ram 3: Bijdragen tot de Claus-Studie* (Amsterdam, 2000), p. 19.

humanist, pacifist and socialist organizations had joined forces for a common goal: the fight against atomic weapons.<sup>37</sup> In the late fifties, the fear of the atomic bomb had grown rapidly, especially after several tests with nuclear weapons. All around the world peace organizations and newly formed protest groups started voicing their concerns. The best-known initiative is the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), which was led by the British philosopher Bertrand Russell. The CND started organizing an annual recurring Easter march, which became an example to peace organizations all over the world.<sup>38</sup> So it was to the Dutch Committee for Peace. Starting from 1961 they organized a yearly Easter and New Year's March. On January 1, 1962, Claus was one of the public speakers that were asked to address the protesters after the demonstration. Especially for this occasion he had written a long poem titled 'Bericht aan de bevolking' ['Message to the population'], in which he addressed the attendees on the nuclear issue. To Claus this was a special moment: it was the first time the writer actually took the stand to make himself heard on a major political topic.

In 'Message to the population' Claus connected to the themes of the Committee for Peace. For instance in a conversation between the narrator and a man who says:

I'd rather be dead than red  
And if I wanted to die then you will also.  
Rather terribly dead than just a hint of red.  
All hands on deck, the whole ship down  
No red mark on our behinds!<sup>39</sup>

Here Claus refers to the anti-Communist slogan 'Better dead than red', which was used extensively in the United States during the Cold War. This slogan expressed the idea it is better to fight until death, instead of living under communism. In the late fifties Bertrand Russell introduced a reversal of the slogan – 'Better red than dead' – within the context of the above mentioned Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. He argued that people

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<sup>37</sup> Archives 'Committee for Peace', International Institute for Social History [IISG], Amsterdam.

<sup>38</sup> Frey, M., 'The International Peace Movement', in: Klimke, M. and Scharloth, J. eds., *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977* (New York, 2008), pp. 33-44. Frey stresses the activities of the peace organizations became successful because of the innovative forms of protest (p. 38).

<sup>39</sup> Claus, H., 'Bericht aan de Bevolking', *Podium* 4 (1962), p. 146; original text: 'Ik ben liever dood dan rood, / En als ik dood wil dan wil jij dit ook. / Liever hartstikke dood dan maar een vleugje rood. / Alle hens aan dek, het hele schip naar onder / Geen vlekje rood aan onze donder!'

should strive for peace, instead of fighting to the bitter end. Russell called upon the Western governments to dismantle their nuclear weapons, even if the Communists would not be willing to.<sup>40</sup> In his poem Claus used this slogan in both meanings. The man who speaks to the narrator uses the anti-communist meaning of the slogan and believes that the Cold War is justified: 'I'd rather be dead than red'. The narrator seems to proclaim the opposite viewpoint (that of Russell) and tries to clarify that a war does not make sense because it will lead to total destruction: 'For what is coming, is not a war / But one horrible, obscene wind of God / And then there is nothing'.<sup>41</sup>

In what follows, Claus warned the people against an atomic explosion. The verse: 'Will grossly / all our eyeless- and toothless grandchildren / moult to their sixteen toes?' refers to the health issues that are the result of such an explosion; on the long-term the radiation could affect unborn babies.<sup>42</sup> The Committee for Peace published pictures of such mutilated infants. In addition, the poet refers to the devastating powers of the atomic bomb, 'that we may turn to ashes and disappear'.<sup>43</sup> Through the heat radiation of a nuclear disaster living beings could indeed be evaporated within seconds. The most striking reference to the atomic bomb however, is illustrated by a compelling metaphor in the poem. The explosion of the bomb is compared with a 'fart of God' and to 'one horrible, obscene wind of God'. Claus ends his poem with a blasphemous version of the prayer Our Father:

Our Father  
Who is in Heaven,  
Hallowed be Your Bomb,  
Your Kingdom will come,  
Your Megatons will kindle here on earth  
As in Your Heaven.  
Give us today our nuclear weapon  
And forgive us our temporary peace  
As we forgive those who withstand with whining for peace  
And do not lead us to the temptation of disarmament  
So we may turn to ashes and disappear

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<sup>40</sup> Safire, W., *Safire's Political Dictionary* (New York, 2008). pp. 49-50.

<sup>41</sup> Claus, 'Bericht aan de bevolking', p. 149; original text: 'Want wat straks komt is geen oorlog / Maar één gruwelijke, obscene wind van God / En daarna is er niets meer'

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 146; original text: 'Zullen schromelijk / Al onze oog-en-tandloze kleinkinderen / Tot op hun zestien tenen vervellen?'

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 148; original text: 'dat wij mogen ver-assen en verdwijnen'

Until the end of time  
Amen.<sup>44</sup>

His version of this Christian prayer turns out to be an indictment to the Western governments that seem to be driven by wrong motives and will lead the world into total destruction. The advice Claus gave to the attendees of the protest march was rather pessimistic: it would be best if they would end their lives themselves, before it would be too late. As an example, he took a big butchers knife and held it against his throat during the performance. Claus, as a poet, felt powerful and powerless at the same time. He did take the stand to express his 'message to the population', but at the same time he questioned his own role: 'How I stand here as a fool. / Because who am I to make a case and to tell you / Whatever?'<sup>45</sup> This dualistic attitude seems to be typical for Claus in the 1960s.

Claus had addressed the nuclear theme before in his poetry. In *Tancredo infrasonic* (1952) he referred to modern weapons for the first time. The title of the volume could also be considered a reference to modern warfare: 'infrasonic' refers to sonic weapons that were used to eliminate the enemy with sound vibrations. In the poem 'p' (the title was later changed into 'Korea, June 1951') Claus dealt with the Korean War. He directly refers to this war in a comment to the poem, in the back of the volume: 'The newspapers of June 1951 on the experiments of new weapons by the Americans in Korea'.<sup>46</sup> In the poem these weapons are being discussed:

Not to burn or bleed to be without breath  
But beyond the limit of what has been described

To perish without ashes and without any trace  
As happened to the 12 Chinese due to of our new weapon  
Including an idiot a peasant and a women<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 148; original text: Onze Vader / Die in de Hemel zijt / Gezegend is Uw Bom / Dat Uw Rijk kome / Dat Uw Megatonnen ontvlammen hier op aarde / Als in Uw Hemel. / Geef ons heden ons nucleair wapen / En vergeef ons onze voorlopige vrede / Zoals wij vergeven wie ons weerstaat met gejank om vrede. / En leid ons niet in de bekoring der ontwapening / Maar dat wij mogen ver-assen en verdwijnen / Tot op het einde der tijden. / Amen.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 146; original text: 'Hoe ik hier sta voor gek. / Want wie ben ik dat ik me sterk maak om u wat dan ook / Te zeggen?'

<sup>46</sup> Claus, H., *Tancredo Infrasonic* (The Hague, 1952), p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 23; original text: 'Niet verbranden of verbloeden zonder adem zijn / Maar voorbij de grens van wat staat beschreven / Zonder as en zonder spoor vergaan / Zoals het verging voor ons nieuwe wapen de 12 Chinezen / Waaronder een idioot een landman en een vrouw'

Here the victims of an atomic bomb are described: they did not burn or bleed, but they have been turned into ashes – as we have seen above, Claus would use the exact same phrase in ‘Bericht aan de bevolking’ in 1962. One more example of the nuclear weapon-theme can be demonstrated by the long poem ‘Het teken van de hamster’ [‘The sign of the hamster’] from 1963. Here, with several different phrases, Claus refers to the theme of the arms race and nuclear threat:

while Europe bubbles in stills of statistics  
 porcelain oldsters dibble the porridge,  
 they chaw ox-liver, that quickens old blood  
 and kneel liturgically before each other, or kiss each other  
 and tomorrow morning over our towns:  
 heat bursting out of their flies religiously zipped.

Whether snow upon the ferns  
 will still leave a mark then?  
 Ashes, white ashes, snow of death.<sup>48</sup>

The ‘oldsters’ are the German chancellor Konrad Adenauer and the French president Charles de Gaulle, who signed the *Elysée Treaty* on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1961.<sup>49</sup> De Gaulle had initiated the development of nuclear weapons in France and Adenauer had similar ambitions for Germany. Again, news facts inspired Claus to discuss a major political topic. In ‘Bericht aan de bevolking’ he compared the explosion of the atomic bomb to a ‘fart of God’, here the explosion will cause snow-like ashes, ‘snow of death’. There are several similar references in the poem, for instance: ‘The morning – dust and ashes – grows white’ and ‘Over the land, flat as a book, / swifter than this train: the heinous snow’.<sup>50</sup>

What is striking about the poems Claus wrote on the nuclear issue, is that he prepared himself thoroughly, and that these poems are all very well documented. Sometimes he openly referred to a specific newspaper, other times he demonstrated his knowledge by just integrating the information in

<sup>48</sup> Claus, H., ‘Het Teken van de Hamster’, *Randstad 5* (May 1963), p. 15; original text: ‘terwijl Europa borrelt in kolven vol statistieken / roeren porseleinen grijsaards in de pap, / zij kauwen osselever, dat kweekt oud bloed, / en knielen lithurgisch voor elkaar, of kussen elkaar / en morgenochtend over onze steden: / de hitte die barst uit hun Rooms verzegelde gulp. / Of sneeuw over de varens / dan nog een afdruk laat? / As, witte as, sneeuw van de dood.’; Transl. Claus, H., *The Sign of the Hamster* (Leuven, 1986), p. 27.

<sup>49</sup> Claes, P., in: Claus, *The Sing of the Hamster*, p. 81.

<sup>50</sup> Claus, ‘Het Teken van de Hamster’, p. 33; original text: ‘De morgen – stof en as – wordt wit’; Transl. Claus, *The Sing of the Hamster*, p. 63; Claus, ‘Het Teken van de Hamster’, p. 38; original text: ‘Over het land, plat als een boek, / sneller dan deze trein: de schadelijke sneeuw’; Transl. Claus, *The Sing of the Hamster*, p. 71.

his poem. Claus using factual and contemporary information in his poems was rather new in the 1960s; before he had never been very eager to be as specific and concrete. What is important about the public poems of this decade, is that Claus did need facts to provide his poems with a certain necessity. By interconnecting his poems both thematically and literally (with the repetition of certain phrases or images) he kept stressing the importance of his subject. The above discussed theme of the nuclear war proved to be one of the thematic constants in Claus' works in the 1960s; it would keep reappearing in his poems and other literary genres. By interweaving references to the atomic bomb in many different works, and by relating to current discussions on the theme, Claus was able to contribute to this political topic in a literary way.

*The Year that Freezes the Smile*

In the poetry collection *Van horen zeggen* [*Hearsay*] (1970) Claus added a commentary to the first poem. It said: 'in answer to a survey in *De Standaard* concerning the previous year'.<sup>51</sup> It was in fact on December 31, 1965, this specific poem was published for the first time, in one of Belgium's major Catholic newspapers *De Standaard*. On this day the paper published a retrospective of the previous year:

1965. What did it mean to them, where would they like to focus on? This question was asked to seven personalities: a cardinal, a novelist, a politician, a rector, a provincial governor, a Director-general of the BRT [Belgium Radio and Television] and a poet – who answered with an exclusive poem. (...) And that is our annual account.<sup>52</sup>

With six other professionals Claus was asked to give an account of the previous year. Unlike the others, he answered with a poem. As a writer he did not feel suited to comment on political events, like he had stated very often in interviews. So asked for his professional opinion, he must have thought it was most appropriate to react 'as a poet'. The poem is his literary annual account of the year 1965, in which he sums up several matters of (public and personal) importance:

Nineteen sixty-five

Year of atrocities, year of breathless blowing  
Between cathode-ray tube and stock market report,

<sup>51</sup> Claus, H., *Van Horen Zeggen* (Amsterdam, 1970), p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> Claus, H., 'Nineteen sixty five', *De Standaard* (December 31, 1965).



Year of milk and honey if you're asleep,  
Year that sticks in your stomach if you're awake,

Scholars will explain,  
Ministers will wrap it in promises:  
"It was a sweet year, it was a good year for our interests."

Yes, my gentlemen, again it was a good year for sleepwalkers,  
They breed themselves stupid, they eat themselves yellow,

The year in which 25 billion went to NATO  
For flags and tanks and planes that later will be midges  
In the limitless clouds of death,

The year Mobutu asked for help, hurrah,  
We will send him cents and assistants  
That will blossom into percentages,

The year of the Voerstreek which people want to save as a language  
that you only read in ads,

The year people planned through the Market of Oudenaarde  
A highway for the ever faster cattle,

Year of the fungus in the Belgian braincase,  
Year that licked at the trough of folklore,  
And, luckily far away from our savings stocking and our folk dancing,  
The year of the escalation, there where  
The children gray with fear dig themselves into the mud,  
("Give them this day our daily napalm,  
and later our canned food and our prayers!")

The year that freezes the smile  
When people see their governors scrape together interest rates,

The umpteenth seventh fat year,

It was in that year I went to live in this village  
With books and a wife and a child  
Who grows while I talk about the tigers in the East.]<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Claus, H., 'Negentienhonderd Vijfenzestig', *De Standaard* (December 31, 1965); original text: Negentienhonderd vijfenzestig / Jaar van de gruwel, jaar van het amechtig blazen / Tussen beeldbuis en beursbericht, / Jaar van melk en honing als je slaapt, / Jaar dat op je maag blijft liggen als je waakt, / Geleerden zullen het verklaren, / Ministers zullen het in beloften wikkelen: / "Het jaar was zoet, het jaar was goed voor onze belangen." / Juist, mijne heren, het was weer een jaar voor slaapwandelaars, / Zij fokken zich stom, zij vreten zich laf, / Het jaar dat men in dit

Just like the writers of the other annual accounts of that year, Claus refers to a number of big events, using factual information. Here he is consciously mixing facts and fictions, or in Eason's vocabulary: he is playing with the relationship between empirical validity and narrative (or in this case: poetic) technique. With 'Year of Mobutu' he refers to November 25, 1965, the day general Mobutu seized power in Congo for the second time. The United States of America, France and Belgium had supported the dictator, for their own prosperity (to the dismay of Claus). Belgium, that had colonized Congo for many decades, did have a great interest in the Congolese economy, and supporting Mobutu with 'cents and assistants' would therefore 'blossom into percentages'. He also refers to the Vietnam War – 'there where the children gray with fear / dig themselves into the mud'. The Western contribution to this war Claus criticizes: 'Give them today our daily napalm / and later our canned food and later our prayers'. Notice that Claus used almost the exact same phrase he did in 'Bericht aan de bevolking': 'Give us today our nuclear weapon / And forgive us our temporary peace'.

What is striking about Claus's annual report is that he imposes his own structure to the different subject matters. There is no hierarchy between the large-scale affairs (concerning the NATO, Congo, etc.) and the local affairs (for instance the Voerstreek and its linguistic conflict or the highway that will cross the small town of Oudenaarde), or between the major and minor affairs. To Claus all topics are equally important (and receive an almost equally amount of space in the poem), in that sense his report can be considered highly subjective. Moreover, some lines of the poem are very evident, others are more vague and lyrical ('Year that sticks in your stomach if you're awake'). This last characteristic seems to be the most striking difference between his annual account and that of the others. In

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land 25 miljard aan de NATO gaf / Voor vlaggen en tanks en vliegtuigen die muggen zullen zijn / Straks in de grenzeloze wolken van de dood, / Het jaar dat Moboetoe om hulp vroeg, hoera, / Wij zullen hem centen zenden en assistenten / Die zullen ontbloeien tot procenten, / Het jaar dat men de Voerstreek voor een taal wilde redden / Die men anders alleen in advertenties leest / Het jaar dat men dwars door de Markt van Oudenaarde / Een autoweg heeft gepland voor het haastig vee, / Jaar van de zwam in de Belgische schedelpan, / Jaar dat likte aan de trog van vergane folklore, / En, gelukkig verweg van onze spaarkous en onze volksdans, / Het jaar van de escalade daar waar / De kinderen zich grauw van de vrees in de moerassen graven, / ("Geef hen heden onze dagelijkse napalm, / en later onze conserven en onze gebeden!") / Het jaar dat de lach vervriest / Als men zijn regeerders ziet scharrelen op rentevoeten, / Het zoveelste zevende vette jaar, / Het was dit jaar dat ik in dit dorp kwam wonen / Met boeken en een vrouw en een kind / Dat groeit terwijl ik vertel over de tijgers in het Oosten.'; A shorter version of the poem was translated in: Claus, H., *Greetings: Selected Poems* (Orlando, 2005), pp. 24-25.

Claus' poem there are many undefined matters, which would be unthinkable in a regular account in a newspaper. As a poet Claus doesn't have to obey empirical validity or factual accuracy. He has the freedom to be ambiguous and subjective.

In the end of the poem Claus uses a strategy similar to that of the new journalists: he returns to his personal situation and stresses his own role. After having dealt with all these worldly affairs he addresses his private concerns. Because above all, to him 1965 was the year in which he moved from the city (Gent) to a small village (Nukerke). Family life has been his main concern. However, 'the tigers in the East' that are part of the bedtime stories he reads to his son, could also refer to the real political troubles in the Eastern part of the world (Vietnam, Korea, etc.). The private and the public are interconnected. The inclusion of his personal life is not only an important characteristic of the above discussed poem, but also of Claus's literary commitment in the 1960s. In all of his writings he has stressed his personal involvement or his personal anger. He didn't write about certain topics because he was expected to do so, but because they affected him as a person in his daily life. So he said to Fernand Auwera in *Schrijven of schieten?*: 'A big part of my commitment is negative. I write from the same desperation from which I observe political life.'<sup>54</sup> Claus's commitment is always highly personally motivated.

### *Conclusion*

A few years after his attendance at the Anti Atomic Bomb manifestation in Amsterdam, Claus critically looked back at the undertaking and mocked his own performance: 'I spoke to the people out of pure luxury. It didn't mean anything and it wasn't efficient. Only a few vegetarians would nod enthusiastically. And then what happened? In politics you can only do right as a professional politician or as a terrorist.'<sup>55</sup> This skeptic attitude was typical for his behavior at the time. Claus, as a writer and poet, was never very eager to directly discuss social and political topics. He was concerned with the literary level of his works and therefore avoided being to overtly committed. Still, in the 1960s Claus felt he had to deal with certain topics and tried to incorporate these issues in his literature – especially in his poetry. He did not really believe literary engagement could change the world, but he still kept trying, he kept sending his messages to the population.

Claus not only took the stand in Amsterdam in 1962, but on many other occasions. For instance at the Anti Censorship Protest Read-In in Antwerp on March 15, 1968, where he performed his poem 'Aan de gecensureerden'

<sup>54</sup> Auwera, *Schrijven of Schieten?*, p.91.

<sup>55</sup> De Bruyn, F., 'Claus uit Apenland', *Avenue* (May 1968).

[To the censored']. A few weeks later he was also present at the Second Anti Censorship Protest Read-In in Brussels on May 20, where he read a text called 'De erotische vrijheid kan een wapen zijn' ['The erotic freedom can be a weapon'].<sup>56</sup> And at the end of the sixties Claus became fascinated by the Cuban revolution. After traveling to Cuba he transformed his admiration for the revolution in the long poem 'Cuba Libre'.<sup>57</sup>

For Claus, the public poems were a means to overcome some of the obstacles concerning his literary commitment. By addressing a specific audience, he was able to be more direct and concrete. And in contrast to his earlier poetic works, these poems were much more accessible and understandable. Claus seemed to have broadened his view and had become more open to all kinds of daily sources of inspiration. The morning paper could be a reason to write a poem, which would be published only a few days later. Claus would extensively research the topics he was going to address and regularly integrated references and factual information in his poems. Still, objectivity was never a goal. His ambiguous poems would always leave certain aspects to the imagination of the reader. And he would always connect the worldly affairs to his own personal situation.

Although the case of Hugo Claus has been used to demonstrate some of the issues concerning literary commitment in the 1960s, it cannot be considered a highly representative case. While many literary writers chose to adopt different genres and turned to nonfiction, Claus kept writing poetry. Unlike his friend Mulisch, he would not consider giving up poetry or fiction. Still, just like his colleagues he manifested a greater interest in objectivity and factuality, and tried to deal with major social and political issues. To some extent this shift in literature can be considered rather different from the developments within journalism. While literary writers turned away from fiction, the new journalists embraced narrative and literary techniques. While writers strived for more objective accounts of reality, journalists questioned the possibility of being objective.

Instead of regarding these developments as contradictory, I would like to argue that both professions shifted towards each other. The new journalists extensively used literary techniques in order to change their profession for the better. Based on the above case study, the same applies to the field of literature: literary writers were able to transform themselves by

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Beeks, S., 'Naakt Protest van Hugo Claus: Een Reconstructie van de zaak Masscheroen', *Zacht Lawijd* 2 (2010), pp. 2-31.

<sup>57</sup> Together with Harry Mulisch he worked on the collective opera on the Cuban revolution called *Reconstructie*. See: Bax, S. and Beeks, S., 'Een Artistieke Guerrillagroep: Hugo Claus, Harry Mulisch en de Opera Reconstructie', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal en Letterkunde* 4 (2011), pp. 390-419.

the use of journalistic techniques and strategies. So by dealing with the changes of the revolutionary 1960s, an interesting overlap of two professions of writing developed.

## THE LARRIKIN LINK BETWEEN JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE IN 1960'S AUSTRALIA

Josie Vine

### *Larrikinism and the Journalist-Author's Public Responsibility.*

Journalism and authorship each have a long tradition of anti-authoritarianism in the Australian context.<sup>1</sup> What is different about the writers of the 1960s, however, is that they were functioning in an era when the nation was struggling out of one of its most oppressively conservative decades. It was during this time that the defiant, brash and rude Larrikin personification enjoyed resurgence among journalists and authors. The Larrikin, an idiosyncratically Australian concept, is defined by rebellion, anti-authoritarianism, and mockery of the pompous. It were these traits that have linked journalism and literature in their common goal of pushing Australia into a more liberal era.

During the 1950s, Australian journalists and writers operated under intensified pressure to conform to a widespread anti-Communism driven by then Prime Minister Robert Menzies. Here, despite Australian journalism's Larrikin tradition, many media outlets conformed to the Menzies' line.<sup>2</sup> Within this testing climate of prevailing social conservatism - in the words of dissident journalist, Wilfred Burchett - 'initiatives for independent investigation on matters affecting policy were discouraged; objective reporting became more difficult.'<sup>3</sup>

It was against this repressive backdrop that Australia moved into the 1960s, and it is here that we can examine how the resurgence of the crucial common element of Larrikinism between journalists and authors - in the words of union and professional association, The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance - 'pushed back that line' to 'inform citizens' and 'animate democracy'.

