Abstract

The American Sixties was an era of social and cultural conflict, the effects of which created groundbreaking new aesthetic products. Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters played a major role in creating these conflicts and their subsequent aesthetics, as they experimented with LSD, linguistic expression and the limits of the body and mind during their Acid Tests. At the same time, journalists like Tom Wolfe created a radical form of literary expression with New Journalism, combining the nonfiction subjective journalism with fictional social realism, resulting in immersive, emotionally-involving true stories that “read like novels” (The New Journalism 22). These controversial figures, their conflicts and aesthetic products are brought uniquely together in Wolfe’s The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test, which, this paper proposes, acts as a symbiotic vehicle of expression between the socio-cultural and literary upheavals that helped shape the Sixties. The controversial style of subjective journalism accurately portrays the intersubjective, present-tense aesthetics of the Pranksters by adopting their techniques into its [...]
Cultures in Conflict / Conflicting Cultures

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Revolutionary Writing: The Symbiosis of Social and Literary Conflict and Aesthetic Production in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*

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The American Sixties was an era of social and cultural conflict, the effects of which created groundbreaking new aesthetic products. Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters played a major role in creating these conflicts and their subsequent aesthetics, as they experimented with LSD, linguistic expression and the limits of the body and mind during their Acid Tests. At the same time, journalists like Tom Wolfe created a radical form of literary expression with *New Journalism*, combining the non-fiction subjective journalism with fictional social realism, resulting in immersive, emotionally-involving true stories that "read like novels" (*The New Journalism* 22). These controversial figures, their conflicts and aesthetic products are brought uniquely together in Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, which, this paper proposes, acts as a symbiotic vehicle of expression between the socio-cultural and literary upheavals that helped shape the Sixties. The controversial style of subjective journalism accurately portrays the intersubjective, present-tense aesthetics of the Pranksters by adopting their techniques into its language. Consequently, this relationship of style and subject calls into question the very nature of how a conflict is "written" into the public zeitgeist.

The zeitgeist of the American 1960s is one of conflict: the Black Power Movement; the Women's Liberation Movement; the Peace Movement; Rock 'n' Roll; the Psychedelic Movement were just a few of the social and cultural revolts that defined the era. Yet, considering the groundbreaking nature of these conflicts and their innovative techniques and aesthetic products, how could traditional, objective journalism accurate-
ly document the events? Scholar Nicolas Mills, author of The New Journalism: A Historical Anthology, believes that it could not, saying:

[the] who, what, where, when, why style of reporting could not begin to capture the anger of a black power movement or the euphoria of a Woodstock. [. . .] it was necessary to report events from the inside out, and this is what the new journalism attempted to do.  

( emphasis added; Mills xvii)

Thus, one revolution creates another: the social revolts effectuated by Mills's examples, rippled through the literary echelons, where battles were waged over language, description, and punctuation, resulting in a controversial literary aesthetic called New Journalism. Stemming from a combination of non-fiction, subjective journalism and fictional social-realism, New Journalism "styled itself as an alternative to more standard media renderings of social reality, promising to deliver a 'more real' reality, the truer story of the many social crises splitting American society in the sixties" (Staub 55). Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters were one of these "many social crises" documented through New Journalism, specifically in Tom Wolfe's classic The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test. The work can be seen as an aesthetic revolution in its own right, a vehicle of symbiotic expression between the respective socio-cultural and literary upheavals of both the Pranksters and the New Journalists. As a result, this essay proposes that it is precisely this controversial negotiation of subjective journalism and literary social-realism, applied to the often inexpressible techniques and aesthetic product of the Pranksters, that makes Wolfe's text one of the most accurate accounts of the Sixties' psychedelic movement. This method of writing a conflict with a conflict subsequently heralded a new method of "writing" the zeitgeist: by speaking with the voice of the times to express the conflicts of the age.1

Though Wolfe's text covers the majority of the Pranksters' history -- with Kesey's initial discovery of LSD in 1959, the creation of the Pranksters in 1963, their infamous road trip across the United States in 1964, and the group's eventual disbandment in 1966 -- it is his narration of the group's linguistic, psychological, and physical experimentation that most clearly demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between the conflicts

1 The idea of "accuracy" in literature, fiction or nonfiction, can be tricky even in the best cases. In this essay, "accuracy" refers to the journalistic ideal of presenting the truer form of the "real story" as it happened, without authorial interference or bias. Complete impartiality is impossible, thus, with "accuracy," what is being suggested is that New Journalism approaches a closer understanding to what actually happened during the Pranksters' experiments than attempted-objective journalism as both the Pranksters and the New Journalists aimed for total audience immersion.
while, at least, — any other person, and could take part in any conceivable adventure, real or imaginary” (*Children’s End* qtd. in *EKAT* 208).2 Just as Pranksters brought the noises outside of the bus inside and the inside noises outside, they also tried to exchange their own experience of an acid high with that of another user.

