There is no longer any such thing as fiction or nonfiction, there is only narrative.

—E. L. Doctorow (as quoted in Fishkin, 1985, p. 207)

None of this was made up.

—John Hersey (1980, p. 2)

Reality is not what it is. It consists of the many realities which it can be made into.

—Wallace Stevens (as quoted in John Updike, 1995, p. 21)

My topics are facts, fictions, and the New (and old) Journalism (Frus, 1994; Wolfe, 1973), the nonfiction novel (Zavarzadeh, 1976), the new and old ethnography (Webster, 1982), the facts of fiction, fictionalized facts, and the narrative turn in the human disciplines (Bochner, 1994; Maine, 1993), and what this turn means for writing ethnography in the sixth moment. My argument moves in two directions at the same time.

Experimental ethnographic writing, the doing of poems, stories, plays, and performances, requires that the ethnographic project simultaneously question and establish the credibility of its use of facts and fictions in the stories that are told and performed (see Marcus & Fischer, 1986, pp. 40, 76, 183-184).

Ethnographers have much to learn from journalists in this regard because it is in the field of journalism that the arguments over factually accurate literary and nonliterary texts have been most hotly debated (see Carey, 1986; Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993, pp. 32-58, 113-122; Condit & Selzer, 1985; Glasser & Ettema, 1989; Reese, 1990; Wolfe, 1973; Zelizer, 1992, pp. 8-9, 19-20, 1993). I will, accordingly, discuss the history of the New Journalism (Eason, 1984; Fishkin, 1985; Frus, 1994; Hollowell, 1977; Pauly, 1990; Sims, 1984, 1990; Wolfe, 1973) while examining select celebrated journalistic cases in which the accuracy of the journalist’s text has been challenged (see Christians et al., 1993; Eason, 1986; Fishkin, 1985, pp. 209-217).

I have no desire to reproduce arguments that maintain distinctions between fictional (literary) and nonfictional (journalism and ethnography) texts (Frus, 1994, p. xi; see also Zavarzadeh, 1976, pp. 50-67). Such efforts inevitably resort to canon pointing and the use of essentializing categories. With Frus (1994, p. xi), I oppose all hierarchical categories including those that distinguish literary and nonliterary and fictional and nonfictional textual forms. These categories, which are socially and politically constructed, work against the creation of an expansive, complex public discourse wherein multiple narrative forms circulate and inform one another (see Frus, 1994, p. xi; see also Ellis, 1995a, p. 317). If all is narrative, then it can be argued that narrative techniques are neither fictional or factual; they are merely formal “methods used in making sense of all kinds of situations” (Eason, 1982, p. 143). Invoking and paraphrasing Tyler (1986, p. 123), the discourses of the postmodern world involve the constant comingling of literary, journalistic, fictional, factual, and ethnographic writing. No form is privileged over another. Truth is socially established by the norms that operate for each form or genre.

As ethnographers engage experimental writing forms, a parallel movement has occurred—namely, the full-scale embrace of methods of narrative analysis (for reviews, see Feldman, 1995; Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1988; Reisman, 1993). This move by the social sciences has produced an embarrassment of riches. Multiple strategies for analyzing narrative texts now exist, including semiotic, rhetorical, topological, structural, feminist, content-based, microlevel,
dramaturgical, thematic, and functional-based models of interpretation. Of course, these strategies falter at the moment (analyzed in Chapter 2) when the recorded or analyzed text is taken to be an accurate (visual) representation of the worlds and voices studied.

These models are pivotal because they authorize the turn to narrative, offering methods that ensure the truth and accuracy of a text and its interpretation (see Trinh, 1989, pp. 142-143). Unlike the “traditional” journalistic text, whose factual accuracy and meaning is presumably self-evident and guaranteed in advance, the social science narrative text requires serious, interpretive analysis. This analysis often divides the text into structural units or reads it in terms of various narrative functions. The story is thereby lost. These methods of interpretation will be reviewed and assessed in Chapter 8.

The previously discussed issues frame the story I tell in this chapter and the next: another chapter in the story about the narrative turn in the human disciplines (Bochner, 1994; Maine, 1993)—the story about facts, fictions, and how fictions become facts. I ask, how do we read storytelling in ethnography’s sixth moment? I begin with the facts of fiction.

From Fact to Fiction

In his epilogue to From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America, Fishkin (1985, p. 207) observes that “during the last two decades the line between fact and fiction has grown more and more blurred.” A decade later, Mitchell and Charmaz (1995) argue that “ethnographers and fiction writers rely on similar writing practices to tell their tales” (p. 1). William Foote Whyte, referring to an earlier age when these distinctions were not blurred, notes, in the fourth edition to Street Corner Society (Whyte, 1993, pp. 366, 371), that

When I began my SCS research [1936], I wanted to contribute to building a science of society. . . . I used my own framework on a basic distinction between the objective (what is out there to be observed), and the subjective (how the observer or others interpret the observed phenomena). . . . [If social realism is but one narrative strategy for telling stories] then the critic can only depend on the persuasive power of the author. Scientific arguments are thus transformed into literary criticism. (p. 371)

For Whyte, there is a clear difference between fact and fiction. The differences are not to be minimized because, when they are, we are left with only rhetoric. This argument, of course, ignores the fact that science writing is a form of rhetorical persuasion (Ager, 1989; Brown, 1989).

Fact and fiction have not always been so confused. Fishkin (1985, p. 207) argues that from the middle of the nineteenth century to the 1920s the journalist and the imaginative writer were held to different standards. Journalists worked with verifiable facts, and readers could expect stories to be factually accurate. Imaginative writers, novelists, told truths that were not necessarily factually accurate, but they adhered to aesthetic standards of good storytelling. Ethnography enters this same terrain, and ethnographers like William Foote Whyte learned how to objectively report the facts of the social situations they studied. Like good journalism, good ethnography reported the facts of life to a scientific and, at times, public community.