The connections between journalism and literature have, until recently, been much derided by the academy in Australia. This attitude was probably best illustrated in Australian literary doyen, Patrick White's infamous comment about novels that contain 'the dreary dun-coloured off-shoots of

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<sup>1</sup> Vine, J., 'The Larrikin Paradox', *The International Journal of the Humanities* 8 (2010), pp. 271 - 284.

<sup>2</sup> Ward, R., *Australia* (Englewood Cliffs, 1969), p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Burchett, G. and Shimmin, N. eds., *Memoirs of Rebel Journalist: The Autobiography of a rebel Journalist* (Sydney, 2005), p. 272.

journalistic realism'.<sup>4</sup> However, as journalism scholar, David Conely says, although 'journalism and fiction usually are not mentioned in the same sentence unless in an unflattering sense', they do have 'much in common'.<sup>5</sup> Journalism academic Matthew Ricketson takes this argument a step further, going as far as to say much of Australia's best journalism can be found in literary format, and many of Australia's best journalists have practiced their craft within the covers of a book:

Some problems, whether it is police corruption or treatment of mental illness or improving the lot of indigenous Australians, are knotty and complicated and need sustained and careful attention from ... those who tell true stories.<sup>6</sup>

As such, journalism written in literary format, argues Ricketson, 'continues the tradition of journalism as the fourth estate'.<sup>7</sup> In other words, literature and journalism, arguably, have a common public responsibility to facilitate and protect the integrity of the public sphere, including ensuring equality of representation, balance of opinion and transparency of authority upon it. By acting as the public sphere's champion, literary and journalistic practice protects democratic liberty from authority. Indeed, the Australian media's national union and main professional association, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), articulates this role clearly:

Journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give practical form to freedom of expression.<sup>8</sup>

In many nations, most notably the United States of America, freedom in the public sphere is constitutionally enshrined. But Australia has no such constitutional guarantee. Although today's Australian social institutional authorities may agree with the media's public responsibility in principle, this agreement does not necessarily translate into practice, leaving it largely

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<sup>4</sup> Bennett, B., 'Literature and Journalism: The Fiction of Robert Drew', *Ariel* 20 (1989), p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Conely, D., 'Birth of a Novelist, Death of a Journalist', *Australian Studies in Journalism* 7 (1998), p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Ricketson, M., *Australian Journalism Today* (South Yarra, 2012), p. 218.

<sup>7</sup> Ricketson, M., 'Newspaper Feature Writing in Australia: 1956 – 1996', in: Curthoys, A. and Schultz, J. eds., *Journalism: Print, Politics and Popular Culture* (St Lucia, 1999), p. 183.

<sup>8</sup> Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, *Codes of Ethics* (Redfern, 2005), available at: <http://www.alliance.org.au/code-of-ethics.html>.

up to the media themselves to facilitate and protect the integrity of the public sphere.

As MEAA President, Christopher Warren reiterated in 2005, a free media 'never emerges as a gift':

It needs to be fought for. It never attains a state of perfection, but rather sits on that uneasy fault line of power between government's desire for control and continuing pressure from society. Above all, it depends on the preparedness of the media, itself, to push back that line away from governmental regulation and towards a freer media.<sup>9</sup>

In 1859, John Stuart Mill argued that the 'struggle' between liberty and authority was 'the most conspicuous feature' throughout history.<sup>10</sup> Calling for a critique of convention, Mill argued that the 'tyranny of the majority' – or prevailing public opinion – could also be 'generally included' among the 'evils against which society must be on its guard.'<sup>11</sup>

It is with this in mind that this paper recalls Australian journalists and authors during the 1960s, and how their common Larrikin resurgence helped 'push back that line' away from socio-political 'tyranny', towards a 'freer media'.

Although the Larrikin, an idiosyncratically Australian concept, may have begun its life as a figure of violence and brutality, it has evolved into one of Australia's quintessential heroes.<sup>12</sup> So much so, in fact, that Larrikinism has become a burgeoning area of scholarly research. And it is here that we find our operational definition for this study for understanding Larrikinism within the culture of the journalist-author's public responsibility.

As literary academic, John Rickard points out, Larrikinism, by its very definition, shows 'little regard' for those in authority, while author Clem Gorman insists that Larrikinism is, 'above all' defiant.<sup>13</sup> This defiance is not silent; it is overt and not only against authority, but also what Mill described as the 'tyranny of the majority.'<sup>14</sup> When conceptualising Larrikinism as the common link between journalism and authorship, defiance can be seen as pivotal, from which all other characteristics cascade.

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<sup>9</sup> Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, *Australian Press Freedom Report*, (Redfern, 2005), p. 3

<sup>10</sup> Mill, J.S., *On Liberty*, in Lindsay, AD. ed., *Utilitarianism; Liberty; Representative Government* (London, 1962), p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> Bellanta, M., *Larrikins: A History* (St Lucia, 2012), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Rickard, J., 'Lovable Larrikins and Awful Ockers', *Journal of Australian Studies* 56 (1998), p. 78; Gorman, C., *The Larrikin Streak* (Sydney, 1990), p. x.

<sup>14</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 65.



If the Larrikin exists to defy those who are in authority, then s/he will also tend to hold affiliation with those who are not. J. Rickard makes this suggestion with his criterion, 'emotional attachment to working class origins', although the "working class" is not necessarily devoid of political or social authority.<sup>15</sup> C. Gorman comes closer to interpreting these affiliations when he describes the Larrikin as 'egalitarian' yet 'suffering fools badly', implying intolerance of any behaviour indicating pomposity.<sup>16</sup> For the Larrikin journalist-author cannot stomach pomposity, and will, according to both Rickard and Gorman, express his, or her, disdain through mockery. Rickard drives this point when he describes the Larrikin's ability to both 'take the piss' (Australian for mockery) as well as to 'stand in judgment.'<sup>17</sup>

Mocking pomposity is an expression of both defiance and the Larrikin's tendency to exceed limits. The Larrikin journalist-author will exceed both legislated limits (what Rickard describes as 'criminality'), as well as unwritten limits of social convention, such as exceeding the limits of alcohol consumption.<sup>18</sup>

Although the Larrikin is aware of the consequences of his/her, actions, a steadfast belief in his/her ability to render change in what academic and author, Kevin Childs describes as life made 'intolerable' by society compels the continuation of risk-taking.<sup>19</sup> In this way, the Larrikin journalist-author self-legitimises his/her own, often dubious, actions. As Rickard says, this self-justification, and the belief that the rest of the world should concur, renders the Larrikin an 'emotional innocent'.<sup>20</sup> As Childs says, the Larrikin is identified by 'immense courage' that borders on 'foolish zeal'.<sup>21</sup> With such a resolute sense of personal idealism, the Larrikin journalist-author is determined to continue defying authority and exceeding limits, and apparently willingly accepts the penalties as some sort of secular martyrdom. So, Larrikin, with defiance and criminality at his/her core, may appear an inappropriate lens through which to conceptualise the public responsibility of the journalist-author. However, if we examine the work and biographical details of Australian journalist-authors of the 1960s, we can see that the Larrikin can transcend perceptions of 'irresponsibility' to sit in the essential nexus between literature, journalism, and their common public

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<sup>15</sup> Rickard, 'Lovable Larrikins', p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> Gorman, *The Larrikin Streak*, p. x.

<sup>17</sup> Rickard, 'Lovable Larrikins', p. 85.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Childs, K., *The Prince of Australia and Other Rebels, Rogues and Ratbags* (South Melbourne, 2006), p. ix.

<sup>20</sup> Rickard, 'Lovable Larrikins', p. 85.

<sup>21</sup> Childs, *The Prince of Australia*, p. ix.

‘responsibility’. In short, the Larrikin resurgence 1960s may have reignited the Enlightenment figure among Australian journalists and authors, insofar as they had the requisite character and wherewithal so famously noted by Immanuel Kant to have ‘the courage’ to ‘make public use’ of their ‘reason’ during a time when Australia was ruled by the “tyranny of the majority”.<sup>22</sup>

*Australian Larrikin Journalist-Authors in the 1960s*

One of Australia’s most controversial author-journalists was (and still is, even more than 25 years after his death) Wilfred ‘Peter’ Burchett. (1911 – 1983) Burchett is possibly most famous for his coverage of Hiroshima’s devastation in 1945, and for his writing from behind ‘enemy’ lines during the Korean and Vietnamese conflicts. Such dissidence during Australia’s prevailing Cold War climate saw Burchett subject to decades of personal and professional attack, and, essentially, ex-communication from his country of birth. Subsequently, some champion Burchett as a symbol of journalism’s public responsibility.

However, there are some who believed (and still do believe) Burchett was nothing but a traitor. And there is evidence of this – Burchett was clearly a communist sympathizer. In 1974, Burchett sued long-time journalistic rival, Denis Warner, for defamation.<sup>23</sup> Although a jury found Burchett had, indeed, been defamed, evidence against him demonstrated his close relationships with the KGB, and communist leaders Chou En Lai and Ho Chi Minh.<sup>24</sup> Further, the court heard Burchett had been involved in the antithesis of Western journalism’s value and belief system - partisan communist propaganda and forced confessions from prisoners-of-war about germ warfare in Korea.<sup>25</sup> Considering the dubious nature of Burchett’s objectivity – undeniably subjective and pro-communist – his supporters may find themselves questioning their belief in him as a champion of the public sphere.

However, a Larrikin reinterpretation of Burchett shows his position transcends historical ‘realities’, to sit in a type of nexus between larrikinism, and normative theories on the journalist-author’s public responsibility.

Although Burchett had written several anti-US, pro-communism pieces prior to the 1960s, it was during this decade that his writing achieved a wider Western audience. From 1962 to 1974, he wrote seven books

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<sup>22</sup> Kant, I., ‘What is Enlightenment’, in: White Beck, L. et al. eds., *On History*, (Indianapolis, 1963), p. 3 – 10.

<sup>23</sup> Perry, R., *The Exile* (Richmond, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> Meray, T., *On Burchett* (Belgrave, 2008).

supporting the communists in Indochina.<sup>26</sup> He also continued writing for newspapers, but now, instead of being buried in obscure Marxist journals, he was making front-page news as the mainstream western media started connecting the growing popularity of the anti-war movement with ratings and circulation figures.

In 1957, Burchett moved to Moscow, where he was correspondent for the left wing New York weekly, *The National Guardian*, recruited for *The Daily Express* and later for *The Sunday Express* and *National Times*.<sup>27</sup> He was there to cover the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party, where Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin, resulting in a period of greater openness and tolerance within the Soviet Union and détente with the West. But Burchett was less interested in Kremlinology, and more concerned with the pioneering concepts related to the conquest of space and the population of, what he described as the ‘virgin lands’ of Siberia, Kazakhstan and the Altai territory - themes reverberating from his rugged childhood in the Australian Gippsland outback.<sup>28</sup>

The two major books resulting from this period were *Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin: First Man in Space* and *Come East Young Man*.<sup>29</sup> Admittedly, for those who believe the Soviet Union was an evil empire, the books are pure propaganda. But for others, the books can be viewed as alternative assessments of the post-war and post-Stalin USSR. Remarkably similar to the Larrikin’s emotional innocence, even “foolish zeal”, these publications demonstrate Burchett’s genuine belief the new regimes offered a viable alternative to what appeared to be a failing capitalism.

Despite the clear, and bordering on naïve, glorification of the communist ideal, these publications offered some alternative in the western public sphere otherwise dominated by McCarthyite anti-communism. In other words, in these books, Burchett was, in a very Larrikin way, defying the “tyranny of the (western) majority” in order to provide some sort of diversity on the public sphere. Here, it is salient to note that the only westerners permitted to interview Gagarin were Burchett and his colleague, Anthony Purdy.<sup>30</sup> But for them, arguably, Western audiences would have little knowledge of the apparent pride the USSR had in achieving the first man in space.

If offering diversity of opinion is part of the journalist-author’s responsibility, then Burchett can be seen as fulfilling it by his determination

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<sup>26</sup> Perry, *The Exile*, p. 179.

<sup>27</sup> Burchett, G. and Shimmin, N., *Rebel Journalism: The Writings of Wilfred Burchett* (New York, 2007), p. 115.

<sup>28</sup> Burchett, W., *Come East Young Man* (Berlin, 1962).

<sup>29</sup> Burchett, W. and Purdy, A., *Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin: First Man in Space* (London, 1961); Burchett, *Come East Young Man*.

<sup>30</sup> Burchett and Shimmin, *Rebel Journalism*, p. 124.

to inform the Western world of life behind the 'Iron Curtain' in Communist societies. This he continued to do when, in the first half of 1962 Burchett visited the former states of Indochina and returned convinced that the US was preparing for full-scale military intervention.<sup>31</sup> For the next two decades he would defy the "tyranny of the majority" in America and his Australian home by denouncing US imperialism and the Vietnam war from behind enemy lines in countless books, articles, pamphlets, films, interviews and speeches. From November 1963, he showed the Larrikin's penchant for extremism, when he travelled for six months with Vietcong guerrillas through the jungles controlled by the National Liberation Front. Describing the journey as the 'greatest scoop since Hiroshima', Burchett lived with the NLF, marched with them, used their networks of tunnels and dodged US aerial attacks.<sup>32</sup>

We could denounce this move as embedment inverted. However, if we consider independently ensuring transparency of authority, and providing alternative opinions on the public sphere – or, in the MEAA's words, 'informing citizens and animating democracy' – as fundamental to the journalist-author responsibility, then Burchett's Larrikinesque insouciance had a democratic effect insofar as it resulted in independent eye-witness accounts of the US/ Australian offensive, and its consequences, in Vietnam.

What we need to remember here is that Burchett was so intent on independent investigation that he moved to North Vietnam in the 1960s to report from the 'enemy' side, albeit supported, according to historian Robert Manne, by two battalions and accompanied by two bodyguards.<sup>33</sup> Burchett was atypical in this – most Western journalists who covered the conflict did so only with approval from the Government, and from the side of South Vietnam soldiers (ARVN) or American troops.<sup>34</sup>

But National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) cadres had briefed Burchett on the situation in South Vietnam, and on exactly how the armed struggle started. In the true fashion of the insouciant, defiant Larrikin, Burchett wanted to see the war's effects on the "enemy" for himself:

It was all fascinating material but I wanted to get closer to the heart of things – much closer to Saigon were the NLF leadership was located. The fact that I represented no one but myself favoured my enterprise.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 151.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 183.

<sup>33</sup> Manne, R., 'Agent of Influence', *The Monthly* (2008), p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> Burchett and Shimmin, *Memoirs of a Rebel Journalist*, pp. 523 – 524.

To do this, Burchett, demonstrating Larrikin tendency for criminality, entered Cambodia with false identity papers and twice illegally crossed the Cambodia-South Vietnam borders.<sup>36</sup> Here we can see extreme, even hazardous, behaviour emerging as a characteristic of the determined Larrikin journalist-author.

During this time, Burchett wrote articles and the book, *Vietnam: Inside Story of the Guerilla War*, propelling him back onto the front pages of newspapers and publishing houses in the West.<sup>37</sup> *Guerilla War* may be a slogan-soaked text, but it also provides an alternative viewpoint through the eyes of mountain tribes people and ordinary Vietnamese lowlands civilians. Further, what was to prove most controversial, it also offers interviews with American POWs. Despite its propaganda overtones, *Guerilla War* clearly stood as a product of diversity next to the jingoism of the Western public sphere.

Similarly, in 1964, Burchett adapted a series of articles for the New York *National Guardian* into narrative form. The result was *My Visit to the Liberated Zones of South Vietnam*.<sup>38</sup> Here we can see how complex topics can be dealt with when they are taken out of short newspaper format, and into the longer literary form. Among other things, this publication provided an insight into the plight of Vietnam's ethnic minorities during the US's "Special Warfare", a policy of moving peasants and minority groups into strategic hamlets away from the guerilla's political influences. As such, this publication shows the Larrikin's penchant for egalitarianism, as well as how the longer narrative form can go some way towards fulfilling the journalist-author's responsibility to redress the imbalance between those with, and those without, political power on the public sphere.

In the 1980 film documentary, *Public Enemy Number One*, an elderly and reflective Burchett explains why he sacrificed his nationality to cover the Korean and Vietnam conflicts from the Communist side:

I felt there should be a voice from the other side. An experienced Western journalist who'd give the other side's point of view... the public had to a great extent been fooled ... people were being kidded along, conned if you like, into going to war."<sup>39</sup>

And then viewers are provided with the historic footage of Ho Chi Minh explaining to Burchett the Viet Cong's military tactics against the French using his broad brimmed hat.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 545.

<sup>37</sup> Burchett, W., *Vietnam: Inside Story of the Guerilla War* (New York, 1965).

<sup>38</sup> Burchett, W., *My Visit to the Liberated Zones of South Vietnam* (Hanoi, 1964).

<sup>39</sup> Bradbury, D., *Public Enemy Number One: A Biography of Wilfred Burchett* (Canberra, 1980).

Not only does Burchett form a narrative about the Larrikin journalist-author's function in disclosure of authority and providing diversity on the public sphere, but it also demonstrates the Larrikin's function in "truth-telling". It is here we again see evidence of the journalist-author's naïve belief that s/he can render change in a world made "intolerable". Indeed, biographer, Roland Perry, even describes Burchett as one of the 'last' of the 'revolutionary romantics' and 'true believers' in the extreme left.<sup>40</sup>

Burchett himself was quite open about his personal, very larrikin-like, belief in his own ability to make a better world.

If ever there was a clear case of justice versus injustice, it was there in Vietnam. For over 2000 years the Vietnamese people had been on the receiving end of injustice and if ever people deserved support from a friendly typewriter, it was the Vietnamese people.<sup>41</sup>

Despite demonisation and ostracisation (Australia refused to reissue Burchett's passport on the basis that he was a suspected Communist until the more liberal Whitlam Government took power in 1974), Burchett steadfastly maintained it was his role to defy the "tyranny of the majority", and publicise all perspectives, particularly those deemed as "wrong":

As a journalist, there is a very great responsibility ... to be absolutely free of any doctrine or any ideological optical devices [to be able to] really seek the truth, get the truth and publish the truth.<sup>42</sup>

According to Burchett, he never was a member or provider of donations to a Communist, or indeed, any other political party.<sup>43</sup> Burchett's denials indicate that, at least in his own mind, his actions did not constitute propaganda, but merely fulfilled journalism's Enlightenment-informed responsibility to provide the public sphere with alternative opinion, including that which is deemed as "wrong" by the "tyranny of the majority".

But it wasn't only in the war zones that journalism and authorship were partnering up through larrikinism to diversify the public sphere. Larrikins on home soil were 'pushing back the boundaries' as well. Here, literature's greatest wedding present to the union was the very larrikin trait of 'taking the piss', or satire. A literary technique that stretches as far back as ancient Greece, satire had long been used in journalism to reveal social injustice,

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<sup>40</sup> Perry, *The Exile*, p. 173.

<sup>41</sup> Burchett, *Memoirs of a Rebel Journalist*, p. 549.

<sup>42</sup> Bradbury, *Public Enemy Number One*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

hypocrisy and pomposity (think Charles Dickens and Jonathan Swift). But it was during the '60s that it enjoyed a revival among Australian journalist-authors as a tool to make public use of their reason. And yet, as the series of *Oz* magazine's Australian court cases (1964 - 1967) displayed, the manifestation of mockery as a means of making public use of reason was still highly vulnerable to legal authority.

As a magazine, *Oz* (1963 – 1969) applied literary technique, particularly irony and over-statement, to the social and political issues of the day. Edited by Sydney University students, Richard Neville (1941), Richard Walsh (1942) and Martin Sharp (1940), *Oz* set a precedent in political satire and dealing with taboo social issues. The publication's whole reason for being was to mock Australian society, particularly its prevailing "wowsersism" (Australian for conservative). By "taking the piss" out of all Australian sacred cows, *Oz* provided a platform for a diversity of opinion on the police force, religion, censorship, the White Australia policy and the mainstream media.<sup>44</sup>

*Oz* was a self-consciously dissident organ, as Neville points out in a salient analysis of its role in the Australian public sphere at the time:

In Australia one was responding satirically to the daily diet of pomposity, intolerance and suicidal idiocy, employing, like most satirists, a frame of reference obvious and acceptable to all.<sup>45</sup>

For its efforts in introducing a broad diversity of ideas into the public sphere, *Oz* was found to have a 'tendency to deprave, corrupt or injure' national morals and its editors were taken to court in Australia and charged with obscenity.<sup>46</sup> Despite the drawn out court case, Neville, Walsh and Sharp defiantly continued producing their magazine.

According to high-profile Australian public intellectual, Mungo MacCallum, this was a watershed case, with a serious backlash in favour of the student editors, 'even from the establishment media', who were 'sufficiently far-sighted' to realise the antediluvian laws might threaten their own interests if pursued to their logical conclusion.<sup>47</sup>

The Larrikin tradition of mocking pomposity among journalists and authors has a long tradition in Australia that stretches back to colonial times.<sup>48</sup> However, it appears to have enjoyed resurgence in Australia through the 1960s in reaction to what was seen as US-induced consumerism,

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<sup>44</sup> Neville, R., *Hippie Hippie Shake: The Dreams, the Trips, the Trials, the Love-ins, the Screw Ups ... the Sixties* (Port Melbourne, 1995), pp. 37–45.

<sup>45</sup> Neville, R., *Play Power* (London, 1970), p. 139.

<sup>46</sup> Neville, *Hippie Hippie Shake*, p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> MacCallum, M., *The Man Who Laughs* (Potts Point, 2001), p. 106.

<sup>48</sup> Vine, *The Larrikin Paradox*, pp. 271-284.

conformity and conventional morality. As MacCallum says, the Australian media, after decades of conforming to the most “wowseryish” standards, were ‘finally starting to have a cautious go’.<sup>49</sup>

This was helped in no small way by Rupert Murdoch’s then-radical idea of a national newspaper. Aptly titled *The Australian*, this breakthrough publication was fresh and new, including its irreverent style, layout, political cartoons and political persuasion. *The Australian*’s modernity extended to its brash new literary style of journalism. While the publication continued offering readers the facts and figures of the day, it also employed journalists to write satirical columns – a revolutionary concept at the time. One of these was MacCallum, who continues to pen satirical fiction and non-fiction today.