Finally, in combination with the experimental forms of linguistic expression and the psychological manipulation of intersubjectivity, the Pranksters also tested the means through which they could bypass the body’s physical limitations of sense. By reducing the average sensorial lag-time of one-thirtieth of a second, they believed that a feeling of the true present, the “whole other world that LSD opened your mind to […] — Now” would be realized. The Pranksters’ *Now* is similar to that of Walter Benjamin’s “Now-time” (*Jetztzeit*), described as follows:

> History is the goal [Ziel] that would be arrived at, or produced by, a construction, the place of which is imagined or made [bildet] by a structure of temporality: the time of *Jetztzeit*. This time is filled or fulfilled [erfüllt] according to the structure of metalepsis and metaleptic prolepsis which conceives of a present fulfilling a past and, therefore, of a past filling or determining a present. (Bahr 11)

As in Benjamin’s *Jetztzeit*, Wolfe relies upon metalepsis (specifically, a metaleptic narrator) and the historical present to portray a literary version of the *Now* in *EKAT*. In contrast, Kesey’s understanding of the LSD *Now* is the very absence of past and future; the “structure of temporality” does not exist beyond the moment itself. It is the sensation of one’s entire being focused and connected on the very moment. Despite these differences in definition, ultimately, Kesey considered the task impossible, saying:

> This “total breakthrough” culminated in the Acid Tests, arguably Kesey’s most influential aesthetic product.3 Designed to simulate the *kairos*, the mystical experience of an acid high wherein all of these barriers — of expression, of audience versus actor, and of physical sensation — are erased: sequential time has no meaning and a new, intersubjective ever-present dimension is experienced. Kesey’s eventual goal for the Acid Tests was to achieve the *kairos* without the assistance of LSD, instead relying upon the disorientating effects of multi-media entertainment — lights, film, photography, music, dance, and chants — to help the attendee reach the mystical sublime without psychedelic assistance. While the success or failure of this acid-free high can be argued, the Tests themselves, as a unique aesthetic product, greatly influenced the Sixties’ society and culture, with artists like Roy Sebern, writers like Hunter S. Thompson, the Hells’ Angels, local and national reporters, journalists from *Vogue* and *Women’s Wear Daily*, the local police, and the FBI in attendance. Fellow artist of the times, Joe McDonald, founder and lead singer of *Summer of Love*, goes so far as to claim that San Francisco’s “Summer of Love,” kickstarted by Kesey and the Pranksters, “became the template: the Arab Spring is related to the Summer of Love; Occupy Wall Street is related to the Summer of Love. […] It became the new status quo” (Weller 64).

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2 In his article, “The Roots of the 1960s Communal Revival,” Timothy Miller writes that communes were not shaped by the hippie movement but were, rather, “crucibles that played a major role in shaping and defining hip culture” and “developing new subcultural mores” of the hippie movement (75). In comparison, Miller states, LSD was a “pivots of the hip experience” but “it did not become a symbol of and vehicle for rejecting the dominant culture until mid-decade, when Kesey staged a year of Acid ‘Tests’” (74). As such, the intersubjectivity of the Acid ‘Tests’ and LSD, though a key component of the eventual image of the Sixties’ counterculture, could be considered a psychedelic search for a sublime commune. For the purpose and scope of this essay, it suffices to say that communal thinking – from living situations to the psychological framework – was a definitive characteristic of the hippie movement, which Wolfe subsequently responds to with a subjective, immersive narration that attempts to blur the lines of audience and actor.

3 In a similar vein, some critics have argued that the bus, the Acid Tests, and the techniques used therein were Kesey’s most post-modern aesthetic product, saying “that in pursuit of the ephemeral NOW, Kesey and the others created an aesthetic form whose abrupt departure from pre-existing ones connects it with Lyotard’s philosophical notion of the postmodern as a probing of the existing of representability” (Whelan 69). As a result, Whelan continues, “Any place at all, any social reality, can be invested by the Pranksters, by their disruptive presence and representational machinery, with aesthetic status” (72).