Robert E. Park, a founder of the Chicago School of Ethnographic Research (Vidich & Lyman, 1994, pp. 32-33), clarifies this relationship between journalism and social science writing (Park, 1950):

After leaving college, I got a job as a reporter. . . . I wrote about all sorts of things. . . . My interest in the newspaper had grown out of the discovery that a reporter who had the facts was a more effective reformer than an editorial writer. . . . According to my earliest conception of a sociologist he was to be a kind of super-reporter. . . . He was to report a little more accurately, and in a little more detail. (pp. v, vii-ix)

Thus, the duties and practices of sociologists and journalists were separated.

All this held steady from the 1920s through the 1960s. There were three different professional groups (journalists, novelists, and social science ethnographers), each producing different but often parallel tellings about society. Then the lines between journalism, imaginative writing, and ethnography began to blur again (see Connery, 1992; Eason, 1984; Frus, 1994; Sims, 1984, 1990; Wolfe, 1973). Impatient with
the rigid conventions of objective journalism, the new journalists "started to borrow technical devices from the novel...and] novelists...began to borrow research methods and subjects from journalism" (Fishkin, 1985, p. 207).

Truman Capote would boldly insist, for example, that with *In Cold Blood* he had invented a new literary genre, what he called "the nonfiction novel" (as quoted in Wolfe, 1973, p. 37). Thus did Tom Wolfe and Joan Didion join the terrain now shared by Truman Capote and Norman Mailer. The *Armies of the Night* (Mailer, 1966), *The Executioners Song* (Mailer, 1979), and *In Cold Blood* (Capote, 1966) emerged as imaginative, journalistic accounts, not unlike the journalistic fictions of Wolfe and Didion. By 1980, the novelist Doctorow (as quoted in Fishkin, 1985, p. 207) would speak the lines quoted previously: "There is no longer any such things as fiction or nonfiction, there is only narrative."

By the mid-1970s, this situation had solidified. Tom Wolfe (1973) codified the epistemology of the new journalists and offered a rich sampling of works by representative writers (Gay Talese, Richard Goldstein, Michael Herr, Truman Capote, Hunter S. Thompson, Norman Mailer, John Gregory Dunn, and Joan Didion). In 1976, Zavarzadeh introduced the term nonfiction novel or true life novel to describe the works of Capote, Mailer, and Oscar Lewis. He suggested that there were three generic (expository, testimonial, and notational) nonfiction writing forms. David Eason (1981, 1982, 1984) would soon offer paradigmatic readings of the new journalists and the nonfiction novelists, dividing them into two camps—the ethnographic realists (Wolfe and Capote) and the cultural phenomenologists (Mailer and Didion).

This situation held steady until a series of journalistic scandals (see below) rocked the nation's leading newspapers in the 1980s, leading to serious challenges to the so-called New Journalism (Agar, 1990; Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993, p. 118; Eason, 1984, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988, pp. 131-136). At the same time, more and more social scientists were turning to imaginative forms of ethnographic reporting, including poems, short stories, and nonfictional novels (see Marcus & Fischer, 1986, pp. 73-76; Richardson, 1994). Like the attacks against the journalists in the 1980s, a new generation of critics is charging that the new ethnography produces fiction, not scientific truth (see Agar, 1990; Fine, 1993; Kunda, 1993; Lofland, 1995, pp. 48, 63; Snow & Morrill, 1993, 1995a; Whyte, 1993, p. 371).

I now turn to the new journalists and the nonfiction novelists, with the understanding that these two terms refer to the same group of writers. The new journalists and nonfiction novelists are all using narrative in new ways to say new things about people in society. I will then discuss the criticisms brought to this work.

**Nonfiction Texts and the New Journalists**

Seven understandings shaped this new work. The new writers treated facts as social constructions; blurred writing genres, combining literary and investigative journalism with the realist novel, the confession, the travel report, and the autobiography (Hollowell, 1977, p. 15); used the scenic method to show rather than tell (Agar, 1990, p. 77; Wolfe, 1973, p. 50); wrote about real people and created composite characters (Hollowell, 1977, p. 30); used multiple points of view to establish authorial presence; deployed multiple narrative strategies (flashbacks, foreshadowing, interior monologues, and parallel plots) to build dramatic tension (Agar, 1990, p. 78); and positioned themselves as moral witnesses to the radical changes occurring in American society (Hollowell, 1977, p. 13).

These identifying features of the new writing also define the points of criticism that would be brought to this blurred genre (see the following discussion; Agar, 1990; Hollowell, 1977, pp. 30-33, 44-45; Van Maanen, 1988).

The cinematic society was the point of departure for all these writers. Social life and the report about life were both understood to be social constructions (Eason, 1984, p. 61). Norman Mailer (1966), summarized by Eason (1984, p. 60), captured this position best, arguing that the technology of the media "disengages subjects from their own expressions...Individuals become observers of their own acts...As actions come to be negotiated in terms of a media aesthetic, both actor and spectator live a reality arbitrated by the assumptions of media technicians."
Facts were created by the media, shaped into narrative accounts of newsworthy happenings that could be inserted into predetermined news slots on the evening news or in the evening newspaper. These understandings challenged the epistemology of the totalizing, fictive novel and the objective news account (Zavarrzadeh, 1976, p. 26).