Indeed, MacCallum claims his ability to “take the piss” generated regular political fallout for his editor, Adrian Deamer:

I used [the column] increasingly to take the piss out of the government in general, and the Prime Minister in particular. [proprietor Rupert] Murdoch continually asked Deamer to pull the column. Deamer replied spiritedly that he would not indulge in political censorship.<sup>50</sup>

A self-confessed ‘smart arse’, MacCallum applied the literary technique of satire to the political issues of the day with outrageous abandon.<sup>51</sup> His signature style would even sometimes include rhyming verse:

Polynomial polyhedrons all have polygons to boot  
While polyanthus pollinates and polymers pollute  
And when the polysyllables get rather too prolix  
It all comes down to polling day and poli-tics.<sup>52</sup>

Verse may appear a long stretch from journalism, and yet the ridiculousness in the rhyme and alliteration possibly reveals more about political pomposity than any straight hard news story. Here we can see the Larrikin-author’s ability to “take the piss” fulfils a public responsibility and this, significantly, can take many literary forms.

Indeed, journalism historian Sharyn Pearce, takes this a step further, saying that ‘most’ newspaper columnists create fictional and semi-fictional

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<sup>49</sup> MacCallum, *The Man Who Laughs*, p. 106.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 159.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 111.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 161.



constructs.<sup>53</sup> This is certainly evident in the work of one of Pearce's biographical subjects, Charmian Clift (1923 – 1969).

Clift is a highly significant figure when looking at 1960's Australian journalism. She was one of those rare individuals of the time that combined motherhood and career – a nonconformist move in itself. But it came at a price. When she followed her more-famous literary husband, George Johnston, home from their life on the Greek island of Hydra in 1964, she was suffering alcoholism and depression.<sup>54</sup> But when *The Sydney Morning Herald* commissioned her to write a weekly column demonstrating 'real writing, from a woman's point of view' (original emphasis), she cleverly constructed a fictional persona, self-assured and successful.<sup>55</sup> As Clift's son, Martin, once noted:

Most of her writing after we came back to Australia was in the column [and] was not fiction at all – except of course that it was. Any columnist of her kind adapts the persona of friend talking to friends ... it's a very artful, fictionalised, literary construct.<sup>56</sup>

As Pearce says, Clift's 'literary disguise', her 'performance in print' was 'absolutely necessary' in order to 'cope' with her 'disintegrating and fragmented' reality.<sup>57</sup> Between the articles on knitting patterns and tips on home-make-overs that dominated the "Women's Pages" of the 1960s, Clift provoked discussion and controversy about significant social issues – a defiant move in itself for the time. Even her estranged husband was impressed with the legacy of Clift's nonconformity; she put 'guts and sinew into what had been the bland formulations of the women's pages', he commented after her death.<sup>58</sup> It is in this "guts and sinew" that we see her Larrikin-like authorship fulfilling the journalist-author's public responsibility.

Like other Larrikin journalist-authors of the time, Clift was concerned with the US-induced conformism and mediocrity that appeared to be creeping into Australian suburbia. In 'A Sense of Property', Clift allows her wit to shine in a scathing attack on suburban property, one of which she imagines procuring:

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<sup>53</sup> Pearce, S., *Shameless Scribblers: Australian Women's Journalism 1880 – 1995* (Rockhampton, 1998), p.153.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 150.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 151, 152.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 154.

<sup>58</sup> Clift, C., 'A Sense of Property', in: Wheatley, N. ed., *Trouble in Lotus Land* (North Ryde, 1990), pp. 148–151.

I am aware that all sorts of human dramas are enacted behind the grilled doors and contemporary curtains, and all sorts of odd and interesting people live in streets like these, but I would never, never in this quirkiest moments of fancy, have imagined myself joining them. Not on your nelly.<sup>59</sup>

In her antiauthoritarian moods, she would show her revulsion over Australia's seemingly happy compliance to fight the largely American war in Vietnam. Although she admits she is not 'personally' a conscientious objector, she is certainly unfazed by the fact that her employer, as with the majority of Australia's media, was solidly behind national military involvement.<sup>60</sup> This is particularly evident in her essay after President Lyndon B Johnson's ticker-tape procession into Sydney:

Certainly the whole affair was a tolerably accurate reproduction of a Roman triumph, organised to a degree that has never been attempted here before, from the strategically-placed claques of little children to the cheer leaders to the ticker tape to the inane slogans to the formidable security measures, which might be common enough on the other side of the world but are alien here ...<sup>61</sup>

Yet Clift was also anti-British during a time when prevailing public opinion overwhelmingly still clung to the skirt-strings of the "Mother country". Infuriated by this nationalistic pomposity, Clift regularly mocked Australia's reliance on other countries:

All this has a sort of afterglow feeling about it, nostalgic hangover from the days when people spoke of England as home, and the English spoke of us as "colonials", and young ladies were taken on Orient liners by their hopeful mamas to have a season in London and be presented at Court.<sup>62</sup>

Clift was, in general, an advocate of an independent Australia, something that she saw as doomed if the nation was not shaken out of its 'strange apathy'.<sup>63</sup> Here, she saw migration as the answer to creating a new, independent and unique nation. She often urged Australians to stop congratulating themselves for simply tolerating migrants and do more to

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 149.

<sup>60</sup> Clift, C., 'A Matter of Conscience', in: Wheatley, N. ed., *Being Alone With Oneself* (North Ryde, 1991), p. 88.

<sup>61</sup> Clift, C., 'The Right of Dissent', in: Wheatley, N. ed., *Trouble in Lotus Land*, p. 177.

<sup>62</sup> Clift, C., 'On Being a Kangaroo', in: Wheatley, N. ed., *Trouble in Lotus Land*, p. 268.

<sup>63</sup> Clift, C., *Images in Aspic* (Sydney, 1989).

welcome them. In 'On Gathering No Moss', Clift, typically, exposes the xenophobia and superficiality of Australian attitudes:

I have an idea that the shockingness of their actions lies in the fact that we go on deluding ourselves about the desirability of Australia as a place of domicile and way of life and expect that migrants should be grateful for the opportunity of sharing it – not as equals indeed because that would be going too far.<sup>64</sup>

It may have been her experience as a returned ex-patriot that underpinned Clift's support for the new wave of migrants. But it was also certainly her sense of social justice, her sense of responsibility to provide voice to those without political power on the public sphere. For example, when Australians were asked to decide in the 1967 referendum whether to give indigenous peoples the vote, she was unafraid to point out the nation's xenophobia:

We can never give back to the Aboriginal people what we have destroyed. All we can do now is get on with the business of assimilating them ... in our own version of society, which indeed might have nothing of the dignity, morality and cohesion that their own used to have for all those thousands and thousands of years before we started messing and meddling ...<sup>65</sup>

Clift's championship of the underprivileged extended to the widows who were forced to accept the tiny government-funded pension. And yet, in true Larrikin-like defiance, she also critiqued the reigning ideology that women should be homemakers and mothers, showing a style of second-wave feminism that was before her time:

It is with a deep and abiding sense of horror that I look back on those interminable years of nauseating bunny rabbit invitations, coconut ice, apple-bobbing ... What exquisite relief lies in the realisation that one is finally immune from snot-nosed whingers and spoilt screamers ...<sup>66</sup>

Clift's work is, in one sense, fiction, subjectively constructed, and may be viewed by traditional empiricists as barely related to journalism at all. But if a journalist-author's function in a western liberal democracy goes beyond the conveyance of mere facts, then journalism's traditional framework of objectivity will struggle. In Clift's "essays" we can see literary technique -

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<sup>64</sup> Clift, C., *The World of Charmian Clift* (Sydney, 1970).

<sup>65</sup> Clift, C., 'Now You See Them, Now You Don't', in: Wheatley, *Trouble in Lotus Land*, p. 236.

<sup>66</sup> Clift, *The World of Charmian Clift*.

the construction of atmosphere, emotion and argument using metaphor and layers of description – can go some way towards making sense of the complex social and political issues that pervaded Australia in the 1960s.

### *Conclusion*

There is no doubt that journalism and fiction *do* occupy different domains; journalism is about covering real events, issues and people within an objective framework, while the novelist's primary concern is to tell a compelling story – objectivity is rarely a consideration. And yet the two activities share a common belief in the virtue and necessity of freedom on the public sphere.

The Larrikin is, in no shape or form, objective. But s/he can be seen as not only the personification of the journalist-author's common belief, but also its guardian. When the public sphere's integrity is threatened, the Larrikin charges in with little thought for the consequences, champions the underdog and slays the authoritarian foe. Traditional empiricists may criticise those who believe this to be their function as naïve. Yet, as the MEAA president says, freedom of speech 'needs to be fought for', particularly in a society with no constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech, such as Australia.<sup>67</sup>

High-profile Larrikin journalist, Phillip Knightley, questions whether objectivity is involved with journalism's function in his foreword to the first uncensored publication of Burchett's autobiography:

What are journalists for? Whose side are they on? Can they tell the truth or are they hopelessly compromised by all the cultural and political and patriotic baggage they carry?<sup>68</sup>

This central and timeless reflection on Western journalism's role continues later in the same text, when Burchett is reporting from Chunking in 1941:

The question was posed, as on many other occasions – how can we carry out our obligations to editors and readers and at the same time fulfil one's larger responsibilities as a member of society'.<sup>69</sup>

'To whom am I responsible?' is a question every serious journalist-author faces and, in the resurgence of Larrikinism in 1960s Australia, we start to consider possible answers.

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<sup>67</sup> Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> Knightley, P., 'Foreword', in: Burchett, *Memoirs of a Rebel Journalist*, p. xvi.

<sup>69</sup> Burchett, *Rebel Journalist*, p. 154.

During this time of intense conformity and sycophancy in Australia, making sense of complex and pervasive political and social problems required a marriage between literary and journalistic practices. This type of contribution to the public sphere was inherently subjective, and yet it fulfilled the journalist-author's fundamental responsibility. It was this ability that makes the work of the journalist-authors considered in this chapter so enduring. Today, it is the Larrikins who are remembered, whose narratives are embedded in the collective memory of the Australian literary community, and whose legacy is passed on from one practitioner to the next.

To fulfill their responsibility, these writer-journalists manifested the Larrikin spirit. Indeed, it was the Larrikin's irresponsibility that functioned as a crucial link between Australian journalism and literature in their common responsibility to, in the words of the MEAA, 'push back that line' 'towards a freer media' during the Australian public sphere's decade of need.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, *Press Freedom Report*, p.1.

# WRITER-JOURNALISTS AND THE SUDDEN TURN IN APPRECIATION FOR THEIR WORK IN THE SIXTIES.

## THE CASE OF LOUIS PAUL BOON.<sup>1</sup>

Annie van den Oever & Ernst Bruinsma

### *Introduction*

In this article we explore the phenomenon of the so-called writer-journalist within the context of the changing relationship between journalism and literature in Flanders in the sixties. The case study we present here is devoted to Louis Paul Boon (1912-1979). He is generally considered the best-known innovator of the novel in the Low Countries, famous for his diptych *Chapel Road* (1953) and *Summer in Termuren* (1956). Furthermore, he is known as a journalist working for several newspapers since the mid-forties.<sup>2</sup> Following Myriam Boucharenc, Doug Underwood, Marie-Françoise Melmoux-Montaubin, Piet Hagen, and others, we use the term 'writer-journalist' here for Boon and other writers who dedicate themselves to prose narratives and literary genres as well as to news media and a diversity of journalistic genres.<sup>3</sup>

The 'golden sixties' created a remarkable turning point in appreciation for his work.<sup>4</sup> Though his writing was considered 'loose', 'fragmentary' and

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<sup>1</sup> We wish to thank A.A. Troost for her extensive contributions to this article. All quotes are translated into English by us, unless indicated otherwise in the notes or the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of Boon's journalistic contributions to a variety of newspapers, see the introductions to a series of books: Boon, L.P., *Het literatuur- en kunstkritische werk. I. De roode vaan II. Front III. 'De Vlaamse Gids IV. Vooruit* (Antwerpen, 1994-1997) and furthermore De Wispelaere, P., *De kunstopvattingen en de literair-kritische praktijk van Louis Paul Boon in de bladen De roode vaan en Front (1945-1950)* (Tilburg, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> See Boucharenc, M., *L'écrivain-reporter au coeur des années trente* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, 2004); Underwood, D., *Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700-2000* (Cambridge, 2008); Melmoux-Montaubin, M.F., *L'écrivain-journaliste au XIXe siècle: un mutant des lettres* (Saint-Étienne, 2003); Hagen, P., *Journalisten in Nederland. Een persgeschiedenis in portretten 1850-2000* (Amsterdam, 2002), p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> The term 'golden sixties' was used only recently by Frans Hellemans in *Knack*, commemorating Boon and the turn in his fame in the sixties as part of the opening of the Boon Year 2012. Hellemans, F., 'De castratie van Louis Paul Boon', *Knack*, 6 March 2012 [online publication, consultable at:

‘incoherent’ within the context of Flemish literature of the forties and fifties, and his colloquial writing style a ‘mumbo jumbo’, in the sixties critics and readers suddenly responded to his work with great appreciation.<sup>5</sup> We argue that the changing relationship between journalism and literature in the international context of the 1960s as suggested by Underwood, Hagen, Huub Wijffes, and others, helped to create a context for the remarkable shift in appreciation, from a denouncement of Boon’s loose, fragmentary and colloquial style to accepting these very same qualities and labelling them as innovative.<sup>6</sup>

This article reflects on the relation between Louis Paul Boon’s early work as a romantic novelist and his practical work as a journalist, and explores the dynamics between the two, using the notion ‘writer-journalist.’ In relation to the research into literary journalism by John Hartsock and others, it investigates the impact Boon’s journalistic practice has had on his literary writing and vice versa.<sup>7</sup> More specifically, it explores the new writing methods and the new writer’s persona developed by Boon within the context of his work as a journalist. Moreover, it examines the remarkable turn in appreciation for the writer-journalist in the sixties as part of the changing relationship between journalism and literature in the new era of television in the sixties. Our approach draws on a rich field of study regarding Louis Paul Boon and his development as a writer and journalist in the post-war era.<sup>8</sup> We want to point out however that Boon was mostly

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<http://www.knack.be/nieuws/boeken/nieuws/de-castratie-van-louis-paul-boon/article-4000060348113.htm>

<sup>5</sup> The term ‘mumbo-jumbo’ was used by A.K. Rottiers in 1947, see: Rottiers, A.K., ‘Mijn kleine oorlog door L.P. Boon. Een kramp van walging en cynische spot, brutaal geuit, decadent’, *Het Handelsblad*, June 1, 1947; appreciation in the sixties came from Paul de Wispleare and others, see: De Wispleare, ‘De structuur van De Kapellekenbaan en Zomer te Ter-Muren’, in: *Louis Paul Boon* (Den Haag/Rotterdam, 1966).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Underwood, *Journalism and the Novel*; Hagen, *Journalisten in Nederland*, p. 83; Wijffes, *Journalistiek in Nederland 1850-2000*, pp. 338-341.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hartsock, J., *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> For a reflection on Boon’s shift away from being a ‘romantic genius à la Van Gogh’, see: Humbeeck, K. & Vanegeren, B., *Louis Paul Boon, een schilder ontspoord* (Antwerpen, 1994); Humbeeck, K., ‘Epiloog’, in: Boon, L.P. *Abel Gholaerts* (Amsterdam, 2008); Bruinsma, E., ‘De Van Gogh-ziekte, gelijk de mazelen’, *Literatuur* 20 (2003); see also a reflection on Boon and modernity: Bruinsma, E., *Louis Paul Boon en het modernisme in Vlaanderen* (Antwerpen, 1998); see, lastly, a reflection on Boon as innovator of the novel in the 1940s and 1950s: Van den Oever, A., *Life itself. Louis Paul Boon as innovator of the novel* (Champaign, 2008).

studied as an influential innovator of the novel so far, and not as a (new) journalist or writer-journalist.<sup>9</sup>

We will start this article with some notes on Boon's pre-war 'romantic' vision on art and journalism, to be followed by a reflection on Boon's journalistic practice in the decade following World War II, to create a context for understanding the revolutionary shift Boon was to make in the late forties. Many understand this shift as typical for the sixties: from a sovereign writer in the romantic tradition, to an anti-authorial writer-journalist who felt solidly embedded in the social and political circumstances of his day.

*Boon's Romantic Idea of the Writer as Creator and Genius in the Pre-war Era*

Boon's pre-war vision on literature (and art) was distinctly 'romantic.' Writers, just as painters and poets, were set apart from the other professions (house painters, journalists) as artists aspired to work in the pure realm of creation. They were supposedly, or ideally, not constrained by the social, political and material circumstances in which they lived. The changes Boon had to face as a writer in the decade just after the war forced him to profoundly rethink his vision and position as a writer. The circumstances turned him into a journalist with a daily writing practice closely tight up to everyday life as he simply had to earn a living for his family. It made him reconceptualize his position as a writer-journalist who *was* constrained by the material and social circumstances in which he lived. Some of the revolutionary shifts he came up with would appeal to young writers in Flanders in the sixties in many ways. In retrospect, one may even assume that Boon's novel perspectives on literature, articulated as early as the forties, facilitated the remarkable turn in appreciation for Boon as a writer-journalist in the sixties – as young writers finally picked up on them in that decade.

When Boon himself was a young writer, however, his thinking was still utterly romantic. Growing up in a petit-bourgeois family of craftsmen, he was destined to learn a craft. He was certainly not destined to become an artist or writer. At the age of fourteen, he was sent to a (Catholic) Technical School in 1926, to be expelled in 1928 – and this turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Boon instantly successfully enrolled in the Academy of Arts

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<sup>9</sup> Boon's work as a journalist – and its impact on his literary work and on the journalistic and literary work of others - is understudied so far. The same goes for his relation to New Journalism. Though Boon obviously was interested in Daniel Defoe, Emile Zola and other 'older' models of New Journalism, and reflected on their work elaborately, scholars did not yet address the topic of Boon and New Journalism fully.



[Academie voor Schone Kunsten] in his hometown, Aalst, near Brussels. This change in fate brought him closer to his romantic dream: to become a great artist like Vincent van Gogh. When going to school, Boon would dress up outrageously romantic, like a dandy, with a flamboyant black hat and a huge white scarf. During the thirties, Boon was fully emerged in the romantic dream of the artist as a genius and visionary, and just like Van Gogh he was most drawn to painting (e.g., he painted a set of worn shoes as Van Gogh had done before him).<sup>10</sup> As long as he was driven by that dream to become some sort of second Van Gogh, writing was only at the back of his mind, at best. He wrote some poetry and prose and published only once, in 1933.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Boon did already have a clear interest in news facts, and collected newspaper clippings on murderers and other ‘decadent’ symptoms of the times, as he would continue to do for the rest of his life.<sup>12</sup> However uninterested or even unwilling Boon was towards writing (especially writing for newspapers) in the pre-war years, the war brought about a change in Boon’s ideas, attitude, and behavior towards writing, journalism, newspapers, and literature.

*The Revolutionary Shift from Romantic Writer to Anti-authoritarian ‘Writer-journalist’ in the Post-war Era*

From 1944 onwards, even before being properly established as a novelist in the domain of Flemish literature, Louis Paul Boon took on work as a journalist, editor and general newspaperman. In other words, he started a career as a journalist. In December 1944 – when Belgium was not under German occupation anymore – he started writing *My little war*, his chronicle on the war that was published by the weekly magazine *Zondagspost*.<sup>13</sup> Boon now strongly felt he needed a job other than his work as a house painter. Not only because he badly needed the money, but also because he felt he needed work that met his artistic talents and ambitions. In July 1945 Boon became an editor at *De Roode Vaan*, a newspaper run by the Belgium Communist Party Belgium. Soon Boon would write for several other Flemish newspapers, like *Front* (1946-1950) and *Vooruit* among others. In subsequent years, Boon divided his energy between a constant stream of novels and journalistic pieces for a variety of newspapers and

<sup>10</sup> Boon, L.P., *Verscheurd jeugdportret* (Amsterdam, 1999), pp. 124-125.

<sup>11</sup> Only one thing was published by Boon in these years, in 1933, ‘De avond vraagt u’, a short piece of prose published in the magazine *De jonge generatie* [The young generation], see: Boon, L.P. & Humbeeck, K., *Album Louis Paul Boon. Een leven in woord en beeld* (Antwerpen, 2008), p. 236.

<sup>12</sup> Boon & Humbeeck, *Album Louis Paul Boon.*, p. 238.

<sup>13</sup> Humbeeck, ‘Een kramp van walg en cynische spot, brutaal geuit, decadent’, in: Boon, L.P., *Mijn kleine oorlog* (Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 355-371.

magazines, such as *Het Parool* (December 1946 till December 1947); *De Zweep* (November 27, 1949 till March 7, 1954); *Zondagspost* (December 1944 till December 1945); and *Het Laatste Nieuws*. In order to make a living, Boon – who was known for his communist and socialist sympathies – strategically used a number of different names, to ensure that all newspapers and magazines from the far left to the far right, the catholic ones included, would accept his contributions.