4 Wolfe documents the fundamental mysticism behind this search for the *kairos* likening it to the “Bashers” that illuminated the beginnings of the major religions: “Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism” (*EKAT* 116-17). Kesey, however, constantly refuses his position as leader of a mystical group by calling himself the “non-navigator,” or “the non-teacher” or by dismissing the argument entirely, saying “Too much, too much” (*EKAT* 115).
With these techniques and the subsequent social influence of Kesey’s Acid Tests in mind, the question remains: how does the method of documentation effect how a social conflict, like the Pranksters, is written into the zeitgeist? In a recent interview, Ken Babbs, a pseudo second-in-command to the Pranksters, said of Wolfe’s text:

If Tom Wolfe’s book never came out, the Pranksters would be nobodies. Thousands of people in San Francisco did the same things we did. But because of Tom Wolfe, and because Kesey was a writer, our story was remembered. (Babbs, Interview with Donaghey)

Likewise, in one of the first reviews of EKAT, journalist Elliot Fremont-Smith writes that the text is “A genuine raz-daz high, courtesy of Tom Wolfe. And it’s done with words. What Ken Kesey could not quite manage, an ‘acid graduation,’ a great turn-on without drugs, Mr. Wolfe brings off” (Fremont-Smith 33). Arguably, Wolfe achieves this level of success by adopting the Pranksters’ techniques into his own writing, using New Journalism to reach a literary kairos in order to document the Pranksters’ own mystical search. In doing so, Wolfe also makes Kesey a character, a cultural (anti)hero, rather than simply a criminal or fugitive. As critic Charles S. Ross said, referring to Wolfe’s The Right Stuff: “He defines the character of Chuck Yeager by telling a story about a nerveless, drawling airline pilot. As a result, he defines reality, but he also enlarges it” (Ross 118). Thus, an analysis of the New Journalism techniques as applied in EKAT demonstrates that Wolfe is able to accurately document the Pranksters’ activities specifically by refuting the conventions of traditional journalism, subjectively immersing the reader into the subjects’ thoughts, actions, and emotions; in doing so, Wolfe writes not only the Pranksters, but also New Journalism, into the zeitgeist of the Sixties.

Immediately separating the New Journalists from more conventional journalists is, as Mills says, their method of reporting from “the inside out” (Mills xvii). Rather than simply interviewing for objective facts, they attempted to create a highly personal and internally-focalized experience, in order to give the impression of being there and seeing the action, rather than being told about it. To do this, the New Journalists reduced their use of the traditional, covert and understated “beige narrator” — so called for its determination to be neutral and unobtrusive — and replaced it with a subjective, overt, and metaleptic narrator — Wolfe’s “Hectoring Narrator” — who would report on the story but also speak directly to the reader or heckle the characters (The New Journalism 31).5 Wolfe would also employ the novelistic omniscient third-person narratorial point-of-view; from this perspective, the narrator was not limited to the personal experience of one character but could convey the thoughts and emotions of many characters. To this point, Wolfe said, “What I try to do is re-create a scene from a triple point of view: the subject’s point of view, my own, and that of the other people watching — often within a single paragraph” (qtd. in Schafer 63). The result gave the impression of experiencing the scene from “the eye sockets . . . of the people in the story,” or like watching a parade from the perspective of someone marching, someone watching, and someone broadcasting (The New Journalism 32). Subsequently, by replacing the traditional, objective “beige” narrator for a more subjective, yet still omniscient, narrator, the New Journalists gave a more personalized, internal view of the reported events; bringing the reader inside the story.