Since its origins in the nineteenth century, informational, commercial journalism had operated under two imperatives (Eason, 1981, p. 128). A report should be a valid accounting of the events it describes, and the account should be written in a way that engages the audience. Such accounts were to be written in an objective fashion. The reporter was not a biographically specific person. He or she gathered and reported facts. The report would be written in a concrete fashion, answering to the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the events in question. The account would be emotionally neutral, given to understatement, and written in a straightforward syntax. Like documentary cinema, the narrator and the processes of textual production would be invisible. The production of the text was never at issue; the problem was to explain (and order) the facts at hand. The facts were visible events, taken as givens, objectively known and knowable by the scientific reporter. This unquestioning acceptance of the facts creates, as Dorothy Smith (as quoted in Frus, 1994, p. 113) notes, a situation in which “what ought to be explained is treated as fact or as assumption.” In this model, facts are reified (Frus, 1994, p. 112). The validity of the text is self-evident: It is grounded in the objectively reported facts.

Validity thus became, as it was for positivistic social science, the key legitimating device that authorized the journalistic text’s claims to truth. Thus conceptualized, validity operated as a marketing device. Newspapers sold to consuming publics valid accounts of newsworthy events. Readers, as an abstract yet concrete market category, could count on their newspapers to print not only all the news that is fit to print but only news that was truthful. The nonfiction writers and the new journalists questioned this equation. Empirical validity was a social construct, and there was no objective news reporting.

By focusing on the tension between the real and its hyperreal, larger than life media representations, nonfiction writers documented Hayden White’s (1973) argument that the formal techniques of history and fiction are the same (Eason, 1982, p. 143). In both forms of writing, writers use narrative strategies (characterization, motif repetition, point of view, and different descriptive strategies) to bring coherence to their materials (Eason, 1982, p. 143). The nonfiction writer uses modernist and postmodern narrative strategies (see below) to make sense of real (and imagined) situations. The historian uses narrative to bring meaning to situations perceived to be real (Eason, 1982, p. 143). For both the historian and the fiction and nonfiction writer, facts become symbolic representations to be interpreted. Narrative techniques are interpretive practices that allow the writer to make sense of the world being described (Eason, 1982, p. 143). In this way, the nonfiction writers turned narrative on its head. They erased the distinction between fact and fiction. They produced true-life accounts of real events.

The New Writers

The basic unit of analysis for the new writers was not the fact; rather, they focused on the scene, the situation in which the event in question occurred or would happen (Wolfe, 1973, p. 50). The distinguishing feature of this work is not given by the use of empirical data because the naturalistic and realistic novel also use empirical materials. The new writers refuse to use facts to support a totalizing reading of reality. The nonfiction text “is written not about facts, but in facts” (Zavarrzadeh, 1976, p. 219). These facts are treated as extensions of real life, which has been interpreted (or presented) by the writer. These writers used the methods of journalistic reporting and ethnographic participant observation to gather the facts and meanings of a particular situation or experience (see Mailer, 1979, pp. 1020-1021). They fashioned these details into stories and novels. Some called it reality fiction (Zavarrzadeh, 1976, pp. 226-227).

The writer’s task was clear: “to stay with whomever you are writing long enough for the scenes to take place before your own eyes” (Wolfe, 1973, p. 50). This point is critical; unlike the traditional journalist, who relies on other’s reports of events, for the new journalist “It seemed all-important to be there when dramatic scenes took place” (p. 21). The writer attempted to enter a world of complete strangers, to “move in on their lives in some fashion, ask questions you have no natural right to expect answers to, ask to see things you weren’t meant to see, and so on” (p. 50). Wolfe stated that the writer believes that
what he is doing is as a writer is as important as what anyone he is writing about is doing.  .  .  . If he doesn’t believe that his own writing is one of the most important activities going on in contemporary civilization, then he ought to move on to something else.  (p. 51)

The new writers found a writing model, at one level, in the realistic novels of Balzac and Dickens who had offered detailed, moralistic accounts of the key social issues of the day.  

This narrative model was exploited by the new writers who would write accurate nonfiction “with techniques usually associated with novels and short stories”  

(Wolfe, 1973, p. 15). They discovered that it was possible in nonfiction and in journalism “to use any literary device, from the traditional dialogisms of the essay to stream-of-consciousness, and to use many different kinds simultaneously . . . to excite the reader intellectually and emotionally”  

(p. 15). This form of writing allowed the reader to see and feel ordinary people in unusual situations.

The new journalists attempted to give a full objective description of the situation they were describing (Wolfe, 1973, p. 21). The novelists, however, wanted to probe and reveal the inner, subjective, emotional life of the characters they were writing about (p. 21). They provided a depth of information “that had never been demanded in newspaper work. Only through the most searching forms of reporting was it possible in nonfiction, to use whole scenes, extended dialogue, point-of-view, and interior monologue”  

(p. 21). A new typology of the printed text was produced: the “lavish use of dots, dashes, exclamation points, italics, and occasionally punctuation that never existed before . . . and of interjections, shouts, nonsense words . . . mimesis . . . the continual use of the historical present and so on”  

(p. 21).

Four narrative devices, borrowed from the social realist novelists (Balzac, Gogol, Dickens, and Fielding), were used. The most basic device “was scene-by-scene construction, telling the story by moving from scene to scene”  

(Wolfe, 1973, p. 31). The second device was the use of extensive, realistic dialogue. Inserted into each scene, this dialogue defined the key characters. The third device was the use of the third-person point of view, presenting every scene through the eyes (and voice) of a particular character (p. 32). This device allowed Wolfe and others to transcend the problems of the first-person narrative style, a style that did not allow the writer entry into the minds of others in the situation (p. 32). They entered other people’s minds by interviewing them (p. 32). The fourth device focused on social manners. The new journalists, especially Wolfe, focused on “everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing, decoration, styles of traveling, eating, keeping house . . . symbolic details that might exist in a scene”  

(p. 32).

Underlying this commitment to social status and its situational specifications rests a moral theory of the text. Wolfe is clear on this. The realist text records history and provides moral instruction (Wolfe, 1973, p. 38). Wolfe equates realism with electricity:

The introduction of detailed realism into English literature in the eighteenth century was like the introduction of electricity into machine technology. It raised the state of the art to an entirely new magnitude. . . . Abandoning social realism would be like an engineer trying to improve upon machine technology by abandoning electricity.  