Coincidentally, he began writing a daily column in the socialist newspaper *Vooruit*, published in Ghent, on November 18, 1959, on the eve of that swinging new decade, the sixties. Boon would continue to write his then famous column until January 1978.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, he posed under the name ‘Boontje’, the diminutive form of Boon, when he wrote his columns for *Vooruit*. He had already been writing for this newspaper in a much earlier phase. On November 25, 1948, he started his column ‘Boontje’s bittere bedenkingen’ [Boontje’s bitter contemplations], which he re-used in fragments for his diptych. It was in this column on ‘bitterness’ that Boon shared his personal thoughts regarding his contributions to newspapers in the post-war years, and the impact journalism had on him as an ambitious novelist. Because Boon’s own analysis of his situation is illusive, we will cite from his thoughts extensively. The following quotes are part of a letter in which he presented his self-analysis to another writer, his friend Gaston Burssens.<sup>15</sup>

Dear Burssens, I have received your book [*Fabula rasa*, AvdO&EB] [...]: your book has taught me that Boontje is still too romantic, too sentimental, too idealistic in the wrong sense: in return I can only send you that little book about *My Little War*, as all the others are not worth the trouble. I could also send you a mountain of unpublished papers, to which I still give the grand name of Novel, but which have long since broken open this term, revealing its hollowness. At first I wrote as a good boy should, ever onward on a respectable novel . . . respectable in terms of form . . . form, oh boy, the form! . . . and

<sup>14</sup> This paper is currently called *de Morgen*.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Gaston Burssens is the author of *Fabula rasa* (1945), a fine example of grotesque prose in Flanders; it is the book he personally gave Boon. The avant-garde poet and writers of grotesque stories, Paul van Ostaijen (1896-1928), was an example to Burssens and Boon in some ways. Van Ostaijen renamed himself ‘zot Polleken’ [crazy little Paul]; the Flemish *ken* in ‘Polleken’ produces the diminutive form of Paul or Pol - as the *tje* in Boontje. Note that Van Ostaijen was an admirer and translator of Franz Kafka, the acclaimed Prague writer of grotesque prose (1883-1924). Boon knew Van Ostaijen’s (and Kafka’s) grotesque stories quite well via Gaston Burssens, who delivered Van Ostaijen’s late work after his untimely death as a young writer and poet in 1928.

which described in 9 fat parts the life of a rather thin heroine. But all of a sudden I no longer know why I stopped . . .<sup>16</sup>

Reason for stopping were ‘illness, death and lack of money’, as well as ‘doubt about the total value of all work.’<sup>17</sup> He takes notes on all this, as a journalist would, on an everyday basis. This induces an unforeseen shift: ‘the fat novel about the thin woman was put aside, while Boontje’s little notebook was growing into the *Iste illegale boek van boontje* [Boontje’s 1st Illegal Book].’ What happens next is even more remarkable: Boon inserts his non-fiction notes into his fiction. In a stroke of panic, however, Boon oversees it all: his notes cannot be made to fit into the book and they cannot be made to fit into Flemish Literature either. And then, in a sudden gush of despair:

[...] I chopped everything to pieces, the novel and the illegal book, plus the commentaries and the newspaper clippings, as well as a retelling of Reynard the Fox, I chopped all of that to pieces and decided to sell those pieces to a newspaper, as Columns. But what newspaper would be mad enough to make such a deal? Not a single paper, dear friend, not a single one. [...] Shall I just arrange these things and send them to you? . . . if the answer is yes, hold on tight to your chair because there’s a chance that it will be the end of you. In the meantime, however, I have laid down my pen for good and have started painting again. Affectionately yours, Boontje.<sup>18</sup>

This personal letter from ‘Boontje’ (as he had signed it) to Burssens was made public under the title ‘Letter to Another Writer’ in *Vooruit* on January 27, 1949. Boon had started using this pseudonym ‘Boontje’ from early on in his career, as he tried to mark a divide between his writer’s different personae.<sup>19</sup> ‘Louis Paul Boon,’ the grander (family) name, was to be used on the covers of his (grander) novels. The name ‘Boontje’, however, evoked something distinctly less ‘grand.’ In many ways the name ‘Boontje’ connotes the very qualities, which were generally rejected in the forties and fifties but appreciated in the sixties, such as looseness, everydayness, frankness, and lack of authority.<sup>20</sup> For a proper understanding of Boon’s

<sup>16</sup> Boon, L.P., ‘Letter to Another Writer’, *Vooruit*, 27 January 1949. Translation in English by Annette Visser. This translation of Boontje’s letter to Burssens in English was first published in: Van den Oever, *Life itself*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> Van den Oever, A., ‘Een Montaigne van de lage landen’, in: Weverbergh, J. ed., *Louis Paul Boon, Boontjes 1967* (Antwerpen, 2003), pp. 391-410; De Wispelaere, ‘Notities bij ‘Boontje’’, in: Joosten, J. & Muyres, J. eds., *Dromen en geruchten* (Nijmegen, 1997), pp. 57-69.

<sup>20</sup> See Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland 1850-2000*, pp. 338-341.

invention of his new writer's persona, it is key to understand the use of the Dutch diminutive form 'Boontje.' Firstly, the diminutive form 'Boontje' would normally only be used for someone quite small, for instance a child, in which case it is often used with affection, however sometimes condescendingly. Moreover, Boon used 'Boontje' for his journalistic writings and work 'on the side', which he wrote in the margins of his writing career, as he explained himself to Gaston Bursens. Thirdly, the name 'Boontje' is a much more colloquial (nick)name than 'Boon' or 'Louis Paul Boon.' Contrary to the last two names, the colloquial 'Boontje' evokes the figure of a distinctly *smaller* and younger person, less mature or 'unripe' even. In other words, 'Boontje' connotes a figure that lacks all signs of distinction and authority. Interestingly, both Boon's father and Boon himself were sometimes referred to in daily situations as 'Boontje', referring in a friendly way to the fact that they were small men – of only 165 centimetres. Finally, the use of the diminutive form itself, apart from colloquial use for children, small people and pets, has a special function and history in the tradition of grotesque literature, as it connoted 'un-ripeness' as well as a highly appreciated, childlike openness to change.<sup>21</sup> In retrospect, these qualities could easily be associated with the playfully subversive and anti-authoritarian 'gestures', which came suddenly in vogue in the sixties.<sup>22</sup> Boon came to be cherished by the younger generations as the pleasantly 'unserious', 'small' writer 'Boontje', who seemed to be one of them.

Reading 'Letter to another writer', one might claim that 'Boontje' was perhaps dramatizing his shift from 'Boon' to 'Boontje' in his now famous letter. In retrospect, however, after he had torn his extensive novel about 'Madame Odile' to pieces, his writing *did* acquire a whole new momentum and dynamic. It began in November 1946, when he made separate notes of all the thoughts and ideas that did not fit his novel: his day-to-day worries, his 'reflections on illness, death, and lack of money, on doubt about the total value of all work.' He published these so-called 'notes' under the name 'Boontje' in 'Het Notaboek Van Boontje...' [Boontje's Notebook] in the weekly *Front*. The implications for him as a writer were far more substantial than he had imagined. Looking back, the tearing-up of the

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<sup>21</sup> Exquisite examples in Flemish literature are to be found in the (grotesque) stories of Paul van Ostaïjen aka 'zot Polleken'. Remarkable is also the specific use of the diminutive form by the Polish writer of grotesque stories Witold Gombrowicz, who used the diminutive form in his characters' nicknames to stress their immaturity or 'unripe-ness'. He explored this specific quality with great sympathy in his novel *Ferdydurke* (1937). Quality, as 'unripe-ness' to Gombrowicz implied an openness to change, which is something adults, privileging the vast and the fixed, have lost.

<sup>22</sup> See: Hagen, *Journalisten in Nederland*, p. 83 and Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland 1850-2000*, pp. 338-341.

manuscript by the writer bearing the extravagant name of LOUIS PAUL BOON signalled his awareness that his old, grandly conceived novel project in which he had sought to describe the rise and fall of the bourgeoisie in Flanders ‘from the year 1900-and-something’ had lost out to his other, less significant, writer’s persona ‘Boontje’ whose ‘illegal’ writer’s ‘Notebook’ became increasingly more prominent. These writer’s semi-journalistic scribbles and notes, initially mere by-products of an authorship invested in a ‘large novel’, suddenly took centre stage. Unexpectedly, the incidental became essential. The ‘Notebook’ all of a sudden burgeoned into the ‘*Iste illegale boek van boontje*’ and now formed the core of the novel project, as Boon explained to Burskens.

*The Poet, Newspaper Writer and House Painter*

Boon’s transition from a writer *and* a journalist into a writer-journalist was closely related to his invention of a new type of novel and his later position as a true innovator of the novel.<sup>23</sup> To fully understand how Boon fitted all this into his life as a journalist and a novelist in the post-war years, it is important to point out once more that Boon tore up the novel on ‘Madame Odile’ without fully destroying the manuscript. He silently kept the remains and reworked them into a new type of novel: an ‘illegal’ novel-in-pieces. Moreover, in doing so, he was no longer in thrall as a writer to a romantic, sentimental idealism. Vincent van Gogh, as we have mentioned, was the artist with whom Boon had gladly identified himself with at an earlier stage of his authorship, and who had provided him the romantic and idealised model of an artist as a genius *par excellence*. However, quite unlike Van Gogh, Boon did *not* work in romantic isolation in these post-war years, nor was he visited by attacks of madness, deprivation and poverty – not if he could help it. Boon worked as a journalist. He desired to provide for his wife Jeanneke and son Jo, and therefore he also occasionally worked as a house painter, as he so often explained in interviews. In *Chapel road*, he ironically labelled himself (and his alter ego’s) as a *writer-journalist* who was a *house painter* as well. It would be become his *epitheton* in *Chapel*

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<sup>23</sup> On Boon as an innovator of the novel and the broader acknowledgement of his merits and reputation as such, see: D’Haen, T., *Text to Reader: A Communicative Approach to Fowles, Barth, Cortázar and Boon* (Utrecht, 1983); De Wispelaere, ‘De structuur van De Kapellekenbaan en Zomer te Ter-Muren’; Humbeeck, K. & Vanegeren, B., ‘Een onfatsoenlijk boek’, in: Boon, L.P., *De Kapellekensbaan of 1<sup>e</sup> illegale roman van Boontje* (Amsterdam/Antwerpen, 1994), pp. 381-402; Humbeeck, K. & Vanegeren, B., ‘Het spookt op de Kapellekensbaan!’, in: Boon, L.P., *Zomer te Ter-Muren: Werkuutgave* (Amsterdam, 1995), pp. 543-575; Van den Oever, *Life itself. Louis Paul Boon as innovator of the novel*.

*road*: ‘dichter, dagbladschrijver en gevelschilder’ [poet, newspaper writer and house painter].<sup>24</sup>

In retrospect, the tearing-up of his ‘fat novel’ on ‘Madame Odile’ must be interpreted as an important symbolic act enacted by Boon to emphasize the radical transition to this new stage in his writing career. By reworking old fragments into his new ‘book’, Boon created the strange, unruly novel *Chapel Road*, which would not appear until 1953, to be followed in 1956 by a sequel, *Summer in Termuren*.<sup>25</sup> These two ‘illegal’ novels were labelled as such by Boon himself because they were clearly written against the constraints of Flemish tradition by the supposedly marginal figure of the ‘small’ writer, ‘Boontje.’ In other words, Boon had not only invented the new figure of the writer-journalist but also an entirely new type of novel, the ‘collage novel’ or ‘montage novel’ or ‘novel-in-progress’ as it has been termed – all referring to a novel in fragments, which are supposedly just glued together on a daily basis to form some sort of ‘chaotic’ whole, as Boontje himself suggested in *Chapel road*. Moreover, part of his ‘collages’ were made of newspaper fragments, looking as if they were minimally reworked, among them weather forecasts, predicting some local rains in the villages close to his hometown.

*The Invention of the Collage Novel or How to Glue (Newspaper) Fragments Together*

In his daily life, Boon was a journalist during office hours and a novelist in the evenings. In the post-war years, when he was working as a ‘poet, newspaper writer and house painter’, preparing the publication of the diptych, he invented a writing practice in which he constantly re-used and reworked materials he had already used in one of his earlier publications in a newspaper for re-use in one of his novels, and *vice versa*. Doing so, he invented new ways of gluing the old pieces together in a radically innovative way. Obviously, this had an impact on his readers. Not only because collage novels and forms of New Journalism were novelties in themselves, but also because Boon moved pieces from the realm of non-fiction to that of fiction *and back*. This meant he profoundly transgressed the conventional boundaries between literature and journalism, and subsequently the intricately related opposition between fiction and non-fiction.

<sup>24</sup> Boon, L.P., *Chapel Road* (New York, 1972), p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Boon, L.P. *De Kapellekensbaan. Roman* (Amsterdam, 1953) and Boon, L.P. *Zomer te Ter-Muren. Het 2<sup>de</sup> boek over de Kapellekensbaan* (Amsterdam, 1956).

In retrospect, it has become clear that Boon has been recycling fragments from one source in another constantly.<sup>26</sup> His overall method of ‘recycling’ can be divided in three distinctly different methods. His first method was to recycle ‘life itself’ as narrated to him by his wife Jeanneke (and others). The second method was to recycle newspaper events and newspaper cuts. Finally, Boon recycled fragments from his own work.

With regard to recycling ‘life itself’, once Boon had decided to *write* (and not *paint*) to earn a living, he literally wrote and typed non-stop. Part of this prolific production consisted of pulp fiction as these stories sold well. Consequently, he needed new stories on a daily basis – and his wife is known for her contributions to his writing by telling him the stories she had heard on the street that day. He recycled these everyday stories in his pulp fiction (which he published under a pseudonym). Sometimes, he reworked and published them a second time under a different name. In this way, Boon published about 300 pulp stories in a rather short time span.<sup>27</sup> Another set of stories from real life, which soon found their way into his newspaper columns, and later into his novels, were the stories his young female companions on the train told him when he was commuting between Aalst and Ghent.<sup>28</sup>

The second recycling strategy is illustrated by the book version of *My little war*, for which Boon recycled the fragments of his war chronicle published separately in the weekly *Zondagpost*. Later he recycled different kinds of newspaper fragments in his books on *Chapel road*.<sup>29</sup> In fact, he did not simply ‘glue’ them together to form a novel (as he suggested in later moments of self-mockery), but he reworked the bits and pieces extensively. Although Boon *always* intended to insert part of his collection of press clippings (on the war, on the symptoms of the changing time) in his literary work, he rarely found a way to actually integrate them or cite them in full. In two cases he did succeed. In *Menuet* (1955) he integrated newspaper clippings, and for his long prose poem *De kleine eva uit de kromme bijlstraat* [Little eva from the kromme bijlstraat] (1956) he drew material from his (pre-war) collection of press clippings searching for cynical and

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Muires, J., *Moderniseren en conformeren. Biografie van een tweeluik: De Kapellekensbaan en Zomer te Ter-Muren van Louis Paul Boon* (Nijmegen, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> These pulp stories were published between 1949-1954, cf. Humbeeck, K., ‘Drie boeiende romans over de moderne, bandeloze jeugd’, in: Boon, L.P., *De liefde van Annie Mols/Het nieuwe onkruid/Als het onkruid bloeit* (Amsterdam, 2005), p. 840.

<sup>28</sup> See: *De liefde van Annie Mols*, first published in the newspapers, and in 1960 as a book. Interestingly, Boon later drastically recycled this pulp novel once again, reworking his material on contemporary youngster in two contemporary novels *Het nieuwe onkruid* [New tumbleweed] (1964) en *Als het onkruid bloeit* [When tumbleweed blooms] (1972), cf. Humbeeck, ‘Drie boeiende romans over de moderne, bandeloze jeugd’, pp. 857-875.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Muires, *Moderniseren en conformeren*.

nihilistic events. Boon often stayed remarkably close to the original newspaper source, yet whereas in his journals these newspaper cuts functioned as simple news facts, in his fiction they were raised to a higher level of significance, as they became part of his critique on culture. In a similar way, Boon tended to recycle and rework his own journalistic contributions to the newspapers. By changing their context, he already changed their status and their meaning. On top of this, he tended to 'fictionalize' the news facts, and 'de-fictionalize' his stories. In general, the news would be made more personal, more Boon-like, and more universal at the same time.<sup>30</sup>

Finally Boon also recycled fragments from his own work. Like the Flemish poet and journalist Richard Minne, whom Boon admired and whom he succeeded as editor of *Vooruit*, Boon was trained to write topical, journalistic pieces, churning out the prosaic day-to-day reality 'in his 20 lines like sausages from a machine.'<sup>31</sup> For many years, Boon dished out the leftovers of his everyday life in his journalistic pieces and columns for the newspaper. To the outside world, he presented himself as a *columnist* rather than as a sovereign oeuvre-builder, who stood apart with aloof dignity. Instead, Boon was a writer and a journalist who constantly sought contact with his readers in an on-going 'dialogue' with them in his column the 'world-of-today.'<sup>32</sup>

During most of the sixties his writing revolved around producing journalistic pieces and columns, in which he described his life on an almost daily basis. In total, he would produce around 5000 pages of 'Boontjes' in the 1960s and 1970s. In the newspaper, the 'Boontjes' in part functioned as 'narrative literary journalism' as Hartsock defines it, that is, as a body of writing that 'reads like a novel or short story except that it is true or makes a

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<sup>30</sup> On his method to fictionalise news facts and defictionalise stories, see: Van den Oever, A., *Gelijk een kuip mortel die van een stelling valt* (Antwerpen, 1992). On his method to personalize stories and news events ('boniseren'), see: Van den Oever, A., 'Tussen roman en kroniek. Over de verhouding tussen *De Kapellekensbaan* & *Zomer te Ter-Muren* en de historische romans van Louis Paul Boon', in: Humbeek, K & Vanegeren, B. (eds.), *De Kantieke Schoolmeester* (Antwerpen, 1992), pp. 115-172.

<sup>31</sup> The first newspaper column by 'Boontje' in *Vooruit*, quoted here, dates from Wednesday November 18, 1959. On the relationship between Boon and Minne, see: Musschoot, A. et. al., *Wanneer van u nog eens een minne-briefje?: de brieven van Louis Paul Boon aan Richard Minne* (Antwerpen, 2003); T'Sjoen, Y. & Van Damme, E., 'Kuipers meets Minne en Boon. *De Kapellekensbaan* in het fonds van De Arbeiderspers', *Zacht Lawijd* 10 (2011), no. 1, pp. 63-83.

<sup>32</sup> 'Wereld-van-vandaag' ['World-of-today'] was the title of one of his newspaper columns, written from September 14, 1947 until June 2, 1951 in the weekly *Front*.



truth claim to phenomenal experience.<sup>33</sup> Part of the ‘Boontjes’ were later recycled by Boon in separate book projects, half fiction, half non-fiction, such as his ‘Tumbleweed novels’, in which he strived to show contemporary youth culture and consumerism in the sixties.<sup>34</sup>

Another interesting example, from a journalistic point of view, is the way in which Boon recycled his pieces on the Profumo scandal, which had been frontpage news in the UK.<sup>35</sup> In the novel, *Het boek Jezebel* [The book Jezebel] that he wrote on this sex scandal, he purposefully blurred the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. He did the same in *De meisjes van Jesses* [The girls of Jesses] (1973), which he based on newspaper clippings of the murder of Sharon Tate, the wife of the Polish-American filmmaker Roman Polanski. These particular books resembled other forms of New Journalism, in which literature and journalism converged. Boon, however, was not too eager to be explicitly associated with New Journalism in those days.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps this was because ‘Boontje’ was very much a brand of his own in the sixties in Flanders. Perhaps also because he had been well ahead of his time as he already worked as a ‘writer-journalist’ (if not a ‘new journalist’) himself already in the forties and fifties.

Somewhere down the line the writer-journalist Boontje must have stopped feeling ‘small’ when writing for the newspapers. In the end, looking back on his work, he refused to accept a clear divide between his fiction, column, (collage) novels and his daily, factual, fragmentary newspaper work. In the end, Boon liked to think of some of his newspaper work and specifically of his daily column as a true *roman fleuve* - though obviously written as a journalist paid by *Vooruit*.<sup>37</sup> Together, he would claim, the ‘Boontjes’ formed a ‘kipkap masterpiece’, referring to its

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<sup>33</sup> In this volume: Hartsock, J., ‘Challenging the American Dream. The New Journalism and its Precursors’, pp. 1-18.

<sup>34</sup> See also the existing story of Van den Vos Reynaerde, which Boon worked into his novel *Chapel Road*, then reworked into *Wapenbroeders* [Brothers in Arms] (1955), cf. Van Humbeeck, B., Rousseau, V. & Windey, C. (eds.), *Vechten met de engel. Herschrijven in de Nederlandstalige literatuur* (Antwerp, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> On Boon and the Profumo scandal, see: Boon, L.P. *Het boek Jezebel* (Amsterdam, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Scholarship on Boon so far focused rather on Boon’s admiration for Emile Zola and for John Dos Passos and other admired authors of the generation of New Journalism (also explicitly admired by Boon) than on Boon’s relation to New Journalism itself, which he did not advertise that explicitly, see Humbeeck, ‘Epiloog’, in: Boon, L.P., *Abel Gholaerts*, p. 444, 459.

<sup>37</sup> He started in 1959, speeded up in the 1960s, slowed down a bit and finally stopped in op 21 januari 1978 – to make more room for the great historical novels of the last decade of his life, as his biographer Kris Humbeeck has argued in Humbeeck, K., *Onder de giftige rook van Chipka* (Amsterdam, 1999).

incoherent structure.<sup>38</sup> In other words, the 5000 'Boontjes' basically formed a 'collage novel' in 20 volumes, if one would only glue the separate pieces together.

*The Remarkable Turn in Appreciation of 'Boontje' in the Sixties*

The first young writer, critic and scholar in Belgium to seriously question Boon's ironic self-deprecation as 'poet, newspaper writer and house painter' was Paul de Wispelaere. He refused to take Boon's ironic characterisation of his writing methods ('gluing together') and its results ('chaos') at face value and was soon to describe Boon's diptych, *Chapel Road* and *Summer in Termuren*, as highly interesting, fragmentary 'total novels' or 'anti-novels'.<sup>39</sup> For many years, since the late forties, Boon had spoken about his novel *Chapel Road*, with a mixture of pride and mild self-mockery, as 'incoherent', or a 'pool, a sea, a chaos'.<sup>40</sup> Why? Was it merely to anticipate the fact that his contemporary readers would inevitably perceive his novel as a chaotic work created by a small writer-journalist alongside his newspaper column, or as an extension of it? Paul de Wispelaere, however, concluded that Boon had reinvented and repositioned himself as a 'small writer' in these post-war years, during which he had left the ivory tower of high literature in order to become, as Boon himself had described in the opening sentences of *Chapel Road*, a writer-journalist who discussed his topics and themes with his readers almost on a daily basis. As a result, Boon's novels came closer to 'life itself' than any novelist before him had succeeded in doing, implicitly showing the shared space of journalism and literature.<sup>41</sup>

However fragmentary and 'incoherent' Boon's writing may have seemed within the context of Flemish literature of the forties and fifties, critics and readers started to comment on his novels with great appreciation in the sixties. 'Total novels', 'anti-novels' or 'collage novels' – these are all qualifications his critics and readers began to use with sympathy in the sixties. Typical of Boon's novels was a sense of the books being constantly

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<sup>38</sup> *Kipkap* literally means 'brawn, head cheese'; metaphorically, it means 'incoherent', see: Van den Oever, 'Een Montaigne van de lage landen.' For general information on Boon and his column, see the first volume of the collected *Boontjes*, published by Houtekiet, Antwerpen, edited and with an annotation by Leus & Weverbergh: Boon, L.P., *Boontjes 1959-1960* (Antwerpen, 1988).

<sup>39</sup> De Wispelaere, 'De structuur van de Kapellekenbaan en Zomer te Ter-Muren.'

<sup>40</sup> Quote from the preface of the novel: Boon, L.P., *Chapel Road* (New York, 1972).

<sup>41</sup> Boon announced for the first time that he wanted to portray 'life itself' in an article he wrote shortly after completing *Mijn kleine oorlog* that appeared in *Front* on 17 November 1946.