Yet for these internal events to be believably from a variety of different, real-world perspectives, the New Journalists had to have intimate knowledge of the characterizing details of their speakers, much like social-realist novelists. To this end, the New Journalists would spend long periods of time investigating the characters and events in order to narrate scene-by-scene and quote a significant amount of real dialogue. When real dialogue was not possible, Wolfe would employ the “downstage voice,” wherein the narrator adopts language similar to the main subject in order to create realistic dialogue while condensing information from perhaps multiple interviews and “create[ing] the illusion of seeing the action through the eyes of someone who was actually on the scene and involved in it, rather than a beige narrator” (The New Journalism 32). Although similar to free indirect discourse, the “downstage voice” differs subtly in that the former can implicitly connect a specific character to the unattributed dialogue — often through proximity or a continuation of subject matter — whereas the latter simply carries the same language as the main character, but without the sense of indirect attribution.6 Thus, rather than giving the narrative control to the charac-

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5 Due to this metaleptic “hectoring narrator,” critic Dwight MacDonald famously called New Journalism “the buttonhole school of writing,” for the reader is “grabbed by the lapels” and offered no objective distance between writer and topic, between reader and characters (“Parajournalism” 4).

6 The “downstage voice” is similar to Kenner’s “Uncle Charlie principle,” where “the neutral narrative vocabulary [is] pervaded by a little cloud of idioms which a character might use if he were managing the narrative” (Joyce’s Voice 17). Wolfe’s “downstage voice” is the reversal of the “Uncle Charlie principle” in that it is not the character managing the narrative, but the narrator imitating the character in order to give additional information without disturbing the scene through an unnatural, “neutral” narrative voice.
ter, the omniscient narrator maintains control of the language, adopting the character’s language for the fluidity of the scene.

Just as point-of-view and language work to seamlessly immerse the reader into a variety of perspectives and characters, so too does Wolfe’s use of punctuation and setting. Wolfe took inspiration for his now-signature unorthodox punctuation from Yevgeny Zamiatin who, he says, “constantly breaks off a thought in mid-sentence with a dash. He’s trying to imitate the habits of actual thought, assuming, quite correctly, that we don’t think in whole sentences. We think emotionally” (Wolfe, Interview with George Plimpton). Likewise, the New Journalists’ minute description of detail, or “status life,” worked to make the real-life subjects into more rounded characters, as Wolfe says in his anthology:

[the] everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture clothing, decoration, [ . . ] plus the various looks, glances, poses, styles of walking and other symbolic details [ . . ] through which people express their position in the world [ . . ]. (The New Journalism 47)

This seeming minutia operates within a non-fiction story in the same manner as Barthes’s *l’effet de réel* operates in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*; the objects not only add an effect of having occurred in a real place, such as Rouen, a courtroom, or La Honda, but also characterize the figures placed within; for example, Madame Bovary, a crime boss, or Ken Kesey (Barthes 84-5). The combination of *l’effet de réel* with the aforementioned perspectives and language allowed the New Journalists to not simply *tell* a gripping and true story, but to provide interiority, to get inside the minds and thoughts of the people who were there, to provide a detailed scene as they saw it and in doing so, to place the reader within the story. As a result of these techniques, the boundary between subject and object, spectator and spectacle would be erased; readers could feel emotionally involved in the non-fiction story, much as they would reading novels. However, the negotiation of the genres of non-fiction journalism and fictional social-realism created not only a new aesthetic product, namely New Journalism, but also a major upheaval within the literary social strata.

In his concise elucidation of Sixties’ New Journalism, scholar Michael Staub writes that, “Self-identified fiction, as none other than The *Harper American Literature* matter-of-factly informs students, temporarily lost its charms, as precisely the destabilizing hecticity of the era made life seem more interesting than art” (Staub 55). With this social turn, from art to life, the assumption would be that traditional journalism would grow in popularity, but again, Staub argues, that was not the case:

For it was not only a loss of interest in fiction that engendered the search for a new style. It was, probably even more significantly, precisely the atmosphere of social crisis that had begun to make the traditional media seem so suspect and that had called attention to the way the media’s claim to be “objective” was frequently a smokescreen for bias. (Staub 55)

This claim of bias in objective journalism implicitly argues a lack of accuracy; that in the journalists’ determination to present an optimal image of Vietnam, for example, they neglected to present the true story. As a result, amid cries of hackery, inaccurate reportage, “antics,” “parajournalism,” and “entertainment rather than information” (adapted from Dwight MacDonald, “Parajournalism”), the subjective New Journalism emerged as a champion of the story that would not be heard elsewhere, in a language that, despite its unorthodox nature, removed the smoke-screen of a biased, objective narrator and placed the reader inside a subjective, yet accurate portrayal of the events. As Gay Talese, one of the first New Journalists, was quoted as saying, “[T]he *New Journalism* is, or should be, as reliable as the most reliable reportage although it seeks a *larger truth* than is possible through the compilation of verifiable facts” (emphasis added; qtd. in Hartstock 193).