(p. xi)

On the basis of their careful attention to status details, Wolfe and the other new writers developed a theory of life in contemporary America. Fragmented American culture produces subcultures and enclaves (stock cars, Las Vegas, and radical chic). These social worlds have created their own authentic, bizarre lifestyles and status rituals. Generally ignored by American observers, these enclaves deserve careful study. They are the site of the “true” America, the places where we now live, and in them are displayed a basic cultural truth: “Human nature follows the same barbaric patterns regardless of class, region or circumstance”  

(Bellamy, 1982, p. xiii). The rapid fragmentation of America has produced status confusions, leading to the production of status drop-outs and bewildering lifestyle formations (p. xiii).

The new writer chronicles these lifestyles, mocks them, pokes fun at them, and brings them alive, and in so doing suggests that we are not unlike those written about. Thus, history goes on behind people’s backs as they continually struggle for social recognition and social domination over one another. By focusing on the symbolism of such events, the new writers attempt to probe and reveal a deeper level of cultural experience. At this deeper level, reality and text have become deeply entangled in one another: Life imitates art and art imitates life (Eason, 1984, p. 52).
words in Mr. Clutter's mouth, knowing only that he spoke with them on the day he was killed.

In the retelling of the past, the writer uses synchronic narration, stopping the flow of time and presenting multiple interpretations simultaneously (Zavrzadeh, 1976, p. 97). This method contrasts to the usual modernist, fictional (and cinematic) technique that matches and contrasts chronological clock time with interior, phenomenological time (p. 97). The suspense that occurs in the nonfiction novel is inscriptive rather than situational (p. 126). Because the facts are known in advance (everybody knew what happened to the Clutter family), suspense comes from how the story is told.

The testimonial nonfiction novel, in contrast to its exegetical counterpart, makes the writer's voice a central part of the text (Zavrzadeh, 1976, p. 130). This version of the nonfiction novel is the story of the encounter between the writer and the experience being described. Thus, Mailer (1966) in The Armies of the Night tells the story of his involvement in the 1967 march on the Pentagon, and Tom Wolfe (1969) in The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test records his experiences with Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters as they took a bus trip across the United States in 1964. The writer is a witness to real events. He or she participates in and records these events, acting as a medium who registers the effects and meanings of these events for its various participants.

The writer attempts to inscribe the emotional experiences of the other, depicting their interior life in a way that maps subjective reality. This, however, is an intersubjective, or intertextual, reality—the inner mental life of the other made visible in the writer's text (Zavrzadeh, 1976, p. 142). Wolfe (1969; also quoted in Zavrzadeh, 1976, p. 150) describes Beauty Witch, the girl who went mad on Kesey's bus:

She keeps coming up to somebody who isn't saying a goddamn thing and looking into his eyes with the all-embracing look of total acid understanding, our brains are one brain, so let's visit, you and I, and she says: 'Ooooh, you really think that I know what you mean, but do you-u-u-u-u-uuuuuuuuuuuuu—finishing off in a sizzling tremolo laugh as if she had just read your brain and it is the weirdest of the weird shit ever, your brain eeeeeeccccccccccccccccccccccc. (p. 84)
Wolfe uses iconic typography to describe this layer of reality. Layers of subjective reality are thus placed on top of one another, alternating between the writer’s experiences in the world at hand, the actual events occurring in the world, and the meanings of those experiences for those involved.

Mailer (1966) creates a public document with his opening of *Armies of the Night*: “From the outset, let us bring you news of your protagonist. The following is from *Time* magazine, October 27, 1967” (p. 13). Mailer then quotes from the *Time* article that describes Mailer the writer confronting an audience of 600, most of them students.

The notational novel is a minimalist text. The writer stays out of the way and attempts to reproduce lived experience in its total transparency. Aided by the camera and the tape recorder, the writer extensively quotes from the life stories and oral histories of everyday people in ordinary situations. This experience, as it is told, is the subject matter of the text, which has no official author (Zavarradzeh, 1976, p. 177). If the exegetical text recovers experiences, and the testimonial work covers a series of events, the notational work attempts to capture the “there-ness of reality, its absolute literalness” (Zavarradzeh, 1976, p. 180). The following is a description by Oscar Lewis (1966; also quoted in Zavarradzeh, 1976, p. 212) of the home in which the Cruz family lives:

The room where she was sitting, the main living and sleeping area, was about nine by twelve feet. With only one small shuttered window facing the sea, it was always dark and damp. . . . A dozen colorful pictures of saints and several bright calendars partially relieved the drab color of the room. Finally photographs were tacked on the two-by-fours in the east wall. Below the pictures on a low table were snapshots of Cruz’s two children in a handmade wooden frame in the form of two hearts. (pp. 536-538)

Lewis inserts into this setting monologues from the Cruz family, anchoring their days and lives in this drab home. Their stories thus illuminate, in vivid detail, the cultures of poverty Lewis wishes to describe (Lewis, 1966, p. 125).

Thus, the new writers created and reproduced forms of writing that also circulated in ethnography’s modernist and blurred genre phases. Those who held to a realist version of the text did not doubt their ability to penetrate reality. Only a few (Didion) were skeptical about their place in the text, and even fewer anticipated the criticisms that would be launched against the realist ethnography in ethnography’s fifth and sixth moments (Clough, 1992).

Reading the New Writing

Following Eason (1984), it is useful to distinguish two versions of the new writing: ethnographic realism and cultural phenomenology. Ethnographic realists (or modernists) display a subculture or social world in rich detail, whereas the cultural phenomenologists (the postmodernists) describe what it feels like to be present in such a world. As indicated previously, Eason locates Wolfe and Capote in the first grouping and Joan Didion and Norman Mailer in the second.