*in statu nascendi*, as Paul de Wispelaere wrote with admiration in 1966.<sup>42</sup> Being a young and ambitious novelist himself, De Wispelaere quickly understood that this was a radically new type of novel; one that would ultimately place the Flemish novelist Boon at the centre of post-war European novel innovation as the creator of a complex and innovative kind of writing.<sup>43</sup> He honoured Boon as the novelist who invented the novel-in-progress single-handedly.

Interestingly, he did so in a special issue of the new literary magazine *Komma*, the new platform for the younger generation of writers, like Julien Weverbergh,<sup>44</sup> René Gysen, Hugo Raes, Willy Roggeman and Paul de Wispelaere himself of course. As young and upcoming writers, they were looking for new literary forms to express themselves. They wanted to break away from the conventional divides between fiction and non-fiction, the political and the personal, the high and the low, the public and the private. Studying Boon's innovative work within this very context even deepened the author's initial impact on them and he embodied the literary model they mirrored themselves to.<sup>45</sup> These young authors were the first to provide a profound – structuralist – analysis of Boon's work, making it the subject of a 'close reading' as the later scholars and critics of *Merlyn* would.<sup>46</sup>

De Wispelaere's critical reflections on Boon already signalled a more general turn in appreciation for Boon's work in the sixties. He was one of the first critics to acknowledge that in the hands of the writer-journalist Boon, the incidental or accidental became the essential and the marginal became the central. In other words, the solid, thematically coherent and synthetic novel became fragmented; a novel-in-pieces as well as a novel-in-progress. This new type of novel included the raw, primitive, not yet synthesized news events as well as impulsive, improvised and *impromptu* exclamations, deliberations, reflections and comments. This innovative type of novel almost inevitably struck Boon's contemporaries as incoherent, hybrid, mixed and mundane, if not plainly vulgar. To them, this type of novel still presented an unpleasant subversion of the traditional novel as they knew it. For that reason, these types of literary innovations were not

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<sup>42</sup> Novel-in-progress was a qualification which was given to this new type of novel very early on by Paul de Wispelaere, Cf. De Wispelaere, 'De structuur van de Kapellekenbaan en Zomer te Ter-Muren.'

<sup>43</sup> De Wispelaere, 'De structuur van de Kapellekenbaan en Zomer te Ter-Muren.'

<sup>44</sup> See in this volume: Plateau, L., 'Fictionalizing Journalism or Journalizing Fiction: the Flemish 'Stenciled Revolution' Authors', pp. 36-50.

<sup>45</sup> A discussion of the considerable impact of the *nouveau roman* on this generation of writers is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>46</sup> In fact, De Wispelaere's essay of the sixties is still a classic in the research on Boon today.

immediately accepted by the literary establishment in the 1940s and 1950s, and even incited much aggravation with some authors.<sup>47</sup>

The sixties, however, created a radical turn in appreciation for Boon's experimental novels as the work of the journalist-writer was repositioned and re-evaluated. The new generation of writers mentioned above acted as frontrunners in this respect. Furthermore, the general public also warmed up to this form of literature, affected by the new mass medium called television that penetrated private life deeply and almost instantaneously from the early sixties onwards. The introduction of television had a strong impact on public life, affecting the way language, literature and literary authors were perceived of, turning around the initial aversions of readers in surprising and unpredicted ways. For one, such features as everydayness, *impromptu* talking, 'looseness' and 'incoherence' gradually but surely got a new and distinctly positive connotation in the new era of television.

#### *Boon's Authorship in the New Era of Television*

The role television played in the reception of Boon's work has been largely disregarded within the scholarly literature so far. In part this is perhaps related to the fact that most authors, critics and scholars well embedded in the field of high literature looked down on television as a (mass) medium, and subsequently on the fame that was acquired through television appearances. However, after television arrived in Belgium, it quickly developed into a popular and influential medium. Boon and his wife Jeanneke already had a television somewhere around 1953 or 1954, which is very early compared to most others.<sup>48</sup> Boon first appeared on public television September 16, 1955, in a program on books and literature, *Vergeet niet te lezen* [Do not forget to read]. When Boon started to appear regularly on television from February 1962 onwards, the medium had already grown into a mass medium and by then Dutch-spoken Flemish television reached a majority of the Flemish households.<sup>49</sup>

Contrary to most literary authors, Louis Paul Boon seems to have had an interest in TV from early on. Although he would grow more ambivalent towards the medium at the end of the sixties, he must have had an initial fascination for the medium and its impact in those earlier days. Perhaps his interest can simply be explained by his long career as a journalist, which had made him more familiar with the news media than most literary authors. His television performances played an important role in his rapid

<sup>47</sup> On the reception of *Mijn kleine oorlog*, see: Humbeek, 'Nawoord: Jazz, ziel van onzen kapotten tijd', in: Boon, L.P., *De atoombom en het mannetje met den bolhoed. Mijn kleine oorlog* (Amsterdam, 2006), pp. 142-147.

<sup>48</sup> Information provided by Louis Paul Boon's son, Jo Boon, September 28, 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Belgische Radio en Televisie: handboek* (Brussel, 1980).

development into a public figure in the sixties. This fame was induced by Boon's regular appearance on primetime television in the popular television show *'t is maar een woord* [It's only a word] (1962) broadcasted nationwide by the BRT.<sup>50</sup> The format of the show was that of a game show or quiz, which involved answering questions or solving puzzles with language as its main focus. The contributions to the quiz as made by Louis Paul Boon were focused on language. Yet, Boon and the other writers in the show were not invited for heavy-handed reflections on literature or politics, but for some light-hearted fun and puns – as was the case with similar quizzes in the Netherlands broadcasted in the early years of television.<sup>51</sup>

However innocent the theme 'language' as the main topic of a television show might sound now, in retrospect this was a clever, if not daring, choice of subject. It helped 'Flanders' to address sensitivities around (non-) standard language use. Moreover, language, or rather dialect and vernacular, must be considered as a more or less sensitive topic anywhere in the 1950s. This certainly goes for Flanders but even for the Netherlands in the fifties and sixties as television now constantly presented examples of standard language use as a privileged tongue to all households in the country – and often in distinct contrast with their own private use of regional dialect and colloquial language.

We argue that Boon's regular appearances on television have had a profound effect on the reception of his literary work as the medium turned him into a public figure almost overnight. TV brought him the fame that his radio work, his newspaper work, and his novels had not generated before. Boon, who was initially thought of by many as a somewhat subversive literary figure, was suddenly considered within the context of popular culture in the sixties. Under this label, he gained fame in Flanders amongst the general public, who initially did not know or appreciate him as a writer-journalist. Interestingly, however, one may argue that his new TV presence as a 'talking head' is related to the literary persona Boon had created for himself through his newspaper columns and his diptych. Posing as a 'writer-journalist', Boon inserted colloquial language as well as marginal notes on his homely life in his written work. In addition, he also used all sorts of personal and direct ways of addressing his readers in what was seemingly

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<sup>50</sup> See on the TV show the information provided online by the Internet Movie Database (IMDB)[Consultable at: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0296468/> (visited last on 24 August 2012)].

<sup>51</sup> In the Netherlands, comparable language quizzes on television had writers such as Godfried Bomans and Annie M.G. Schmidt in their panel; they were known for their wit.

an open dialogue with his readers.<sup>52</sup> All these features however were highly uncommon, if not plainly unacceptable, in the field of literature in the forties. Critics and readers alike expected a 'Normal Flemish Novel' from him, as he had pointed out in his letter to Burssens in 1949. In light of this it is quite remarkable that television, in some ways, succeeded to familiarise and popularise the writer's face as well as his quirky voice and way of speaking. Only a decade earlier his radically subversive language use had shocked some critics and readers while changing the novel in the process.

More generally, television as a medium was in itself a decisive factor in the normalisation of colloquial language use in public discourse since the sixties. In the forties and fifties, the use of colloquial language in the public sphere was still considered taboo – one of many taboos broken by Boon. His 'mumbo jumbo' language had outraged one of his critics (Rottiers) not so long ago. The new era of television, however, profoundly changed the public attitude towards it. Not only had the new (mass) medium familiarised his face and high-pitched voice in unexpected ways, it also successfully desensitised the TV audiences to the medium itself, and rendered Boon's colloquial language and squeaky voice as familiar through a process of repetitive viewing. Thus, TV turned Boon not only into a familiar face and a household figure, but even into a public personality broadly accepted by the general public. In the sixties, 'Boontje' was popular. This was accompanied by a growing acceptance of his personal writing style. Boon's idiosyncratic use of colloquial language was suddenly seen as less abnormal. As television progressively provided a podium to *impromptu* language and to the 'mumbo jumbo' of colloquial language, his style and writer's persona were gradually perceived of as 'familiar' and 'normal.' In other words, they were no longer considered to be that 'innovative', 'subversive' and 'brilliant' by the general public.

This general familiarization with Boon's literary techniques triggered a new dynamics in the field of literature. It created new space amongst younger writers for the acceptance of the extraordinary value of his earlier work; Boon became a literary figure they could model themselves after. The way they honoured and analyzed Boon's work affected the wider circle of literary critics, who had in part overlooked, ignored or underappreciated his earlier works. They changed their mind about their literary value, specifically so with regard to *Chapel Road*, which is now generally considered 'one of the very few truly great novels in Dutch literature.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Boon introduced a new, dialogical writing style, using *you* (*ge* and *gij*) in exceptional and innovative ways in his newspaper work as well as in his diptych, see: Van den Oever, *Life itself*.

<sup>53</sup> See Fens as cited and commented on by Muyres, *Moderniseren en conformeren*. See also Muyres 'De schrijver en zijn criticus', p. 53.

Boon would soon become Belgium's candidate for the Nobel Prize for literature.

### *Conclusion*

Boon had been working for several Flemish newspapers and magazines from the end of World War II onwards. In retrospect, the impact of his journalistic work for this news medium on his work as a storyteller and novelist is evident. It changed his work as a novelist, both in terms of his work and writing practice as well as his literary persona. This transformation of his writing started with the increasing prominence in his novels of *impromptu* notes that covered everyday topics such as daily news events and weather forecasts, and a stream of additional comments by his readers as well as the writer-journalist himself. Secondly, he developed a writing practice in which he could constantly recycle and rework his materials by 'gluing' things together in his new collage novels all the time. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly: the stream of writer scribbles destructed the solid form that traditionally deserved 'the prestigious predicate 'Novel.'

The convergence of literature and journalism that is characteristic of the sixties created a remarkable turning point in appreciation for his work. In part the new mass medium of television helped to familiarize the broader audience to colloquial language use and helped to make these new styles of literary writing with its heterogeneous influences acceptable. In part the new generation of writers and journalists broke away from the conventional divides between fiction and non-fiction, the political and the personal, high and the low culture even further than Boon had done, introducing new conceptions of journalism and literature and redrawing the boundaries of the respective domains.

MASHING-UP THE SOUND OF THE CITY  
EXPLORING UNDERGROUND POP LITERATURE AND NEW  
JOURNALISM IN 1960'S WEST GERMANY

Heiner Stahl

*Introduction*

Focusing on Hubert Fichte, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann and Jörg Fauser, three authors contributing to the West German pop literature scene of the 1960s and early 1970s, this article is highlighting their writing efforts in the search for 'realness'. In the course of mapping out how Fichte, Brinkmann and Fauser have produced an aesthetic of 'authenticity', I aim at touching the interfaces of words and music, of sound and noise, of body politics and of deviant narrations of everyday life.

I am arguing that all three authors worked more or less as embedded reporters. By laying bare the physical politics of sub-cultures, describing drug misuse, clubbing and consumption in cityscapes, Fichte, Brinkmann and Fauser pushed such topics in the scope of an emerging 'literary republic'. This term stands for a reformulation of post-war West German citizenship in public discourses, mainly lead by authors, print and broadcast journalists, asserting multiple notions of contending social superstructures as for example the 'state' and the 'system'.

Conducting such explorations they compiled atmospheres of dissent by recording the sounds of moving human bodies and vibrant cities. By accentuating a deviant perspective on the reality of 'things that are going on' in novels, poems, radio features or newspaper articles the exponents of the upcoming underground literature stored a knowledge about the experience of disintegration in society that is understood as passive and silenced by quasi state-owned broadcasting media. Fichte, Brinkmann and Fauser were writers in a shifting, left-leaning countercultural context, filling out the ever-increasing gap left by the mainstream print media's refusal to make an issue of contemporary challenges at the edge of lived experience, where individuality is more striking than belonging to social collectives. Emphasizing the personal dimension, the construction of a self on intermediary stages could be well described as prominent resource of the 'aesthetic of experience', shaped in their workings. All three authors did merge reportage-style writing techniques with fictional or semi-documentary narratives. In this respect, Fichte, Brinkmann and Fauser merged New Journalism's pretensions concerning the politics of the social with modes of literary self-invention. By mixing the media practices of



recording technology with a sensual curiosity this sort of literary production stressed, even triggered, the instability of previously established forms of writing. New Journalism and underground literature started blurring the boundaries of formats, genres and styles of reportages, consolidating an altered and diverging set of self-positioning strategies.

By means of bricolage and cut-up techniques, underground pop literature, especially from the 1950s to the 1970s, has rather successfully reconnected novel writing and poetry with the bias of new journalism with respect to reporting and commenting emerging social, cultural and political issues. This firstly led to a reintroduction of remix culture, and secondly, paved the way for a sort of 'embedded journalism' that plays the exploratory card in appropriating new media. In this respect, new journalism is an arising, multi-faceted phenomenon that challenges the ways of narrating of figures, dialogues and facts contending the preconfigured representation set by corporate audio-visual media.<sup>1</sup>

By applying the ideas and techniques introduced by the American Beat Generation authors, like Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, Allen Greenberg and the late Charles Bukowski, Fauser and Brinkmann were acting as translators, journalists and cultural entrepreneurs when promoting transatlantic pop literature to an emerging market of alternative publishing in West Germany. Both stood for a sort of 'positive Americanization' contrary to the anti-American sentiment so prevalent in Germany in 1968. While Hubert Fichte (1935-1986), born before World War II in Perleberg/Prussia situated 120 km northwest of Berlin.<sup>2</sup> Fichte remained on the periphery of the 1968-movement in Germany, while Rolf Dieter Brinkmann (1940-1975) was very much at the core of those streams of cultural and political activist pouring into student unrest. Raised in Vechta,

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<sup>1</sup> Bleicher, J. K. and Pörksen, B. eds, *Grenzgänger: Formen des New Journalism* (Wiesbaden 2004); Bleicher, J.K., 'Sex, Drugs & Bücher Schreiben: New Journalism im Spannungsfeld von Medialem und Literarischem Erzählen', in: Bleicher, J. K. and Pörksen, B. eds., *Grenzgänger: Formen des New Journalism* (Wiesbaden, 2004), pp. 126-159, 146 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See Gillett, R., *German Literature*, available from: <https://sites.google.com/site/germanliterature/20th-century/fichte>; *Hubert Fichte (1935-1986): Veranstaltungen, Publikationen, Filme usw.*, available from: <http://www.hubertfichte.de/>; Baumgart, R., 'Über Hubert Fichte. Die Palette. Eine wüste Idylle', in: *Der Spiegel*, nr. 9, available from: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-46135734.html> (February 26, 1968); Fichte, H., 'Ein Geschwür bedeckt das Land: Furcht und Elend der brasilianischen Republik', in: *Der Spiegel*, nr. 6, available from: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-43019824.html> (January 31, 1972); Trapp, W., 'Star-Club statt Gruppe 47: Hubert Fichtes fast vergessene Radioarbeiten 1966 bis 1986', in: *Die Zeit*, nr. 30, available from: <http://www.zeit.de/2006/30/D-Aufmacher> (July 20, 2006).

a catholic shaped area of Lower Saxony, Brinkmann started a bookseller apprenticeship in the city of Essen in 1959.<sup>3</sup> He worked as a journalist and as an editor for the publishing house März. Jörg Fauser (1944-1987), born in Bad Schwalbach, near Frankfurt am Main, dismissed his military service and worked as a male nurse in a hospital for psychiatry.<sup>4</sup> Besides writing prose and poems, Fauser gained publicity as an author of crime stories, like 'The Snowman', that later became the screenplay for a successful German road movie.

In their writings Fichte, Fauser and Brinkmann captured the atmosphere of the post-war consumer culture by using a new 'word-sound', a distinctive shaping of voice, diction and body-sense-relation, rarely expressed in mainstream literature beforehand.<sup>5</sup> Coming from different angles, all three authors pointed to the lingering repression of social norms and cultural mores in the post-Fascist society of West Germany and marked, and to a certain degree overstated, the adverse conditions of liberal capitalist welfare state.

*Mashing-up 'Authenticity'. Loops of Writing and Reporting*

Connecting different material, without putting any limitations in terms of content or form is the central idea of mashup.<sup>6</sup> The term mashup refers to new modes of reassembling auditory, visual and written textual material. From this angle, a fair assumption can be made: new journalism and pop literature are quite narrowly related, even interwoven, in terms of playing

<sup>3</sup> Rank, A. and Kim, S., 'A short biography of Rolf Dieter Brinkmann', Intiute, available from: [http://www.brinkmann-literatur.de/010English\\_bio.html](http://www.brinkmann-literatur.de/010English_bio.html); Some articles Brinkmann wrote for the weekly Der Spiegel. Brinkmann, R. D., 'Phantastik des Banalen', in: Der Spiegel, nr. 34, available from:

<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-44905059.html> (August 17, 1970);

Brinkmann, R. D., 'Bücher/ Neu in Deutschland: Billige Plätze', in: Der Spiegel, nr. 46, available from: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-45878742.html> (November 11, 1968); Fuchs, G., 'Über Rolf Dieter Brinkmann. Keiner weiß mehr. Ehe zu zweit', in: Der Spiegel, nr. 25, available from: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-46039657.html> (June 17, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> See for example: Fauser, J., 'Der Ruhm hat keine weißen Flügel', in: Der Spiegel, nr. 38, available from: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-13520344.html> (September 15, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> See Dolar, M., *His Master's Voice: Eine Theorie der Stimme* (Frankfurt, 2007); Nancy, J.-L., *Zum Gehör* (Zürich, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Kretzschmar, J., Mundhenke, F. and Wilke, T., 'Mashup. Theorie – Ästhetik – Praxis', *Call for Papers*, available from: <http://www.zwf-medien.de/tagungen/mashup.html> (2012); 'Workshop zur Medialität, Genese und Dynamik des Mash-up', *Call for Papers*, available from: <http://www.mediatisiertewelten.de/neuigkeiten/article/workshop-zur-medialitaet-genese-und-dynamik-des-mash-up/> (2011).

with the existing boundaries of media. Examining the interspaces of media and cultural interaction, pop literature in the 1960s aimed to explore the 'authenticity' at the edges of urban living.

The loops of rearrangement are forming a remix. It is transgressing the diversity of media to link elements that are supposed to come asunder. Eduardo Navas argued that Remix, understood 'as a form of discourse, affects culture in ways that go beyond the basic recombination of material.'<sup>7</sup> According to Navas, remixing and recycling is bound to musical material, instrumental loops and improving freestyle rhymes. Concerning remixing, he separates an extended, from a selective and a reflexive approach. The 'sampling' and therefore re-contextualizing of other texts generates 'an intrinsic subversive effect.'<sup>8</sup>

Liam McGranahans' ideas are going into the same direction when he claims that 'a mashup is a piece of recorded music that is comprised of samples taken from other recordings and remixed to create a single new track.' In this respect, 'a typical mashup features samples from two or more songs, usually by different artists, edited into one track via the manipulation of elements like tempo, pitch, and key.'<sup>9</sup> But when applied to prose and literature the boundaries of visual and sonic reproduction modes are blurring. This framing of mashup is opening up a perspective in which the resources and recombination of material are mutually reinforcing the resources and the recombination of material. I suggest that this process is to be understood as a 'transitional mode of remix'. With this remark I indicate that the practices of sampling are retrieved and relocated in another ensemble of media, as for example pop literature.

*Fichte, Brinkmann, Fauser. Remixing Sounds of Urban Space*

In the early 1960s, Hubert Fichte (1935-1986) had already adopted a semi-documentary style when reporting on Hamburg's gay and transgender scene. By appearing to simply transcribe the casual conversations of members of these communities, Fichte was able to question the illusion of social mobility and the ethics of labor.

In this excerpt from 12th visit to Palette Club, the pursuit of coolness becomes an ambivalent source of stability, easily tilting towards instability.

<sup>7</sup> Navas, E., *Remix Theory: The Aesthetics of Sampling* (New York, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> See the interpretation of Joneilortiz Joneilortiz, *The Mashup and the Remix: Fetishizing the Fragment*, available from:

<http://www.mutuallyoccluded.com/2008/03/the-mashup-and-the-remix-fetishizing-the-fragment/> (March 24, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> McGranahan, L., 'Mashnography: Creativity, Consumption, and Copyright in the Mashup Community', *PhD Music and Ethnomusicology Brown University*, p. 11, available from: <http://mashupresearch.blogspot.de/2010/04/dissertation-finished.html> (2010).

In the self-disciplinary quest for 'being cool' sound, body and machine are initially interwoven and form a specific, media induced set of references.<sup>10</sup>

[...] Twelfth visit to the Palette joint. Being on the scrounge. Berlin –  
 Love nest: Do you know Basel asks Jäcki: Do you have a fifty pence  
 coin for music. Jäcki lends Do you know Basel fifty pence.  
 Do you know Basel enters the first cavity of the Palette, hunkers  
 over the jukebox. His face is illuminated in blue light. He presses  
 the buttons, resqueezing the keys with all of the body.  
 Palettenmusik is dropping out of the loudspeakers in the second room.  
 [...]

When the level of ambient noise increases, the pitch rises and others  
 meanings of the text get articulated:

Portly boys with freshly sprayed and squirted motor cycle are  
 singing in tight-fitting leather sleeves. A thick Teddy Boy curl is coming  
 off their brows. They chant promising. They have a deep pitch of voice  
 and the their voices are trembling promising. St. Pauli bouncers.  
 Do come in Mister Director General ! The plastic plectrums slinging the  
 electric guitars metal strings are scratching the chords in Jäcki's ears."<sup>11</sup> [...]