It is this “larger truth,” despite the often lack of “verifiable facts,” that Wolfe searched for in 1965, when he began reporting on Kesey and the Merry Pranksters as he attempted to “not only to tell what the Pranksters did but to re-create the mental atmosphere or subjective reality of it” (EKAT 367). As a result, the all-present, intersubjective *kairos* and the subjective, immersive New Journalism achieve symbiotic, mutual expression. For example, the unusual spelling, syntax, and typography used to narrate Kesey’s paranoia of FBI surveillance, while on the run in Mexico, recall the Pranksters’ linguistic experimentation:


--------- or are we gonna have a late Mexican re-run of the scene on the rooftop in San Francisco and sit here with the motor spinning and watch with fascination while the cops they climb up once again to come git you -.

THEY JUST OPENED THE DOOR DOWN BELOW, ROTOR ROOTER, SO YOU HAVE MAYBE 45 SECONDS ASSUMING THEY BE SLOW AND SNEAKY AND SURE ABOUT IT.
Kesey sits in a little upper room in the last house down the beach, $80 a month on paradise-blue Bandarias Bay [. . .] (EKAT 255)

The prolonged onomatopoeia ("RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR
guage of several key figures creates recognizable characters out of complex real people: Kesey becomes the flawed hero of a band of cultural rebels, rather than simply a wanted criminal.

While the previous examples demonstrate the use of individual Prankster techniques with individual New Journalism techniques, the following example analyzes how these respective techniques come together within the text to express the eventual aesthetic products of both groups: the sense of total audience immersion into a continuously-unfolding, present-tense stream of action, the literary achievement of the LSD kairos, as seen through Kesey’s most successful Acid Test:

They come piling into Big Nig’s, and suddenly acid and the world crazes are everywhere, the electric organ vibrating through every belly in the place, kids dancing not rock dances, not the frug and the — what? — swim, mother, but dancing ecstatic, leaping, dervishing, throwing their hands over their heads like Daddy Grace’s own stroked-out inner courtiers — yes! — Roy Seburn’s lights washing past every head, Cassady rapping, Paul Poster handing people weird little things out of his Eccentric Bag, old whistles, tin crickets, burnt keys, spectral plastic handles. Everybody’s eyes turn on like lightbulbs, fuses blow, blackness — wowww! — the things that shake and vibrate and funnel and freak out in this blackness — and then someone slaps new fuses in and the old hulk of the house shudders back, the wiring writhing and fragmenting like molting snakes, the organs vibro-massage the belly again, fuses blow, minds scream, heads explode, small toggle switch here, lubricated with Vaseline No. 634-3 diluted with carbon tetrachloride, and they ripple, Major, ripple, but with meaning, 400 of the attuned multitude headed towards the pudding.

(EKAT 211-12)

Throughout the entire passage, the subjective, interfering narrator uses the historical present and gerunds to give a sense of immediacy; the narrative timeframe is reduced to the immediate actions. Unlike the previous examples, the sense of the Now, be it the Story-Now, Discourse-Now, or the Prankster-Now, is maintained throughout the majority of the Acid Test narrative.

Like the present-tense in creating the sense of Now, the interrupted and rapidly-changing narrative voice creates a sense of a critical mass, of many voices speaking and responding to each other, with only a shade of coherence to hold the wildness of the party together. Despite the seeming inaccuracy in this section — stemming from the narrator’s apparent loss of understanding, with “it seems most surely” and “—what?—” by displaying the overall scene as a wild, incoherent mass of thronging partiers, Wolfe sacrifices minor details for an accurate depiction of the overall party. The resulting sense is one where the specifics no longer matter in the thronging mass of dancers; only the actions are important. The narrator eventually loses control of the description, giving only the most basic indications of what is happening, with “and then someone slaps new fuses in” and “minds scream, heads explode, neighbors call the cops.” No specificity is given, in contrast to the previous lines, where Roy Seburn, Cassady, and Paul Foster are explicitly mentioned. Adding to this sense of the crowd, the “downstage voice” frequently interrupts the narrator to answer his questions, as with the dancers who answer, “swim, mother,” to other anonymous speakers with “—yes!” and “—wowwww!—” Likewise, the “downstage voice” is applied again towards the end of the section, as the narrator indicates Kesey — making changes on the dials — before adopting a common Kesey phrase with “ripple, Major, ripple,” to describe the crowd’s movement. Thus, the rapid shifts between narrative point-of-view and different characters’ language give the sense of a crowd, of a variety of voices speaking almost simultaneously. As a result, the conventional journalistic aim of objective description is sacrificed; yet, the immersive quality of the narrative, from language and perspective, creates a far more accurate image.