This classification complicates Wolfe, who stressed the priority of a shared social realism for all the new journalists. Eason’s (1984) two categories, however, have the virtue of establishing the overlap and continuity between the new journalists and the exegetical, testimonial, and notational nonfiction writers. Both groups of writers work from scenes, not facts, locate themselves in their texts (at one level), and cut against the grain of established writing styles. Eason’s typology stresses the writer’s treatment of the relationship between reality and image—the writer’s place in the text, including his or her relationship to the scenes and worlds described.

Image and Reality

Ethnographic realists attempt to penetrate the images and facades that surround a group, hoping to reveal an underlying reality or cultural logic that holds the group together. Wolfe, for example, invokes social types and uses history to show how his subjects embody current cultural stereotypes. The following is a typical description: “She is a socialite in the sense that she lives in a twelve-room apartment on Park Avenue with a wealthy husband” (Wolfe, 1982, p. 103). These terms anchor Wolfe’s text in a body of taken for granted meanings.

Cultural phenomenologists refuse such moves, seeing image and reality as basically intertwined and inseparable (Eason, 1984, p. 53) and
doubting the interpretive power ability of any a priori scheme. Joan Didion (1968, p. xii; also quoted in Eason, 1984, p. 54) is explicit on this point, noting that she started *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* at a time "when she had been paralyzed by the conviction that writing was an irrelevant act, that the world as I had known it no longer existed. . . . [This report] is an attempt to come to terms with disorder." There is no recourse to preexisting cultural categories in Didion's text.

**Observing and Writing**

Ethnographic realists place a distance between themselves and those they write about (Eason, 1984, p. 53). Like classical ethnography, reports are written as if the observer is a passive participant in the events described. The reporter is cautioned to not get too close to those observed because a close personal relationship may be formed. Writers may "become stricken with guilt. . . . They may begin to feel like voyeurs. . . . People who become overly sensitive on this score should never take up the new style of journalism" (Wolfe, 1973, p. 51).

Cultural phenomenologists question this ethical relationship, often even mistrusting their right to tell a story or do an interview. Janet Malcom (1990) is quite explicit on this point: "Every journalist who is not too stupid or too full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he is doing is morally indefensible" (p. 4). Joan Didion (1968) agrees: "People tend to forget that my presence runs counter to their best interest. . . . Writers are always selling somebody out" (p. xiv).

**Stories**

Ethnographic realists have faith in the reporting process, believing that stories are out there waiting to be told and the storytelling form will accurately reveal what they have learned (Eason, 1984, p. 59). The reporter penetrates an image, a scene, to reveal underlying patterns in American culture. In contrast, cultural phenomenologists "call attention to reporting as a way of joining together writer and reader in the creation of reality" (Eason, 1984, p. 53). These writers doubt their ability to "impose a narrative line on disparate images" (Didion, 1979, p. 11; also quoted in Eason, 1984, p. 60); Stories are not waiting to be told; they are constructed by the writer who attempts to impose order on perceived events. Indeed, when it comes time to write, the writer experiences a crisis. Didion (1979) observes, "I was meant to know the plot but all I knew was what I saw: Flash pictures in variable sequence, images with no 'meaning' beyond their temporary arrangement, not a movie but a cutting room experience" (p. 13; also quoted in Eason, 1984, p. 60). These two modes of the new writing reflect radically different ways of responding to the cinematic society (Denzin, 1995a). For the ethnographic realist, the diversity "of contemporary society is interesting but not threatening" (Eason, 1984, p. 62). An underlying cultural logic can always be revealed if scenes are penetrated and the reporter digs deep enough. For the cultural phenomenologist, contemporary reality is a "lunar landscape" (Eason, 1984, p. 62): Nothing is fixed, nothing makes sense any longer. The reporter has no privileged position (Eason, 1984, p. 62), and stories are only temporary understandings—nothing holds firm. One can only write stories about these provisional understandings—stories about one's personal relationship to these seemingly disconnected events.

**The Legacies of the New Writers**

The legacies of these arguments were multiple (see Eason, 1986, pp. 437-444). The new journalists and the nonfiction writers changed the way reality was represented and interpreted. They described scenes, not facts, created composite characters, and manipulated point of view and temporality in the stories they told. They reasserted the primacy of realism as a major literary style and worked from underlying interpretative theories about the postmodern culture. They generated enormous skepticism about the government as a source of trustworthy information and had no hesitation about locating themselves in the stories they told. They were part of the movement that undermined the authority of the white middle-class reporter. In so doing, they were part of the process that opened the door for minority and women reporters. They thrived on the notion of the celebrity journalist—the star literary and investigative reporter. This diminished the cultural authority of the traditional, informational journalist.

These legacies, and their challenges to objective news reporting, persist and reemerge, as will be discussed in the cases of Janet Cooke,
Michael Daly, Christopher Jones, Alastair Reid, and Janet Malcolm (see Fishkin, 1985, pp. 209-216). First, however, a brief summary of the criticisms that were launched against these new writing forms is presented.

The Critics

Five criticisms, connected to the defining features of this genre discussed previously, were directed against the new writers (see Agar, 1990; Eason, 1986, pp. 437-442; Fishkin, 1985, pp. 210-217; Frus, 1994, pp. 155-156; Hollowell, 1977, pp. 13, 33, 38, 53, 73-75, 148; Van Maanen, 1988, pp. 134-136). First, the critics were unanimous on the fact or fiction issue: "The bastards are making it up" (Wolfe, 1973, p. 11). The critics could not accept the argument that facts were social constructions, and all writing is narrative. It was as if the use of narrative was an option, when in fact, as Booth (1983) stated, "authors cannot choose whether to use rhetorical narrative strategies, including fictional accounts, the only choice is which ones will be used" (p. 116).