The *Palette* club scenery is filled with flirtation, expressed in the two  
 modes of turning something – the music box – and somebody – juvenile  
 bikers – on. At the first glance, Basel dates the jukebox, which projects his  
 choice of sound in the ambiance of the club. Secondly, a gang of young  
 rockers – probably bouncers – are enjoying posing and high-spirited banter.  
 In this cut-out, the music emanating from the jukebox mashes up with the  
 roaring of motor cycle engines when the bunch of leather-clad youths head  
 off into the city night in search of an adventure. The body politics of desire  
 is sampled by sound, voices and physical presence. Fichte's subjects are

<sup>10</sup> Linck, D., 'Désinvolture und Coolness Über Ernst Jünger, Hipsters und Hans  
 Imhoff, den »Frosch«', in: Kultur & Gespenster 3 (2007), pp. 2-25, available from:  
<http://druckversion.studien-von-zeitfragen.net/Desinvolture.pap.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Fichte, H., *Die Palette* (Frankfurt 1978), p. 85. First published at Rowohlt 1968.  
 Original text: [...] "Zwölfter Besuch in der Palette. Abstauben. Berlin – Liebesnest:  
 Do you know Basel fragt Jäcki: Hast Du fünfzig Pfennig für Musik? Jäcki gibt Do  
 you know Basel fünfzig Pfennig. Do you know Basel geht in den ersten Raum der  
 Palette, beugt sich über die Music-Box. Sein Gesicht wird blau angeleuchtet. Er  
 drückt die Tasten. Er drückt mit dem ganzen Körper nach. Die Palettenmusik fällt  
 aus dem Lautsprecher im zweiten Raum. [...] Es singen die dicken Jungen mit  
 enganliegenden Lederärmeln auf frischgespritzten Motorrädern. Eine dicke Locke  
 fällt in ihre Stirn. Sie singen verheißungsvoll. Sie haben eine tiefe Stimmlage und  
 ihre Stimmen beben verheißungsvoll. St. Pauli-Portiers. Kommen Sie mal herein,  
 Herr Generaldirektor!. Die Kunststoffplättchen für die Metallsaiten der elektrischen  
 Guitharren schrammen über die Saiten in Jäckis Ohren." [...]

rockers – probably bouncers – are enjoying posing and high-spirited banter. In this cut-out, the music emanating from the jukebox mashes up with the roaring of motor cycle engines when the bunch of leather-clad youths head off into the city night in search of an adventure. The body politics of desire is sampled by sound, voices and physical presence. Fichte's subjects are hipsters, dropouts and villains and can hardly be told apart.<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that the characters evident in Fichte's prose are originated in the unfashionable, washed out aspects of 'hipness'. They are camp, in the notion of Susan Sontag, sharing a sense of failed seriousness and a theatrical air when becoming active in urban nightlife.<sup>13</sup>

In order to promote the Palette book, Fichte and his publishing house, Rowohlt, arranged several live reading sessions in 1966 and 1967 in the Hamburg Star-Club where The Beatles had performed in 1963.<sup>14</sup> Hubert Fichte continued to read his texts live, performing like a lead vocalist, while the music of *Ian & the Zodiacs* accompanied the show with beat music songs. This encouraged the magazine *Twen*, collaborating with the music label, PHILIPS, to release a recording of the show entitled 'Beat und Prosa' in 1966.<sup>15</sup>

Dieter Eduard Zimmer, a freelance journalist who worked for weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* and later directed its editorial features board, wrote that on that evening, Fichte had found 'a new audience in an informal and most casual way' – in a nightclub setting and not in the traditional marketplace. The newspaper journalist added, excited about this sort of publicly engaged literature, that 'in the holy village of St. Paul, beat did not kill prose; both did coexist, even more: they connived, acted in collusion, disclaiming the alleged schism between subculture, namely pop culture, its clothing, language and manners, and the so-called solemn, high-browed and 'true' culture wearing dark suits and evening attire.'<sup>16</sup>

By staging poetry in this way, Fichte linked pieces of artistic production to an audience of readers and listeners. *Firstly*, the author

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<sup>12</sup> The following conferences have focussed on Fichte in recent years: 'Hubert Fichte (1935-1986) – Texte und Kontexte', *University of London*, 2006, available from: [http://www.suppose.de/texte/london\\_fichte.html](http://www.suppose.de/texte/london_fichte.html); *Hubert Fichtes Medien* organised by Stephan Kammer and Karin Krauthausen, University of Düsseldorf, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Sontag, S. ed., 'Notes on Camp', *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York 1966), pp. 275-292, available from: <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/Sontag-NotesOnCamp-1964.html>

<sup>14</sup> See 'Ian & The Zodiacs Live at the Starclub Hamburg', YouTube, available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUvJxLgBeJg>

<sup>15</sup> See 'Beat & Prosa: Hubert Fichte im Star-Club', Flickr, available from: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/a5design/3690566974/lightbox/> (1966).

<sup>16</sup> Zimmer, D., 'Fichte und Beat: Dichterlesung ohne Verlegenheit', in: *Die Zeit*, nr. 41, available from: <http://www.zeit.de/1966/41/fichte-und-beat> (October, 7, 1966).

in a nightclub serves as a testing ground for new strategies of presenting books to the public. Doing this, Fichte bridges the gap between stage and the attendant crowd, communicates directly with the guests and makes his literature instantly consumable. In this respect, Fichte bypasses corporate media and dodges the logic of reviewing books by creating an event that is supposed to be worth reporting about.

Rolf-Dieter Brinkmann acted as a critic himself. Referring to a lecture given by Leslie Fielder at the University of Freiburg in June 1968, he stressed that all maligned genres needed to be re-assessed. Fielder had summed up science fiction, western or erotica as forms of literature equal to the customary canonization. During the course of the so-called 'Leslie Fielder Debate,' potential quality of the new forms of writing, the visualization strategies and listening practices of pop culture were re-evaluated.<sup>17</sup> Writing in the conservative weekly journal *Christ und Welt*, Brinkmann took the contentious point made by Fielder even further:

[...] "I hate old poets! Leslie Fielder's lecture is nothing more than a comment on the current situation of literature that reveals how our gently literature needs brought up-to-date and be relevant when avoiding self-abandonment is key. Differentiation is due much later, when (literary) products are commenting on West German social "reality" in real-time. But in order to produce such content, the generational gap has to be widened further, because the literary scene in West Germany is predominantly shaped by an unwritten law. The dead are fancying the dead." [...] 18

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<sup>17</sup> Concerning Leslie A. Fielder, literature professor from the University of Buffalo please see URL: <http://archive.is/IX0P>. The interview with Fielder, L., 'Cross the Border – Close the Gap', in: *Playboy Magazine* 12 (1969), pp. 151, 230, 252-254, 256-258; Walther, D., 'Kleiner Versuch, die Chiffre 1968 von links ein wenig aufzuschreiben' (Leipzig, 2007). [MA-Thesis submitted at the Institute of Cultural Science University of Leipzig, available from: [http://www.cultiv.net/cultranet/1182166469Magisterarbeit\\_Danny\\_Walther\\_Kuwi.pdf](http://www.cultiv.net/cultranet/1182166469Magisterarbeit_Danny_Walther_Kuwi.pdf)]

<sup>18</sup> Brinkmann, R. D., 'Angriff aufs Monopol: Ich hasse alte Dichter', in: *Christ und Welt* 21 (November 15, 1968), no. 4-6, available from: <http://www.literaturwissenschaft-online.uni-kiel.de/veranstaltungen/vorlesungen/literatur20/westwaerts.pdf>  
Original text. [...] "Ich hasse alte Dichter! Der Vortrag von Leslie Fielder ist nichts anderes als eine Tagesaktualität, die deutlich macht wie sehr Literatur der Aktualität bedarf, will sie sich nicht selbst aufgeben. Differenzieren kann man später, wenn es Produkte gibt, in denen heutige Aktualität verarbeitet ist. Um zu solchen Produkten zu kommen ist es notwendig, dass die Kluft zwischen den Generationen sich noch weiter vertieft, so jedoch ist die Literatur, besonders hierzulande, noch vorwiegend beherrscht von dem ungeschriebenen Gesetz: Die Toten bewundern die Toten." [...]

Brinkmann favored newsworthiness and ‘authenticity’ as key modes for reshaping contemporary literature and bring it up to date. This kind of intervention is needed to refresh modes of literary production that have become stale, sluggish and inflexible. Reporting, documenting and communicating events that are actually taking place are the central elements of Brinkmann’s approach to writing. He was relentless in marking his poems and radio plays with the acoustic traces of everyday urban life in order for the reality of the text to fuse with the virtual reality of sound and noise.<sup>19</sup> In a piece entitled “A Day at the Border”, Brinkmann manipulates the reader’s sensory experience by bringing together both sound and smell:

[...]“A sweltering day in West Germany. A sound could be heard like the noise of a huge chunk of flesh being roasted in a large ladle. And the facts vanish: ‘Speaking is the only way to express myself’. That is why they dispel reality at any moment in a flash. Lyrical: vinyl, turning constantly at night. Striation. ‘Mum, Dad, I remember boo-boo.’ A nursery rhyme.” [...]<sup>20</sup>

Marshall McLuhan uses the term acoustic space to define the zone of the tribal capacity for listening and hearing, which has been infringed upon by the vision-dominant culture of writing.<sup>21</sup> For him active listening in an acoustic space is bound to speech, to narrations, to storytelling. Contending McLuhans point, I would argue that the acoustic space is transitional in the first place. It is not an extension of man using mass media as tools, in contrast to the visual space of reading. Acoustic space is holding the potential to widening the sensory space-place relation, albeit being framed by the technological means of production, transmission and reception. Taking a contrasting view, I would argue that the acoustic space is transitional. And, concerning Brinkmann’s mixing practices; this emerges pre-configured, but appears to be accidental. When reading Brinkmann’s works, one must listen to the flow of notes and noise, words and voice. For

<sup>19</sup> Selg, O., *Essay, Roman, Erzählung, Hörspiel: Prosaformen bei Rolf Dieter Brinkmann*, available from: <http://www.brinkmann-literatur.de/007DissSelg.html> (2001).

<sup>20</sup> Brinkmann, R. D., ‘Ein Tag an der Grenze’, in: *Westwärts 1&2. Gedichte* (Reinbek, 1975), pp. 20-22. Original text: [...]“Ein rappendes Tag in Westdeutschland. Man hörte ein Geräusch wie das Geräusch, das ein großes Stück Fleisch macht, das in einer großen schwarzen Pfanne gebraten wird. Und die verschwindenden Fakten: “Zu reden ist die einzige Art mich auszudrücken.” Also redeten sie die Wirklichkeit in jedem Augenblick auf der Stelle weg. Lyrisch: schwarze Rillen, die sich nachts drehen. “Mama, Papa, da fällt mir Aua ein” ein Kinderlied.” [...] (Brinkmann 1975: 21)

<sup>21</sup> Carpenter, E. and McLuhan, M. eds., *Explorations in Communication: An Anthology* (Boston, 1960); Norden, E., ‘Marshall McLuhan: The Playboy Interview’, in: *Playboy*, pp. 26–27, 45, 55–56, 61, 63, available from: <http://www.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway/classes/188/spring07/mcluhan.pdf> (March 1969).

by the technological means of production, transmission and reception. Taking a contrasting view, I would argue that the acoustic space is transitional. And, concerning Brinkmann's mixing practices; this emerges pre-configured, but appears to be accidental. When reading Brinkmann's works, one must listen to the flow of notes and noise, words and voice. For example, 'a nursery rhyme', 'sound of a hunk of flesh being roasted in a large ladle' and 'vinyl, constantly turning' are both auditory markers that convey specific environmental settings; interfaces that connect both the internal and external experience of reality.<sup>22</sup>

Taken from this perspective, 'sound, noises and voices are [...] complex cultural constructions.'<sup>23</sup> Sound, noise and voice are, therefore, markers of cultural and social materials that introduce new ideas and influence how an individual positions themselves within a lived and an imagined space.<sup>24</sup> Brinkmann's sonic interventions reconnect forgotten lines that span various layers of auditory memory. Sound, then, affects how one experiences the past, present, and future. With sound rattling around between the lines of virtual spaces – like poems and prose – the sensory experience is broadened and enlivened.

Through the eyes and ears of Jörg Fauser, encountering the West Berlin political and cultural bohemia of 1968 becomes a multi-sensory trip as well as a multimedia adventure. The author's alter ego, Harry, is the principal, the embedded performer. He is bouncing like a pinball between spectacle and horror-show, between smell and sound, taste of substances and body temperature escalating when heroin flushes down the veins.

[...]”Berlin 68. Degenerated and sleazy commune Bülowstrasse. Harry being on the move, alone, black backyards for miles and miles, an equilibrist on junk without a netting in search of the paranoia that is explaining the paranoia...: Red tail lamps of the underground train calling at Krumme Lanke or Schlesisches Tor, in a Volkswagen camper Type 2 Hübsch makes a stab at explaining to Kunzelmann, waving about madly, why he is still writing. Short conversation on poems. Beat generation. Harry is guzzling a pail of amphetamine (AN 1). “The Beat Goes On”. Nadine is somewhere with Humphrey, Bogey, Movie theatre at Ku-Damm, “The Treasure of the Sierra Madre”, later puffing a spliff under the railway bridge, Yorkstraße, opposite

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<sup>22</sup> Corbin, A., *Les Cloches De La Terre: Paysage Sonore et Culture Sensible Dans les Campagnes au XIXe Siècle* (Paris, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Mieszkowski, S., Smith, J. and De Valck, M. eds., *Sonic Interventions: Intersecting Place, Sex and Race* (Amsterdam, 2007), p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Lefèbvre, H., *Die Revolution der Städte* (München 1972).



'Mister Go'. The ambulance is checking its customers in the flickering light-show...." [...]<sup>25</sup>

Living in flat-sharing communities in West-Berlins boroughs of Charlottenburg, Schöneberg and Kreuzberg, Fauser experienced the vibrations of the city as the aesthetic products of disquiet and post-adolescent unrest.

In the way Fauser is moving through the sounds of 1968 Berlin, between the Free University Campus and the final destination of underground line number 1, Schlesisches Tor in Kreuzberg, virtually enclosed by the Berlin Wall. Fauser is constantly updating his auditory memory as he goes. To him, everything beyond Schlesisches Tor – is actually situated on the territory of socialist German Democratic Republic – may as well be located in another dimension and only accessed as reality through the media. To Fauser, East Berlin is an alien place and not worth referring to and reporting about. Bob Dylan singing 'the times they are a-changin'' announces acoustically what Fauser himself is resonating to at that time. While moving through the sounds of a city, Fauser acts like a chemist brewing rhythmic prose through the combination of guitar solos, riffs and the sounds of a street brawl.<sup>26</sup> He re-creates the toxic effect of self-harming as he inflicts those sounds on the reader. Sensory experience is a key feature of Jörg Fauser's fictional prose. In his notion of 'acoustic space' environmental noise merges with his own super-charged sensual data owing to substance abuse.

[...] "Comatose in Schmargendorf, Charlie in pieces with Lou Reed under the roof, "Writing against life, living against reality". Eventually the guitarist boils up "and he had to / run run run"- Awaken from that ten years later, as Harry once again, Mister Go got fucked, but the nightmare continues."<sup>27</sup> [...]

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<sup>25</sup> Fauser, J., *Die Harry Gelb Story* (Augsburg, 1973), pp. 27-29, 27. Original version: [...] Berlin 68. Heruntergekommene Kommune Bülowstrasse. Harry allein auf Achse, meilenweit nichts als schwarze Hinterhöfe, Junk-Akrobat ohne Netz auf der Suche nach der Paranoia die die Paranoia erklärt... rote Schlußlichter der U-Bahn Richtung Krumme Lanke oder Schlesisches Tor, im VW-Bus versucht (Paul-Gerhard HS) Hübsch dem fuchtelnden Kunzelmann zu erklären, warum er noch schreibt. Kurzes Gespräch über Gedichte, Beat Generation. Harry schluckt einen Eimer AN 1. "The Beat Goes On". Nadine irgendwo mit Humphrey, Bogey, Kino am Ku-Damm, "der Schatz der Sierra Madre", später ein Joint unter der Eisenbahnbrücke, Yorckstraße, gegenüber 'Mister Go', die RD-Streife checkt ihre Kundschaft im Geflacker der Light-Show." [...]

<sup>26</sup> Toop, D., *Haunted Weather: Music, Silences and Memory* (London, 2004), pp. 110-151.

<sup>27</sup> Fauser, *Die Harry Geld Story*, p. 29. Original text: [...] Koma in Schmargendorf, Charlie kaputt mit Lou Reed unterm Dach, "Schreiben gegen das Leben, Leben

reference is another: self-destruction. He is laying bare a pre-punk binge drinking and drugging habit that is auto-inflictive and brutal in its realism.

It appears as if Brinkmann, Fauser and Fichte cast their own nets to trawl for all the urban sound vibrations that bounce between buildings and drift down busy streets.<sup>28</sup> Their subjects move through a bustling consumerist society in which a seeming array of products is advertised, but even though they may delay making choices to keep their options open, the incentives to buy later turn out to be invalid. They examine how the self and the body react in a netting of sound emissions and sensorial information in the urban environment. And, in this process, they map out the patterns of anti-disciplinary tactics, deployed on the scale of everyday life and only loosely connected to countercultural resistance.<sup>29</sup>

Brinkmann, Fichte and Fauser were dedicated to cutting off the accepted norms of everyday business and social interactions. Immersing the self-addicting self-divesting and yet adversely self-disciplining individual as the subject of prose within the flow of events, sounds and senses fabricates an aesthetic of authenticity. In this respect, this sort of authenticity has successfully blurred the boundaries between newspaper journalism and literature. Fichte, Fauser and Brinkmann establish a shape of mashup that integrates urban landscapes, condensing moments of the present to into snapshots of their personal conceptualizations of reality, of what supposed to be 'really happening'. Consider the jukebox and bouncers described in the excerpt from Fichte; the sound of flesh being roasted, or the record player, in Brinkmann's poem; or in the case of Fauser, poetry as a written text perform in a dialogue with the act of reading out aloud and is engaged in the hearing process of close listening to the sound of the environment. Pop culture and audiovisual media have gained an important stake in this setting. By using Bob Dylan, Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground as placeholders, Fauser boosts the volume of the contemporary sensual and physical experience within such pop cultural and mediated social relations. Fichte, Fauser and Brinkmann recombined notions of events, urban space and interweaving bodies in the muddy waters of sensing the 'real' world and one's everyday routine. Fichte gives a voice to hipsters who had to cope with the depressing effects of the post-war consumer culture, between freemen and sexual liberation, and the repressive social norms and manners of a post-fascist German society. Brinkmann elaborates a mode of hate speech that is initially turned on himself, then on his fellow citizens and

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<sup>28</sup> Nusser, T. and Strowick, E., "Logisch gesehen, dehnt sich das Raster unendlich in alle Richtungen aus." Vorwort', in: Nusser, T and Strowick, E. eds., *Rasterfahndungen. Darstellungstechniken, Normierungsverfahren, Wahrnehmungskonstitution* (Bielefeld, 2003), pp. 9-11.

<sup>29</sup> Certeau, de M., *Kunst des Handelns* (Berlin, 1988), p. 16.

physical experience within such pop cultural and mediated social relations. Fichte, Fauser and Brinkmann recombined notions of events, urban space and interweaving bodies in the muddy waters of sensing the 'real' world and one's everyday routine. Fichte gives a voice to hipsters who had to cope with the depressing effects of the post-war consumer culture, between freemen and sexual liberation, and the repressive social norms and manners of a post-fascist German society. Brinkmann elaborates a mode of hate speech that is initially turned on himself, then on his fellow citizens and cities, politics, and society as a whole. He attacked the culture industry, the industrial mass production of cultural goods, although being a part of the process and the way journalists did construct reality in public broadcasting media and through Linking the idea of 'disaffirmative resonance' to the work of Brinkmann helps to understand how he is voicing discontent and disgust about him experiencing life in an – from his perspective – apolitical and repressive consumer society.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, I am arguing in favor of taking the seismological rifts engraved in these pieces as a further pillar of analysis, because it is enabling to examine the vibrations, rhythms and sonifications of environments within a multimedia and multisensory framing. In 'Political Poem Nov. 13<sup>th</sup>, 74, BRD' Brinkmann provides a fitting example:

[...]”Quarter to 11 at night: ...television bowls down the amusement of the public, unease in the streets, flurry in sundry cities, words are bearing dreadful bugbears, governmental language (& in firm contrast: adolescent ideological groups poaching and marauding/ against – EXTERMINATION OF CULTURE – the individual /mentality of the herd within – BOOSTING THE ECONOMY BY INJECTION – the fences of general terms and conditions.”<sup>31</sup>

Shortly before the transmission signal fades out and the daily TV program ends, the news broadcast bombards consumers with pictures and

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<sup>30</sup> Adorno, Th. W. and Horkheimer, M., ‘The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception’, in: Adorno, Th.W. and Horkheimer, M. eds., *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London, 1979), pp. 120-167; Birdsall, C., ‘‘Affirmative Resonances’ in the City? Sound, Imagination and Urban Space in Early 1930s Germany’, in: Mieszkowski, S., Smith, J. and Valck de, M. eds., *Sonic Interventions. Intersecting Place, Sex and Race, No 18* (Amsterdam, 2007), pp. 57-85.

<sup>31</sup> Brinkmann, R. D., ‘Politisches Gedicht 13. Nov. 74, BRD’, in: *Westwärts 1&2. Gedichte* (Reinbek, 1975), p.160-167. Original text: [...]”Viertel vor 11 nachts: ...das TV erledigt, die Unterhaltung der Öffentlichkeit, Unruhe in den Straßen, Unruhe in den verschiedenen Städten, Schreckbilder durch Wörter, Sprache des Staates (& dagegen: herumwildernde junge ideologische Gruppen/ gegen den – KULTURVERNICHUNG – Einzelnen/ Herdenmentalität, in den – KONJUNKTURSPRITZE – Zäunen der Begriffe.”[...] [Brinkmann 1975: 160].

images of the world. From the spoken words and language of television, feelings of terror and fear are provoked to the soundtrack of the regular pitch and tone of a 1930s German newsreel. The subliminal fear of being the object of state-run agitation plays well into Brinkmann's generic distrust. Corporate media suppresses the individual appetite for social unrest and the willingness of groups to take action in order to achieve self-empowerment.

Brinkmann, for example, asserts that mass media organizations, public broadcasting and public information strategies do communicate more than just words, images and camera angles in order to convey meaning. The sound of words, in his perspective, does create an auditory shape of the media landscape that goes beyond an imminent acoustic space. It is tapping into layers of common auditory memory linked to the soundscape of Third Reich propaganda.<sup>32</sup> In this way, the mashup sets language free from simply being a tool for political campaigning, and combining it with other sensory elements robs it of any taint of the propaganda for which it is was used on television or by the government's media mouthpieces.