Equally characterizing is the description of the setting and the presentation of the status-life that characterizes the figures of EKAT. In this passage specifically, Foster is known for the random objects (“tin crickets, burnt keys”) within his Eccentric Bag. Like an unusual form of objective correlative, the setting is also described like random objects, emerging through poetic-devices: similes and consonance (“wires writhing and fragmenting like molting snakes”), spondaic rhythms (“fuses blow, minds scream, heads explode”), repetition and anaphora (the electric organ, blackness and “fuses blow”), contradictory images (“eyes turn on like lightbulbs [sic], [...] blackness”) and objective correlative (“the old hulk of a house shudders back”). Through the repeated use of these literary devices, Wolfe presents a scene of crazed movement, incoherent speech and noise, and, subsequently, of intersubjectivity for it is never clear whose “minds scream” and whose “heads explode.” The immediate answer would be those audience members at the Acid Test but it can just as easily apply to the reader, who struggles to follow and understand the unorthodox narrative.

Just as the voices and descriptions immerse the reader into the scene, so too does the punctuation. To read the section aloud is to speak in an excited and uncontrolled manner, with the italics creating emphasis and the pauses and abrupt shifts creating an abundance of breath. In spite of these pauses, however, the lack of full stops accelerates the narrative speed, mirroring the wildness of the scene. The combination of so many literary devices within a relatively short space not only creates an ab-
sorbing and vivid sense of movement, of action, of crowded spaces with noise and voices, but also "excites the reader intellectually and emotionally" (The New Journalism 28). Thus, in these passages illustrating the individual techniques and the combined aesthetics in the Acid Test, Kesey's conflicts - linguistic, psychological, and physical - find a unique means of expression in Wolfe's conflicting techniques - applying novelistic devices to subjective journalism. As a result, EKAT does not simply document the historical-cultural conflicts involved in the Pranksters' activities; rather, the text embodies the very form of these conflicts and their eventual aesthetic products: Kesey's search for the mystical kairos becomes Wolfe's search for a subjective, emotionally-involving non-fiction narrative.

Beyond the pairing of social and literary conflicts, however, is the question of "writing" the zeitgeist of the Sixties. While critics of New Journalism argued that the use of social-realism in journalism reduces the objective distance between journalist and subject and, therefore, reduces the journalistic accuracy, Wolfe's text nonetheless remains, as Fremont-Smith wrote in 1968, "not simply the best book on the hippies, it is the essential book" (Fremont-Smith 33). Though Wolfe was not physically on the bus, nor did he witness the large majority of what he documents in EKAT, he is nevertheless awarded an honorary place on it by Robert Stone, a pseudo-Prankster who spent time with them in New York City; as he says:

Who was actually on the bus? I, who waited, with the wine-stained manuscript of my first novel, for the rendezvous in New York, have a count. Tom Wolfe, who did not see the bus back then at all but is extremely accurate with facts, has a similar one. (Stone 120)

Thus, the question of accuracy in subjective journalism, at least in Wolfe's case is unquestioned; his text is widely considered to be the definitive account of the Sixties' psychedelic counter-culture. In comparison to other non-fiction works on the Psychedelic movement, Wolfe has "the literary leg-up on the competition [by] having a genuine hero - Kesey - who can carry his epic story about the origins of a new culture" (Schafer 61). Thus, Wolfe and the New Journalists not only documented the social conflicts around them but "enlarged the reality" of the Sixties zeitgeist with the voice of a literary conflict, using the controversial New Journalism to create heroes out of men, to "show" rather than to "tell" the story, and to place the reader emotionally and intellectually into the story through language and perspectives. As a result, New Journalism became the voice of the Sixties, the source of accurate documentation through subjective immersion. An era of social and cultural upheaval demands a literary upheaval: conflict writes conflict and symbiotically documents a new social, cultural, and literary aesthetic.
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