The critics held to the belief that a journalist should produce an accurate, balanced news story (Christians et al., 1993, p. 55). This story should be based on carefully researched facts, information gathered from credible sources (hopefully eyewitnesses), and the use of quotes spoken by real people (Agar, 1990, p. 80). The critics were unified on this point: "While wrong truths are always correctable, with facts, fictional facts are forever counterfeit" ("The Fiction of Truth," 1984, p. 13). Facts were facts and fictions were fictions, and the two could not be intermingled. The new writers were producing fabricants (Fishkin, 1985, p. 216), and fabricants cannot be disproven. These writers were sacrificing journalistic truth for dramatic effect (Agar, 1990, p. 78). Hence, the new writers were not producing objective news accounts or objective stories about what was really going on in society.

Second, the new writers had no agreed on method for validating their assertions. Readers contended that it was not possible to determine if the writers had gotten the story right. Furthermore, their presence in the tale could well have disturbed and distorted the very scenes they were studying (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 135). Because they made up quotes, fabricated events, and quoted fictitious sources, the credibility of their texts was constantly in doubt (Agar, 1990, p. 80). The critics were most disturbed by the use of composite characters (Fishkin, 1985, p. 212). They felt that the new writers were being dishonest with the reader, who might believe they were reading about a real person (Hollowell, 1977, p. 30). Writers such as Sheehy (1973, p. 16) defended the use of this method, contending that it had a long and distinguished history in the New Yorker and that its use allowed them to "protect the privacy of perfectly decent people." The method also allowed the writer to "compress considerable amounts of documentary evidence from a variety of sources into a vivid and unified telling of the story" (Hollowell, 1977, p. 31).

Third, the writer's place in the new fiction was challenged. Some felt that too much of the writer was in the prose. Others felt too little was there (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 134), claiming that the writer's moral stance was hidden from view. These so-called neutral or objective texts were in fact neither neutral nor objective (Hollowell, 1977, p. 73). Still, some felt that the writer's place in society had gotten out of hand. These people had become celebrities, larger than the stories they were writing, making pretensions about doing something that was really not new at all (Hollowell, 1977, pp. 40-41, 49-50, 118).

Fourth, these writers were doing "scoop ethnography... Self-serving, pandering... tales [about] inconsequential topics" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 135). When they wrote about important things, they did not connect their work to the scholarly literatures on the topic (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 135). This meant that the work had the feel of something new, when in fact the findings were not new at all (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 135). At the same time, much of their work was topical in nature and perhaps too close to the news of the day. This raised doubts about its durability (Hollowell, 1977, p. 148).

Fifth, these writers eroded the public's trust in the media and the government (Eason, 1986, p. 442). By making celebrities out of themselves, they became bad models for a new generation of journalists. Their use of literary techniques violated journalistic norms concerning objective storytelling (p. 439). They contributed to the disorder journalism was experiencing in the 1970s and 1980s as large numbers of women and minority group members entered the newsmaking labor force (p. 441).
This is the critical legacy Janet Cooke (1980) confronted when she presented a composite story titled "Jimmy's World."

The Janet Cooke and Related Stories

On April 16, 1981, the Pulitzer Prize Committee announced that it had withdrawn the 1981 Pulitzer Prize in feature writing from Washington Post reporter Janet Cooke (Marianiss, 1981, p. A1). Two days earlier, Cooke had been awarded this prize for her 1980 story "Jimmy's World." This was a 2256-word story about an 8-year-old African American heroin addict who lived in a drug-invested neighborhood in Washington, D.C. (Cooke, 1980). On the basis of 2 hours of taped interviews and 145 pages of handwritten notes, Cooke's story was accompanied by an artist's depiction of Jimmy being injected with a needle by his mother's boyfriend Ron, who was quoted as saying to Jimmy, "Pretty soon, man, you got to learn how to do this to yourself" (Cooke, 1980).


a task force of police and social workers to locate the 8-year-old cited in the story and to obtain treatment for him. When the child could not be located, Barry and Jefferson voiced deep skepticism about the validity of the story. Barry said he believed 'Jimmy' did not exist, or was a composite of several youngsters. (p. A25)

Other irregularities appeared the day after Cooke received the award. Officials from Vassar called Benjamin C. Bradlee, executive editor of the Post, and told him that Cooke had not graduated magna cum laude from Vassar; in fact, she had only attended the school as a freshman. Associated Post staffers in Ohio were told that Cooke had received a bachelor's and not a master's degree from the University of Toledo (Marianiss, 1981, p. A25). These reports lead to an investigation by the Post. Bradlee and Bob Woodward, assistant managing editor, told Cooke that they "had serious doubts about her story. . . Bradlee told Cooke she had to prove Jimmy's existence as soon as possible" (p. A25).

Cooke's supervising editor, Milton Coleman, drove to the neighborhood where Cooke claimed Jimmy lived. She was unable to find his house. Post officials examined Cooke's files for the story, and there was no record of an original meeting with Jimmy and his family. After several hours of interrogation, Cooke confessed that "Jimmy did not exist" (p. A25).

A 26-year-old African American, Cooke claimed she had graduated magna cum laude from Vassar and held a master's degree from the University of Toledo. In forfeiting her prize, Cooke also admitted that her story and her autobiography were fabrications. Although she had previously stated that she had interviewed this boy, his mother, and his mother's boyfriend, she now confessed that she "had never met or interviewed any of these people and that she made up the story of Jimmy based on a composite of information about heroin addiction in Washington gleaned from various social workers and other sources" (Marianiss, 1981, p. A1). Cooke stated that "the article was a serious misrepresentation, which I deeply regret. I apologize to my newspaper, my profession, the Pulitzer board, and all seekers of truth" (Marianiss, 1981, p. A25).