[...]”Shaking hands on state-owned, well-kept lawn, in the background  
 flags were hoisted a rod, a company of army bandsmen is playing/  
 they are entitled to claim pension at the age of 60, dowdy shindig for the  
 gaggle, knocking on tables for acclamation, the leader is sniffing diction,  
 the correct politics of words, what is the current word on the street,  
 vox populi opinions are hustled on the table area like bargain,  
 position papers get exchanged / to wit being synchronized/ off the beaten  
 track of daily affairs, files are cemented in buildings and strongrooms,  
 'arcana', off the record & locked and virus shielded.”<sup>33</sup>

In this poem the mixing and collating of spoken words, loudspeaker noises and live interference results in the production of multiple meanings and layers of complexity in the hearing and understanding of the performance. Pieter Verstraete has claimed that ‘whereas the performance would appear to resist any coherent narrative unfolding because of the juxtaposition of text, music and image, the music unmistakably addresses

<sup>32</sup> Birdsall, C., *Nazi Soundscapes: Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933-1945* (Amsterdam, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Brinkmann, ‘Politisches Gedicht 13. Nov. 74, BRD’, p. 165. Original text: [...] Hände schütteln auf staatl. gepflegtem Rasen, im Hintergrund werden Fahnen den Mast hochgezogen, eine Kompanie Armeemusiker spielt/ sie kriegen, mit 60 dafür eine Pension, schäbiger Hordenzauber, Klopfen auf den Tischflächen, der Vorsitzende schnüffelt 'die politische Wortsituation' ab, wie der augenblickliche Sprachstand 'des Volkes' ist Meinungen werden über die Tischflächen geschoben, Papiere ausgewechselt /dh. gleich gemacht/ jenseits der täglichen Interessen, Akten in Betonbauten & Panzerschränken, “Geheimnisse”, “nicht für die Öffentlichkeitbestimmt” & Virensicher“ [...]

the listener to synthesize the elements and interpret the whole in a narrative way.<sup>34</sup> He adds that pre-recorded music or sounds can create interventions in the narrative.

Two decades earlier, Peter Sloterdijk went even further when stating that a ‘neo-synthetic author’ aims ‘to forge shape out of the mangle-mangle, to fabricate sound and resonance out of random noise’ and to construct a world “with the scraps of melodies and noise.”<sup>35</sup> Fichte, Brinkmann and Fauser fit into this requirement. These three authors fostered difference extensively. By producing their original kind of underground and pop literature they inserted new layers of sensory perception into the contemporary literary scene of the late 1960s.

Fichte, Fauser and Brinkmann did substantially undermine the authority of what the precedent generation of authors, journalists and broadcasters constructed as the reality that has been taken for granted.<sup>36</sup> By metaphorically playing the ‘ontological synthesizer’ they challenged “old poets” and ‘linear media’ when snapping at media settings and their explicit forms of illustrating what is worth reporting.<sup>37</sup>

*Mashing-up. Dealing with the Intermedia Shape of ‘Authenticity’*

Fichte, Fauser and Brinkmann glued together bits and pieces from their sensory experience of the world to create something different – something with the air of being new and original. In their own prose styles, as can be seen in *Palette*, *Day at the Border* or *Political Poem 13.11.74*, BRD, and *Mr. Go goes kaputt*; Fichte, Brinkmann and Fauser, respectively, brought together the sound of words, references and experiences. They preferred to follow this approach in pursuit of ‘authenticity’ and to engage the audience with the text. As representatives of 1960s underground literature they applied a new and alternative style of writing and reporting, a new method of creating authenticity. In this sense, New Journalism and pop literature were about crossing the boundaries of formats, genre, location, and positioning. Making use of restrained homosexuality, individual addiction and self-destruction as topics of literature, Fichte, Fauser and Brinkmann paved the way for a self-reflexive journalistic style, called ‘Gonzo-

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<sup>34</sup> Verstraete, P., ‘The Frequency of Imagination: Auditory Distress and Aurality in Contemporary Music Theatre’, *Dissertation Amsterdam*, available from: <http://dare.uva.nl/document/134145> (Enschede, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Sloterdijk, P., *Kopernikanische Mobilmachung und Ptolemäische Abrüstung: Ästhetischer Versuch* (Frankfurt, 1987), p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem.*, p. 94.

Journalism', that is, in an American context, commonly associated with Hunter S. Thompson.<sup>38</sup>

The embedded writer-reporter tears down the limitations of the learned practices of traditional reporting and analyzing issues. Documentary makers and journalists like Günter Wallraff follow this approach with firm conviction to constantly reveal the truth of how the media industry operates or to reveal the actual working conditions in different sectors of trade and industry.<sup>39</sup> As the boundaries between genres, styles, tastes, objects, stories and plots became permeable, the instability of established cultural forms became increasingly more evident. In the field of Literature, this opened spaces where new modes of reading could develop – modes that featured a mixing of the senses more than ever before.

In this respect, pop culture influencing literature did champion an audio-visual approach to the writing and the reading texts. Cultural material was floating around freely and the author/journalist was obliged to grab relevant information to condense in written words and tape-recorded self-interviews.<sup>40</sup> Whether it was Brinkmann strolling through the acoustic environments of Cologne, Fichte in Hamburg, or Fauser in West Berlin, all three authors linked the words, sounds, noises and melodies that they came across to capture everyday life in the late 1960s.

Three different strategies need to be outlined in order to examine how written excerpts were conflated with sound, music and noise using recording technologies and the media. This is a key element of in mashup strategies. The media is a tool for the individual to use for positioning oneself at the interface of pop culture, the publishing business, print and broadcast journalism and counter-cultural self-empowerment.

Firstly, audio-visual media challenged literary production in so far as pop literature, for example, updated and brought writing processes up-to-date by synthesizing the sound of words, of the environments and even of

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<sup>38</sup> Thompson, H. S., *Hells Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga of the Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs* (New York, 1966); Thompson, H. S., *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (New York, 1971); Winston, M., 'The Gonzo Text – The Literary Journalism of Hunter Thompson', PhD Project, University of Cardiff, available from: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/jomec/contactsandpeople/phdstudents/winston-matthew.html>.

<sup>39</sup> See Günter Wallraff, available from: <http://www.guenter-wallraff.com/>. Reassessing Wallraff's contribution to the aesthetic of journalism from such a perspective is due.

<sup>40</sup> 'Listen to Fratzen in der Straßenbahn – Rolf Dieter Brinkmann über Köln', YouTube, available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RacsxZPrpwo>; Listen to 'Rolf Dieter Brinkmann – Die Riten der Aufnahmetechnik', YouTube, available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVMf1SkaA9o>.

actions. Secondly, when Fichte read extracts from his *Palette* book on stage, he brought the sound of a city into the public sphere and invited scrutiny of his chosen topics. In his performance pieces the jukebox and the microphone transmit the sounds of what the body and voice are expressing and marking as newsworthy. The third strategy is rendering the mundane aspects of everyday life, such as addiction or fainting, into poetry. This can be seen in Fauser's work where he conveys the noise that accompanies self-destructive activities or, in Brinkmann's work, where underlying feelings of misanthropy are voiced.

Across all three of these strategies, urban spaces and their distinctive sound markers are central to new forms of expression. Fichte, Brinkmann and Fauser were testing the limits of media and public discourse within the shifting soundscape of a 1960s West Germany on its way to denationalization. They used a wide range of sensual data, of symbols, sounds and media clips to remix contemporary life and to sample daily routines. In this respect, mashup techniques proved to be a valuable addition to the aesthetic arsenal of underground pop literature and to New Journalism's quest for 'authenticity'.

# LITERATURE, JOURNALISM AND POSTMODERNISM IN THE NETHERLANDS

Thomas Vaessens

## *Introduction*

In the build-up to the 2010 national elections in the Netherlands, the leading Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* published a series of forty-two front-page articles about the most important politicians running for public office. A series of six daily articles was devoted to each leader of the seven major parties. What was remarkable about the articles was that none of them were written by journalists. For this occasion, the editor invited seven Dutch writers and novelists individually to shadow a politician for a week and to give a daily account of their experiences. These invitations resulted in a series of rather unconventional portraits of the politicians concerned. The reader was not only informed about the position and views of the top political actors, but also about the more human aspects of politics: the man or woman behind the politician, his or her character, personality, and so on. In the newspaper, the series was not only highlighted with recurring illustrations, but the articles also stood out on the front page thanks to an eye-catching heading: 'Uit de stolp.' The Dutch word 'stolp' can be literally translated as "cheese cover" (a bell-shaped glass cover we use to cover the cheese), but metaphorically it refers to the idea of the 'ivory tower'. In Dutch there is the expression 'de Haagse stolp': the political ivory tower in The Hague which is the parliamentary capital of the Netherlands. Those using the expression 'de Haagse stolp' tend to see the political system in the Netherlands as isolated: politicians who are unaware about what is really going on outside their bubble, meaning outside of their glass cover. So, in the English translation, the title of the series reads something like 'Out of the Glass Cover', say, or, somewhat more imperatively: 'Get out from under the glass bell!' (subtitle: 'Writers Shadowing Politicians').

At first sight, the cheese-cover metaphor in this title seems to refer to the politicians portrayed in the series. It reminds us of the cliché of the political ivory tower.<sup>1</sup> The suggestion is that the disconnected, somewhat unworldly politicians have to be brought back into the street, that they have to be reconnected to the real world, to the world of ordinary newspaper readers. And the suggestion is also that we need writers and novelists to do so. As a literary historian I find the implications of the title very interesting for this reason: It would appear that the editor of one of the leading

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<sup>1</sup> The equivalent in the U.S. would be "inside the Beltway."



newspapers in the Netherlands thinks that writers and novelists are more able to break through the barriers erected by politicians than journalists. Or maybe even that writers and novelists are more closely connected with the everyday world. In this interpretation of the metaphor in the title, the writer is held to be, in a way, superior to the conventional mainstream or newspaper journalist.

But there is an additional interpretation. The idea of disconnectedness that is implied in the cheese-cover metaphor can also be applied to the writers and novelists. If the idea of politicians under a glass cover is a cliché, the image of the writer as someone who lives in an artistic bubble is not unfamiliar either. Complaints about the ivory tower mentality of writers and literary specialists are as old as modern literature and every now and then the literary debate is revived by writers or critics who accuse their colleagues publicly of being disconnected or uncommitted. This could also be the message of the editor in giving the series of articles this title. In that case, 'Get out from under the cheese cover' is an incitement to political and social involvement of writers and novelists. It is a cry for literary engagement.

The 2010 series of newspaper articles on politics written by writers and novelists was not a unique event. All of us can easily think of recent examples of the same overlap of the domains of journalism and literature. Writers, not only in the Netherlands, write journalism about current social and political issues—think of Martin Amis and David Foster Wallace in the English-speaking world, Juan José Millás in Spain, Frédéric Beigbeder in France, Abdelkader Benali and Arnon Grunberg in the Netherlands, or Tom Nagels and Tom Lanoye in Belgium. Their literary journalism of the last two decades examines the "lostness" of Generation X.<sup>2</sup>

One could also point in this respect to the many contemporary novelists worldwide who have recently started to write nonfiction, or to the considerable number of recent novels based on true stories. To sum up with just a few examples: Dave Eggers (*What Is the What*, 2006; *Zeitoun*, 2009), and Jonathan Safran Foer (*Eating Animals*, 2009) in the United States; Aifric Campbell (*The Semantics of Murder*, 2007) in Ireland; Thomas Brussig (*Wie es leuchtet*, 2004) in Germany; François Bon (*Daewoo*, 2004) in France; and Anton Dautzenberg (*Samaritaan*, 2010) and Joris van Casteren (*Lelystad*, 2009) in the Netherlands. All these novelists decided to leave the field of fiction, some of them for an indefinite period, others just for the duration of one book. Whether using their authorial imagination or not, they all entered the domain of an external reality, a domain that is usually the territory of the journalist.

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<sup>2</sup> Roiland, J., 'Getting Away from It All: The Literary Journalism of David Foster Wallace and Nietzsche's Concept of Oblivion', *Literary Journalism Studies* 1 (2009), no. 2, p. 96.

What we see therefore in contemporary literature is a considerable number of writers becoming journalists. This has been around for a while, of course (Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Truman Capote, among others). Yet the cross-border traffic between literature and journalism also goes in the opposite direction. There are journalists who think that sometimes fiction can be a more useful instrument to investigate reality than the methods of journalism. Recently I came across the example of Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Lorraine Adams, who switched from investigative reporting at the *Washington Post* to writing fiction because she felt it allowed her to tell more of the truth. 'Fiction is much more equipped to capture the complexity of our lives than the missives and reports that come out of newspaper organizations,' she said.<sup>3</sup>

So, what we see is novelists inclined to write journalism in order to enrich their writing, and journalists seeking out fiction and other literary techniques to make their journalism more effective. Writers and journalists are making overtures. The borders between fact and fiction are once again being reexamined and challenged. The recent phenomenon of the so-called 'New New Journalism,' as Robert Boynton has characterized it, underlines this observation. American writers and journalists such as Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, Michael Lewis, or Susan Orlean write research-based, narrative-driven, long-form nonfiction, using all sorts of innovative immersion strategies.<sup>4</sup> Their work exemplifies the process of cross-fertilization between journalism and literature that is clearly of the moment.<sup>5</sup>

The current heavy traffic on the borders between journalism and literature raises several important questions about both disciplines. As a scholar of literature I am first and foremost interested in the literary aspects of this interaction. That means that I ask questions like these:

- What do we expect from writers (writing journalism)?
- (Why) do we think that writers can cure politics/politicians from "disconnectedness"?
- (Why) do writers feel the need to leave their ivory tower?
- Are writers writing journalism because they feel that the old reproach of their supposed other-worldliness and disconnectedness makes sense at this point in history?
- What makes writers opt for a more literary journalism?
- Are they trying to reinforce literature?

<sup>3</sup> 'Reporters 'are mouthpieces for people in power'', *BBC4*, available from: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_8700000/8700144.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8700000/8700144.stm) (May 24, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Boynton, R.S., *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft* (New York, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> I have reflected on similar issues in: Vaessens, T., 'Making Overtures: Literature and Journalism, 1968 and 2011: A Dutch Perspective', *Literary Journalism Studies* 3 (2011), no. 2, pp. 55-72.

- Is literary journalism a sign of the times?

This last question is a historical one. The current literary interest in journalism is certainly not a new phenomenon. When Boynton coined the term ‘new new journalism’ he was, of course, referring to the New Journalism of the late 1960s. Forty years ago writers were also attracted to journalism. The similarity between those moments in recent literary history—two moments in which authors came out from under their glass cover—provokes a series of historical questions as well, questions concerning the similarities and the differences in the Netherlands between 1968, a critical year historically among the Western European democracies, and today, 2011. In exploring the subject, I will do so by examining two Dutch authors I would suggest serve as exemplars among their peers during each period, first Harry Mulisch (1927-2010), and then Arnon Grunberg (1971).

*1968: Harry Mulisch and New Journalism*

Let us first have a quick look at the Dutch literary journalism of the 1960s and Mulisch. Then an up-and-coming novelist, he was a Dutch representative of the New Journalism movement (although I’m not sure whether or not he was aware of the American version at the time). In the period between 1952 and 1960 he published four successful novels, but after this promising start a lean period ensued and it was not until 1970 that his next one was published. This absence of new work represented a conscious choice by the writer, as he deliberately chose to write nonfiction. In 1962, he published *De zaak 40/61* [*Criminal Case 40/61*], a reportage of the Adolf Eichmann trial; in 1966, he gave an analysis of Dutch Provo – a counterculture movement in the mid-1960s that focused on provoking violent responses from authorities using nonviolence as bait – and the disturbances in Amsterdam during 1965 and 1966 (*Bericht aan de rattenkoning*); in 1967, he collected a number of political and satirical pieces (*Wenken voor de jongste dag* [Suggestions for the Youngest Day]); and in 1968 gave his sympathetic view of the Cuban revolution in *Het woord bij de daad* [Suit the Word to the Action]. Not much of Mulisch’s nonfiction is translated into English but his book on Eichmann is. Mulisch witnessed the Eichmann trial in Israel and wrote a series of articles that first appeared in a Dutch weekly *Elseviers Weekblad*. The entire collection was then published as a book in 1962. Six years ago, the English translation came out under the title, *Criminal Case 40/61: The Trial of Adolf Eichmann, an Eyewitness Account*.

Mulisch’s switch to nonfiction was a well-considered choice. He had come to the conclusion that writing fiction at this point in history was not what a writer should do. He even accused his fiction-writing colleagues of

conservatism, saying that ‘a writer who agrees with the theory of *l’art pour l’art* chooses the side of the reactionaries.’ He continued by saying that objectivity is an illusion, and that writers should speak from their own unconcealed consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

This emphasis on consciousness fits in with the established patterns of New Journalism as part of a historically broader literary journalism.<sup>7</sup> In his book *True Stories* Norman Sims gives very similar definitions for the New Journalism and literary journalism. According to Sims, ‘The New Journalism movement . . . sought to return the voice and consciousness of the writer to journalism.’ And ‘literary journalists recognize the need for a consciousness on the page through which the objects in view are filtered.’<sup>8</sup> Both definitions emphasize the fact that writers give up their ambition to be objective and that they do so because they think it is important that journalism is written from the position of a writer’s individual consciousness. ‘Writers should let their consciousness speak,’ said Mulisch in 1968, emphasizing this crucial concept in the discourse of New Journalism or literary Journalism.

The idea is that writers can let their consciousness speak by using the technical instruments of the novelist and by using their imagination. Mulisch provides the reader with a novelist’s perspective on the trial and utilizes literary devices, particularly the use of imagery, to complete his picture of Eichmann. The image that the reader takes away is that the most frightening enemy might be the average man walking down the street or even the face in the mirror (an image that reminds one of Hannah Arendt’s ‘banality of evil’ to be found in the average and normal). As a writer, Mulisch says he is ‘less concerned with what he [Eichman] has done than with who he is,’ and he doesn’t use historical facts, but rather his psychological insight and his imagination to find out ‘who he actually is.’<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the work, Mulisch relies on imagery, a useful tool given the graphic nature of the subject. The descriptions of Israel, the Holocaust, the city of Berlin during and after the war, and of Eichmann, provide the reader with constant and lasting images. In describing Eichmann, Mulisch provides a series of photos of Eichmann. The real photograph, the one in the middle, is divided in half. Each half is reproduced and matched against

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<sup>6</sup> Auwera, F., *Schrijven of Schieten* (Antwerpen, 1969), p. 96.

<sup>7</sup> I follow John Hartsock here in not drawing a sharp distinction between those two forms, assuming that the boundaries between them are fluid. Hartsock, J., *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, Mass., 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Sims, N., *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston, Ill., 2007), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Mulisch, H., *Criminal Case 40/61: The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: An Eyewitness Account* (Philadelphia, 2005), p. 111, 117.

itself to create two additional photos.<sup>10</sup> One photo is the two left sides put together and the other photo contains the right side of the face in its mirror image. The first one portrays an average, inoffensive-looking middle-aged man. The latter shows an image not unlike a monster, or as Mulisch describes him: a beast. Thus, we have the ‘two faces of Eichmann,’ one good, the other evil. This emphasis on imagery plays a major role in providing a portrait of Eichmann, at least from the perspective of Mulisch, the novelist and witness.

In 1968 Mulisch believed that nonfiction would in the end replace the novel. Like Tom Wolfe, spokesman of the American New Journalism, he claimed that the kind of literary nonfiction he was writing displaced the monumental literary form of the novel.<sup>11</sup> His literary journalism was, in Maitrayee Basu’s words, meant to be a response to an issue raised by the novel in the nineteenth century, namely, the correspondence between literary illustration and the reality that it imitates.<sup>12</sup> This supports Wolfe’s rationale in the 1970s for the New Journalism as the rightful successor to the novel, which he claimed was in a “retrograde state,” stagnant for over half a century. But it also supports Mulisch’s claim that literary journalism was a superior form of journalism as well as a superior form of historiography. In an interview, he said that his nonfiction would be used in the future by people who would really want to know about the 1960s. “They will not nose around in old newspapers,” he claimed. And he triumphantly stated that his nonfiction would have become a replacement for reality by then: ‘That means that my book has become reality.’<sup>13</sup>

What Mulisch does here is frame traditional journalism as the antithesis of literature. His new literary form is thus presented as a synthesis in which the virtues of journalism (its seeming closeness to an external reality) and of literature (consciousness, imagination) come together.

*2011: (New) New Journalism after 9/11—Amis, Eggers, Grunberg*

Before crossing over to present-day literary journalism, I would like to return to the metaphor of the glass cover for a moment. In 1968, explaining

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<sup>10</sup> See Ronda L., ‘Review of ‘Criminal Case 40/61: The Trial of Adolf Eichmann’’, available from:

<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/lpbr/subpages/reviews/mulisch0106.htm> (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Wolfe, T. and Johnson, E. W. eds., *The New Journalism: With an Introduction* (New York, 1973), 41.

<sup>12</sup> c.f. Basu, M., ‘‘New Journalism’’, *Subjectivity and Postmodern News’*, *Proof* (2010), no. 2, available from: <http://www.proof-reading.org/-new-journalism-subjectivity-and-modern-news>.

<sup>13</sup> Roggeman, W., *Beroepsgeheim 4: Gesprekken met schrijvers* (Antwerpen, 1983), p. 122-23.

to a journalist why he stopped writing novels, Mulisch said that it was time for literary writers to leave their ivory towers. At that moment in history, fiction to Mulisch was something of a renunciation of the world and a waste of time. 'It is war,' he said, referring to Vietnam first of all, but also to the Cold War. 'In times of war one should not waste one's time writing novels. There are more important things to do.'<sup>14</sup>

Although the nonfiction Mulisch published in the 1960s was not about Vietnam, nor about the Cold War, for him there was a clear connection between topical matters—the current events in the world—and his decision to stop writing novels. Other things were more important.

One could say that the same goes for many literary writers writing nonfiction and working as journalists today. I have chosen Martin Amis as a spokesman for these writers. This is what he wrote in the *Guardian*, looking back upon 9/11 and its effects.

After a couple of hours at their desks, on September 12, all the writers on earth were considering the course that Lenin menacingly urged on Maxim Gorky: a change of occupation. . . . An unusual number of novelists chose to write some journalism about September 11. . . . I can tell you what those novelists were doing: they were playing for time. The so-called work in progress, the novels they were working on, had been reduced, overnight, to a blue streak of autistic babble.<sup>15</sup>

It is not my intention to reduce the revival of nonfiction and the current fascination with 'true stories' to a mere reaction to the War on Terror that started on September 11, 2001. Then again, the fact is that Amis certainly was not the only writer who made a connection between a writer's inclination to journalism and the turbulent times they are living in.<sup>16</sup> For Amis, as for Mulisch forty years ago, unrest and turmoil are the catalysts for literary journalism.

Many of Amis's colleagues, most of them novelists, have chosen to write nonfiction in the last few years. All these writers account for their switch to nonfiction as a kind of social service for writers. Apparently they seem to think that sometimes writing a novel is not enough, even for a novelist. Or, in Mulisch's words, sometimes there are more important things to do than writing a novel.

Clearly, another point of similarity between 1968 and the present is that novelists writing nonfiction use their typically literary skills and qualities. By doing so, these writers claim that their nonfiction is of a higher order than conventional journalism or other forms of factual writing. To support

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<sup>14</sup> Auwera, *Schrijven of Schieten*, p. 96.

<sup>15</sup> Amis, M., *The Second Plane: September 11: 2001-2007* (London, 2008), p.11.

<sup>16</sup> Boynton, *The New New Journalism*, p. xxix.

this claim, let us have a quick look at two authors, one American and one Dutch.

American Dave Eggers's *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, a Novel* is one example. The double subtitle of this 2006 book combines fictional with nonfictional elements: it refers to the life of a real person, the Sudanese refugee Deng (nonfiction); but in the second part of the subtitle the book is qualified as a novel (fiction, or the suggestion is that the book contains rhetorical strategies normally associated with fiction, such as richly colored description).

Eggers started to write the book as a factual report of Deng's life. In an interview he said that he wanted America to know what every immigrant to the U.S., whether legal or not, is going through now.<sup>17</sup> But then he gradually realized 'that he'd have to fictionalize it, for the fullest effect.'<sup>18</sup> 'Fictionalizing,' then, means something like making it lively, compelling, affective. I quote Eggers:

All these things in the book—the facts of the war, the movement of people and troops—are historically accurate, but what's necessary to make a book compelling is shaping it in an artful way. . . . I wanted . . . the book to come alive, and not be dry, so . . . I decided the important thing was to tell the story well and bring an audience that might not otherwise come to it if I had written only what Deng could remember, and only what we could prove. Only maybe 433 people would've read that book. So I made it a novel.<sup>19</sup>

Eggers does use fictional elements in the sense of made-up details, , as well as the techniques of the literary writer, to broaden the impact of his writing, just as Mulisch did back in the 1960s. Although forty years later it has been given, in my view, a contemporary touch of commercialism, it is still imbued with the same principle.

Eggers obtained a degree in journalism from the University of Illinois and he credits that training, along with his experience in daily journalism, with giving him the tools to report real-life stories, for instance the interviews he did for *What Is the What*, and the immersion journalism he undertook to report *Zeitoun*.

Eggers's Dutch colleague and contemporary Arnon Grunberg has no degree in journalism, but apart from that, there are many points of

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<sup>17</sup> Kirschling, G., 'Dave Eggers on "What Is the What"', *Entertainment Weekly* (October 28, 2007), available from: <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20154178,00.html>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*; Eggers himself: "This is a work of fiction. Names characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously," in Eggers, D., *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, A Novel* (New York, 2007), p. x.

agreement between his work and that of Eggers. Grunberg is a novelist, yet to an increasing degree his novels are based on journalistic fieldwork. In his novel *Onze oom* [Our Uncle] (2008), for instance, he incorporated the results of research into illegal arms trade and interviews with imprisoned women in Peru.

In 2010 Grunberg published *Kamermeisjes en soldaten* [Chambermaids and Soldiers], a collection of recent pieces written for *NRC Handelsblad*. In his introduction, he characterizes this new journalistic work by contrasting it with his earlier contributions to newspapers:

For 10 years I have been writing for the newspaper every two weeks. I wrote about my life and my traveling. Now I feel the need to write about other people's lives. I want to go get out and about, to see people, following the advice that Maxim Gorky gave to Isaac Babel.<sup>20</sup>

The reference to Babel as a role model is significant in the introduction to a collection of journalistic work that includes pieces of immersion reporting about military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 1920, Babel joined in a campaign of the Red Army against Poland in the Russian Civil War. He wrote about his experiences, not only for the army's newspaper, but also in his novel *Red Cavalry* (1926). For that reason, his biographer called him an embedded journalist *avant la lettre*.<sup>21</sup> Grunberg follows Babel's example: he becomes embedded in the Dutch and American armies, he writes about it for several Dutch newspapers, and he incorporates this journalistic material into his novels.

Keywords for the description of Grunberg's immersion strategies are embedding, grounding, and participation. In several recent interviews he declared that, as an author, he wanted to really be part of something: 'Sure, there are writers who stay in their study all the time,' he says, 'but I don't want to be such a writer. . . . I want to be in contact with people, I want to be part of the world.'<sup>22</sup> Grunberg, who started his career as a politically unconcerned writer of ironical novels, now clearly feels the need to get out from under the glass cover, just like his predecessor Mulisch in 1968. And his new work, based as it is on journalism and fieldwork, reminds one of Mulisch's literary journalism.

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<sup>20</sup> Grunberg, A., *Kamermeisjes & soldaten: Arnon Grunberg onder de mensen* (Amsterdam, 2009), p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> An interview with G. Freidin: Haven, C., 'Isaac Babel's Stanford Biographer explores the Russian writer's world of violence, irony', *Stanford News*, February 16, 2010. Consultable at: <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2010/february15/freidin-babel-biography-021610.html>

<sup>22</sup> Grunberg, *Kamermeisjes & Soldaten*, p. 8.



Grunberg's beliefs about his new, journalistic style of writing are congruent with what scholars in the field of journalism studies have said about the power and purpose of literary journalism.<sup>23</sup> A primary characteristic has to do with the idea of literary journalism as a kind of social service by the author. Sims, referring to Kenneth Burke's definition of literature as 'equipment for living,' wrote: 'Whether or not literary journalism equips me for living differently than other forms of literature, I read it as if it might.'<sup>24</sup>

Grunberg also thinks that literary journalism, and the novels that are based on it, are very special styles of writing. Both the reader and the writer are likely to find answers to their key question: how to live? For Grunberg, literary journalism is the art of everyday living. 'It is my task to find answers to the question how to live,' says Grunberg in his introduction to the collection *Kamermeisjes en soldaten*.<sup>25</sup>

Other scholars emphasize the subjectivity of literary journalism, a subjectivity that doesn't distort the truth, but instead provides the facts with new, literary perspectives. John C. Hartsock claimed that literary journalism's 'purpose is to narrow the distance between subjectivity and the object, not divorce them.'<sup>26</sup> Grunberg confirms this line of thought every time he emphasizes that he is not just a journalist in search of objective facts but also a novelist. In an interview with Frank Harbers he said that as a journalist he has no shining example: 'In my literary reportage I have only been guided by novelists.'<sup>27</sup> Grunberg here seems to imply that a reportage written by a novelist is of a higher order and is richer than mere journalism, thanks to the subjectivity and the imagination of the novelist.

The third characteristic of literary journalism that is often mentioned is the idea that literary journalism realizes a relationship between art and politics.<sup>28</sup> If literary journalism is not about 'objective truths,' maybe instead it is about working toward the discovery and presentation of pragmatic truth (or truths). Grunberg also confirms this idea. To him, conventional journalism is about conventional truth. In an interview he said that he tries to pursue 'a higher truth,' not only in his novels but also in his literary reportages.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> cf. Roiland, 'Getting Away from It All', p. 90.

<sup>24</sup> Sims, *True Stories*, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Grunberg, *Kamermeisjes & Soldaten*, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, p. 132.

<sup>27</sup> Harbers, F., 'Between Fact and Fiction: Arnon Grunberg on His Literary Journalism', *Literary Journalism Studies* 2 (2010), no. 1, pp. 77.

<sup>28</sup> Roiland, 'Getting Away from It All', p. 90; Roberts Forde, K., *Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment* (Amherst, Mass., 2008), p. 205.

<sup>29</sup> Harbers, 'Between Fact and Fiction', p. 78.

*1968 and 2011: Differences*

What have we seen so far? If we accept Mulisch and Grunberg as exemplars of their periods in the Netherlands, we can see that there are considerable similarities between the literary journalism of 1968 and of 2011. Harry Mulisch, forty years ago, and Arnon Grunberg, today, switch to nonfiction and literary journalism because as writers with a growing awareness of their social task they feel the need to leave the comfort zone of the writer, to get out from under the glass cover. They place their ambitious literary journalism in the service of big questions (equipment for living, how to live, and so on); they feel that the world is in need of their subjective views and they deliberately enter the domain of politics. Inevitably, however, there are differences too, and I will consider three of them.

*1. The Devaluation of Literature*

The first difference has to do with the declining standing of literature. Much has been written about what William Marx called 'the devaluation of literature,' and I am not going to add another pessimistic statement to the endless series of proclamations on the death of literature.<sup>30</sup> What I will do is merely record the fact that a novelist like Mulisch, in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, was credited with all manner of virtues. His position as a prominent novelist earned him a good deal of respect, not only in literary circles, but in all walks of life. In the public domain he was a well-known intellectual and television personality. He owed his vast reputation to his novels, the novel being an art form that had little competition.

Today, Arnon Grunberg is the undisputed *jeune premier* of Dutch literature. His award-winning novels are prominently reviewed in all the newspapers in the Netherlands and Flanders. Yet Grunberg is not Mulisch and he probably never will equal his predecessor's fame and prestige. Grunberg would not complain about this, of course, but that does not mean that he is not worried about the social impact of the novel or the novelist. I believe he is for the following reason: His characterization of literary journalism as 'the novelist's oxygen mask,' in the above-mentioned interview with Harbers, suggests that to him the switch to journalism and research-based novels is a survival strategy: you require oxygen to survive.<sup>31</sup>

After his nonfiction period in the 1960s, Mulisch returned to the novel in the early seventies, saying that war was now over, and that it was time to

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<sup>30</sup> Marx, W., *L'adieu à la littérature: Histoire d'une dévalorisation xviii-xxe siècle* (Paris, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Harbers, 'Between Fact and Fiction', p. 76.

tell stories again. And right he was: In the years that followed, the American press compared him to Homer, Dante, and Goethe.<sup>32</sup> He did not need his nonfiction to be the distinguished and influential public intellectual that he was. But, whereas the journalists once felt humbled by the novelist, we now live in an age in which the novelist lives in a state of anxiety about nonfiction, as Michael Lewis puts it.<sup>33</sup> This reversal of fortune may have come about because news has become the “de facto literature of our times,” which is used by many people for distraction and entertainment as well as information.<sup>34</sup>

Grunberg works in a world that ascribes more authority to the writer of nonfiction than to a novelist. In his manifesto *Reality Hunger*, David Shields writes that ‘urgency attaches itself now more to the tale taken directly from life than one fashioned by the imagination out of life.’<sup>35</sup> And Hartsock said in an interview that his students are always startled when they read literary journalism. The work of literary journalists always makes them hungry to read more, he says, and that is no small accomplishment with today’s young people: ‘I think it’s all because it’s about real life.’<sup>36</sup>

In the 1960s Mulisch made an excursion outside his discipline, after which he returned to the novel permanently. Today Grunberg lives in another world. His rapprochement with reality can be considered as part of a strategy against the devaluation of literature. In order to regain the authority that was once self-evident for a literary author Grunberg places himself in the position of the journalist. To be more precise: as an embedded writer he places himself in the position of a war journalist, adopting a role that—according to Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer, two experts in the field of war journalism—is perceived as even more authentic and more authoritative than an average journalist.<sup>37</sup>

## 2. *The Rise and “Fall” of Postmodernism*

Now we move on to the second difference between the literary journalism of Mulisch and his contemporaries on the one hand, and Grunberg and

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<sup>32</sup> Mulisch, H., ‘Archibald Strohalm’, website of the Dutch Foundation for Literature, available from: <http://www.nlpvf.nl/book/book2.php?Book=782>.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, cited by Boynton, *The New New Journalism*. p. xii.

<sup>34</sup> Seymour Krim, quoted by Boynton. See also Basu, ‘New Journalism’.

<sup>35</sup> Shields, D., *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (London, 2010), p. 200.

<sup>36</sup> Schulte, B., ‘John Hartsock on the Lasting Power of Narrative Journalism’, *The Washington Post*, available from: [http://blog.washingtonpost.com/story-lab/2010/04/narrative\\_journalism\\_a\\_convers.html](http://blog.washingtonpost.com/story-lab/2010/04/narrative_journalism_a_convers.html) (April 23, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Allan, S. and Zelizer, B., ‘Rules of Engagement: Journalism and War’, in: Allan S. and Zelizer, B. eds., *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (London, 2004), p. 3-21.

company on the other. That second difference has to do with the colorful history of postmodernism between 1968 and today. Back in the sixties, Mulisch's New Journalistic distrust of the novel was consistent with early postmodernism. He had passed beyond the essentially modernist view of the world that considered it possible to determine the nature of reality by the scientific method of objective observation. Mulisch was a child of his (postmodern) time in part, but only in part. He made the shift from scientific belief in the progressive elimination of uncertainty and ambiguity, to a belief in the indeterminate nature of reality. On the other hand, Mulisch at the time clearly distinguished facts from fiction. For him, those were two ontologically divided categories, and that is what sets him apart from postmodernism. While Mulisch resorted to nonfiction, postmodern writers developed a kind of writing that implied that reality only existed in the language that described it, with meaning inseparably linked to writing and reading practices.

Forty years later, well after the heyday of postmodernism, Grunberg would not dare to distinguish facts and fiction so decisively anymore. To him it is more self-evident that one cannot think of a reality outside of the fictions we create when we try to describe it. Unlike Mulisch in the sixties, Grunberg knows and emphasizes all the postmodern clichés, that there is nothing outside the text and such. However, like so many other writers today, he also holds the opinion (at least in most recent years) that postmodern discourse, half a century after its appearance, has got bogged down in cul-de-sac relativism and detached irony.<sup>38</sup> Grunberg admits that postmodernism, in demolishing the essentialist cultural ideal of liberal humanism, has had an important cultural function, yet he is left wondering what answers postmodernism can give to today's questions. And one of the questions that is of special importance to him is the question of how we can speak about reality (external phenomenal reality) again, after postmodernism deconstructed the distinction between reality and fiction.

Mulisch and Grunberg made the same move by switching to literary journalism and leaving the glass cover of literature but each had different opponents. Mulisch was opposed to the art-for-art's-sake idealism of his colleagues, whereas Grunberg is fighting the noncommittal attitude of postmodernism. In doing so, he sometimes returns to statements about fiction and reality that remind us of Mulisch's distinction between fact and

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Vaessens, T., 'Realiteitshonger: Arnon Grunberg en de (non-)fictie', *TNTL*, 126 (2010), pp. 306-26; Vaessens, T. ed., *De Revanche van de Roman: Literatuur, Autoriteit en Engagement* (Nijmegen, 2011); Vaessens, T., 'Dutch Novelists beyond 'Postmodern' Relativism', *Journal of Dutch Literature* 2 (2011), no. 1, available from: <http://journalofdutchliterature.org/>.

fiction. Here is an example of such a remark, in which Grunberg makes fun of the alleged postmodern denial of reality:

Doubt and skepticism about what constitutes reality are very healthy, but denying the distinction between fiction and reality just like that points to an attitude that results from a lack of skepticism and doubt. Reality offers a few “truths,” which leave not a lot of room for skepticism. Go and stand on a rail track for instance, and wait for the train to come.<sup>39</sup>

Grunberg is not attacking postmodernism here, but an idea commonly associated with postmodernism. Just like Mulisch, he embraces external reality, and he resists popular relativism—a relativism that was not there when Mulisch decided to stop writing novels. What we’re seeing here are similar responses to different critical idealizations or hegemonies during different historical periods.

### 3. *Media Revolution*

The third and last difference between 1968 and now that I want to discuss has to do with the fundamentally changed context of the media in which nonfiction and literary journalism manifest themselves today. Let’s have another look at the manipulated photographs of Adolf Eichmann that Mulisch used. This handiwork shows us that, back in the sixties, Mulisch was already very well aware of the power of images and how perception could be manipulated. In this sense, the somewhat naïve and amateurish photographs used in *Criminal Case 40/61* are a fast-forward, a prophecy even, of one of the most prominent themes of present-day literary journalism. For Grunberg and many of his colleagues, living in a world dominated by mass media, images, signs—and any other simulacra, mediation, and the steering of our perception by media industries—are at the very centre of attention. In his pieces of immersion reporting, for instance, Grunberg ceaselessly questions the discursive authority that is, as we have seen earlier, ascribed to embedded journalists such as himself. In today’s climate, to write as if one’s writing were neutral and unbiased is sufficient to show that it is anything but. Instead, there is widespread suspicion that any such “independence” of the writer is nothing but an institutional voice steeped in specific ideologies that benefit the mainstream news industry.<sup>40</sup>

Shields, in the above-mentioned manifesto *Reality Hunger*, offers a background against which the current attention of literary journalists to the theme of hyper-reality can be understood. His book is about the inclination

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<sup>39</sup> Harbers, ‘Between Fact and Fiction’, p. 80.

<sup>40</sup> Basu, ‘New Journalism’.

of present-day writers and artists of putting as much reality in their work as they can. Shields claims that the incorporation of 'raw material, seemingly unprocessed, unfiltered, uncensored' is one of the hallmarks of today's culture.<sup>41</sup> We live in a time dominated by innumerable forms of extra-literary fiction, Shields argues, and he mentions politics, advertising, the lives of celebrities, and the world of professional sports. Everything on television is fiction, whether it is packaged as such or not.<sup>42</sup>

In his journalism, Grunberg frequently shows his fascination for the ways in which, in today's hyper-reality, facts and fiction merge into one another. One of the pet notions in his newspaper articles about military missions is the idea that for soldiers there isn't that much difference between their actual situation in the army and the military video games they used to play at home. And he notices that when we think about war our frame of reference is determined by war movies, not by reality or any real experience:

What we see of war are often movies about war. . . . Soldiers imitate such movies, [and it is . . . nice to show how that works. You need a frame of reference, even when you are in a war zone for the first time, and when it concerns me that frame is the war film. . . . With that, fiction and reality can still be separated from each other, but some kind of interaction does take place.<sup>43</sup>

He concludes by saying that not only 'reality influences fiction' but that 'fiction influences reality' as well.<sup>44</sup>

'Our age has a great liking for true stories,' says the Dutch writer Christiaan Weijts, 'even though we keep coming across fiction all the time.'<sup>45</sup> For Weijts, as for Grunberg and the other contemporary writers of nonfiction, it is clear that today, more than ever, we are aware of the fact that seemingly harmless fictions can shape reality. We are more than ever aware of the manipulative character of rhetoric, journalism, and nonfiction. We have to be, in our current world in which we combine collective dependence on mass media with a very lively, individualized activity in social media like Facebook and Twitter. This mediated world is the context from which the current popularity of memoirs, New New Journalism, and other nonfiction draw their meaning. It is also the context in which we have to deal with the striking popularity of journalistic forms and television formats in which the illusion of reality plays an important role. Although

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<sup>41</sup> Shields, *Reality Hunger*, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Sante, L., 'The Fiction of Memory', *New York Times* (March 14, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> Harbers, 'Between Fact and Fiction', p. 79.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>45</sup> Weijts, NRC Handelsblad, 12 June 2010.

the formula of the reality television series *Big Brother* was not entirely new when Dutch producer John de Mol invented and developed it in the late nineties, the success of this format all over the world clearly indicates a considerable amount of reality hunger.

*Conclusion: The Writer's Responsibility*

Today's literary journalism continues an ongoing tradition that can be detected at least as far back as the New Journalism of the sixties and seventies. Nevertheless, we can also see remarkable differences. Since 1968 we have seen the devaluation of literature, the rise and fall of postmodernism, and, above all, the fundamental changes in the way news is brought to and perceived by the public. Because of these developments, the current practice of literary journalism must be viewed in a dramatically changed context.

Many novelists and writers of nonfiction today are fascinated by the role of fiction and imagination in our global media industries. The relation between fact and fiction is an appealing theme for writers. It seems to me that they are very much aware of the increasing precariousness of that relation, and also that they claim their own role as writers in those processes of fiction that shape reality. Recently, the Dutch novelist and nonfiction writer Anton Dautzenberg caused a controversy in the Dutch press. In a magazine, the *VPRO-gids*, he published a series of three interviews with Lemmy Kilmister, leader of heavy-metal rock band Motörhead, about the global financial crisis. The interviews, however, turned out to be faked. Dautzenberg never actually spoke to Kilmister, and every word in the series originated from his imagination. The hoax was much talked about. Journalists accused the author of trifling with the interview format, this unique mode of professional journalism, and, indeed, of doing away with reality, a deadly sin for a journalist.

Dautzenberg defended himself on his website by calling into question the very concept of 'reality.' He referred to the war in Iraq to support that remarkable move. We were not dragged into the war because of reality, Dautzenberg said. We got involved because Bush, Blair, and (former Dutch prime minister) Balkenende told us there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which of course was not true. What happened therefore is that, once again, fiction shaped reality: the fiction of a few politicians precipitated the harsh reality of real people risking their real lives (and actually dying!) because of a real war. And at that point, Dautzenberg writes: 'I conclude

that inventing fictions now is the exclusive domain of politicians. Writers may no longer enter this domain. I do not take the slightest notice of that.’<sup>46</sup>

I don’t think Mulisch was right when he said that in times of war one should not waste one’s time with fiction. By saying so he downplayed the role of the novel and the role of the writerly imagination in some way. Contemporary writers like Grunberg and Dautzenberg attempt to escape the isolated position in which Mulisch had left the novel. Today’s overtures between journalism and literature indicate that contemporary writers feel responsible for the current discussion about the role of fictions in contemporary politics and in the public debate. They want their work to play a role in that discussion, whether it is fiction or nonfiction.

It is no wonder then that in the 2010 Dutch national elections there were attempts to break the glass bubble of political and mainstream journalistic rhetoric that tend to perpetuate the fiction. Only the integrity of a personal voice can do that, a David with sling and stone confronting a Goliath of mindthink—a flung stone is capable of breaking a glassine brittleness. After all, in the reality hunger, everybody wants a piece of the cheese. What we are seeing are similar responses to different critical idealizations or hegemonies during different historical periods.

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<sup>46</sup> Dautzenberg, A.H.J., ‘A.H.J. Dautzenberg reageert op ophef ‘Lemmy’’, available from <http://www.ahjdautzenberg.nl/2011/03/a-h-j-dautzenberg-reageert-op-ophef-lemmy/> (March 18, 2011).





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