Thus was exposed, in two swift days, the narrow dividing line between fact and fiction. The New Journalism (Eason, 1984; Hollowell, 1977; Wolfe & Johnson, 1973; Zavarzadeh, 1976) was put on the spot, and the legitimacy of the news media as a democratic forum was challenged (Eason, 1986, p. 431). In the wake of the scandal, journalists of course did not claim that the facts speak for themselves. The question became, instead, how did the story get published in the first place (Eason, 1986, p. 433).

If 1980 was a bad year for American journalism, 1981 was worse. Washington Post reporter Michael Daly published a story about a British army gunner in Belfast named Christopher Spell. It was soon revealed that Spell was a composite character and Daly was out of a job (Fishkin, 1985, p. 212). On December 20, 1981, the cover story in the "New York Times Magazine was a dramatic firsthand account of life inside Cambodia titled 'In the Land of the Khmer Rouge: An American Reporter Takes a Journey Into the Cambodian Jungle'" (Fishkin, 1985, p. 213; Jones, 1981). Reporters for the Washington Post "checked with Cambodian officials and concluded that Jones 'neither visited with Cambodian rebels . . . nor interviewed people quoted in the piece'" (Fishkin, 1985,
p. 213). Alexander Cockburn (as quoted in Fishkin, 1985, p. 213), writing for the *Village Voice*, "showed convincingly that Jones had invented material himself... [and had] plagiarized portions of his report from André Malraux’s 1930 novel, *The Royal Way.*"

Three of the nation’s leading newspapers had been caught “passing off fabrications as fact” (Fishkin, 1985, p. 213). The *New Yorker*, with its eight-member fact-checking department, remained to be implicated in this situation (Fishkin, 1985, p. 213). The *New Yorker* had long held the reputation for being the most accurate publication in the world (Fishkin, 1985, p. 214). The magazine’s editor, William Shawn, was fond of asserting that “at the *New Yorker*, not only accuracy but truthfulness is sacred.... I venture to say that the *New Yorker* is the most accurate publication not only in this country, but in the entire world” (as quoted in Fishkin, 1985, pp. 213-214; also quoted in Lipman, 1984, p. 1). On June 18, 1984, *Wall Street Journal* staff reporter Joanne Lipman published an article revealing that Alastair Reid, a prestigious *New Yorker* writer, had admitted to spending his entire career “creating composite tales and scenes, fabricating personae, rearranging events and creating conversations in a plethora of pieces presented as nonfiction” (Lipman, 1984, p. 1).

The story did not end. Ten years later, Janet Malcolm and the *New Yorker* would be charged with libel by Jeffrey N. Masson (Gross, 1993a, 1993b; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 576). Malcolm and the *New Yorker* were accused by Masson of fabricating five quotations in her two-part 48,500-word *New Yorker* profile of him.

The Cooke, Daly, and Malcolm stories were widely read as indictments of the New Journalism (Christians et al., 1993, p. 118; Eason, 1986; Fishkin, 1985, pp. 212-215). How did they happen?

Janet Cooke and the *Washington Post*

It was a fast-moving sequence. Cooke was hired by the *Post* on January 3, 1980. Because they were impressed with her credentials, her presentation of self during the job interview, and with the stories she had written for the *Toledo Blade*, the *Post* only checked her references in a cursory fashion. She was soon assigned to Washington’s drug-infested riot corridor (Green, 1981, p. A12). Her stories drew compliments from Ben Bradlee. In August of 1980, Cooke’s supervising editor, Vivian Aplin-Brownlee, asked her to look into a new type of heroin being used on the streets of Washington. Cooke amassed “extensive notes and taped interviews with intriguing leads” (p. A13). When Aplin-Brownlee saw what Cooke had collected, she told her she had a story for the daily. Aplin-Brownlee would not see this emerging story again until it appeared in print. Cooke brought her materials to Milton Coleman, the city editor. He reported that “she talked about hundreds of people being hooked. And at one point she mentioned an 8-year-old addict. I stopped her and said, ‘That’s the story. Go after it. It’s a front-page story’” (as quoted in Green, 1981, p. A13).
Cooke returned with a report that she had located the boy’s mother. Coleman assured her that she could promise the mother anonymity. He did not ask for the mother’s name or address. “He had promised Cooke confidentiality on her sources” (Green, 1981, p. A13). Coleman shared this emerging story with the Post’s managing editor, Howard Simmons, who also did not ask Cooke or Coleman to reveal any details on identity. Coleman reported that Cooke had told him that she had taken the boy’s mother out to dinner, and that she had visited the mother’s house. There were no further interviews with the boy or his family. Cooke reported to Coleman that Ron, the mother’s lover, had threatened her with a knife: “If I see any police, Miss Lady . . . we will be around to see you” (as quoted in Green, 1981, p. A13).

The original draft of the story contained exhausting detail about the mother’s home and about Jimmy’s dress and speech. The name Tyrone appeared on Cooke’s first version of the story and Coleman assumed this was the boy’s real name. Cooke also told Coleman the name of the elementary school “Tyrone” attended. Members of the Post staff assumed that Coleman knew who the child was, and other editors did not ask because they had guaranteed Cooke anonymity. Coleman helped Cooke redraft her story, and he checked details concerning the process of shooting up described in the story. Legal counsel made minor changes in the story.

Bob Woodward then called Cooke in and asked her about the story and was convinced of its truth. None of the Post’s senior editors checked the story. Coleman believed that “the extra eyes of the backup system would catch anything that I missed” (as quoted in Green, 1981, p. A14). On the evening of September 26, Coleman gave Cooke one last chance to pull her story and she declined. Confident that they had a true story, the Post ran the story in its Sunday edition. The rest is history.

Reactions from the Journalism Community

The responses of the American journalism community to the Cooke story reflected a nostalgia for a past when the practices of anonymous sources, unchecked reports, composite characters, scene setting, and fictionalized dialogue did not occur (Eason, 1986, p. 430). These were the practices associated with the New Journalism. As a complex inter-pretive community (Condit & Selzer, 1985; Glasser & Ettema, 1989; Reese, 1990; Zelizer, 1993, 1995, p. 79), with shared values and common understandings, American journalism responded as if with a single voice to the Cooke case. Reporters are supposed to tell the truth. Facts and fictions are not cultural categories produced by social and symbolic processes; they are real things, truthfully known (Eason, 1986, p. 431).

No one stepped forward to defend Cooke. The Post’s system of accountability had failed, and they too were at fault. They failed, in part, because the times had changed. Although the Post had gotten away with anonymous sources (“Deep Throat”) in the Watergate case, they were betrayed by Cooke, who “was free to write whatever she wished” (Michener, 1981, p. 79). Objectivity and its loss were at stake. The nation “would perish” (p. 79) if readers could not trust their newspapers to tell the truth.

Journalism history was rewritten to explain the Cooke story. Cooke was placed outside the moral boundaries of the journalism community. As a deviant, she defined the rules that had been broken (Eason, 1986, p. 430). She was young, female, and African American. She had not served a long apprenticeship (Michener, 1981, p. 80). She worked for a newspaper that had achieved considerable notoriety in the Watergate scandal in which the investigative journalism practices of Woodward and Bernstein had brought down an American president. Cooke’s work was connected to this history, and to the backdrop of the New Journalism, leading one member of the Pulitzer Prize (Judith Crist) committee to call her work not the New Journalism but the New Fiction (Tyler & Simmons, 1981).

Two decades of journalistic practice, the 1960s and the 1970s, the decades of the New Journalism and the new nonfiction, were taken to task. The problem turned on fact and fiction and reality. Greenfield (1981) is quite explicit, arguing against “the degraded condition of reporting in this country. . . . The increasingly slithery nature of the ‘reality’ much of that reporting seeks to convey” (p. A19). Greenfield goes on. The 1960s and 1970s bear witness to “a looser and looser and ever more self-indulgent and impressionistic conception of what is real and what is imagined” (p. A19).

For the journalistic community, the villain was the New Journalism and the related tradition of investigative reporting. These writing
forms, with their "cloak of anonymous sources..." [and] the use of composites had eroded public trust, and television docudramas further blurred the line between fact and fiction" (Eason, 1986, p. 439; see also Greenfield, 1981, p. A19). At issue was the composite character—a "dimly acceptable journalistic art form" (Greenfield, 1981, p. A19). Greenfield is adamant:

There was a time when quotation marks were sacred, and their presence at either end of an utterance meant something specific. It meant that the recorded utterance had, word for word, been said by whomever it was attributed to, and for this the writer could vouch. (p. A19)

Judy Mann (1981) elaborated: "Our job is simply to tell people what is happening, to use the skills we have to obtain the truth." (p. B3).

John Hersey's (1980, p. 2) line, "None of this was made up," became the rallying call for the critics. Arguing from a reconstructed moment in time when facts were facts and fictions were fictions, Hersey contended that the new journalists had lost their faith in objectivity. At the same time, their investigative reporting strategies undermined governmental authority (Eason, 1986, p. 441). Cooke's story was now read through the narrative strategies of the New Journalism. In their praise of subjectivity, the new journalists had turned reality into something that in the end becomes "fuzzy, vague, unrecognizable, and false" (Hersey, 1980, p. 23; see also Glasser & Ettema, 1989, p. 6).

Two other issues were read into the Cooke story. The 1960s and 1970s opened up American society to the sound of new voices—stories about youth, women, gays and lesbians, African Americans, Asians, American Indians, and Latino(a)s (Eason, 1986, p. 441). These voices were heard by the new journalists, and they represented a challenge to conventional journalism. Many presumed that stories about these groups could only be written by persons from these groups. Affirmative action hiring practices addressed this situation. These programs brought countless minority and female reporters into America's journalism community. Some argued that these reporters had not paid their dues and that they were hired because they filled affirmative action criteria, not because they were good reporters.

Cooke was part of this group: She was not just Janet Cooke, she was an attractive African American woman. Michener (1981) observed, "she was what is known as a twofer" (p. 80), and she "progressed so fast in her profession that she did not learn its great traditions." (p. 79).

Therefore, the argument comes full circle. The Post was culpable, taken in by this untrained African American female reporter. This reporter had learned her methods by reading the new journalists who had contributed to the disorder the larger journalism community was now experiencing.

The answer to the crisis was clear: Return to that earlier time when the crises in representation and legitimation did not exist—the nostalgic past. The call to "None of this was made up," however, failed to address the underlying problematic situation. The 1960s and 1970s had ruptured and forever changed the media's relationship to its audience and to the federal government (Eason, 1986, p. 441). A white middle-class audience that believed what its government said could no longer be presumed.

The media, however, resisted change. It did not propose any significant changes in its production process—in the way stories were written, sources were used, or interviews were quoted. It just put greater pressure on its internal, complex system of accountability to ensure that accurate facts were being produced. Nor did the media propose any significant change in its relationship to the government or to its reading audience. In response to audience cultural fragmentation, "it put more emphasis on lifestyle sections" (Eason, 1986, p. 441). In response to the loss of trust in the government, the media continued their dependency on governmental sources for stories while asserting their own independence from these sources (p. 442).

Therefore, nothing changed, and Janet Cooke was banished from the community. A victim of her own hubris, perhaps, but surely she made a moral judgment when she created her story—a call for help for persons like Jimmy. In this call, she was, as an investigative reporter, writing a human interest story, well within the moral boundaries of the larger community (see Cohen, 1981). Her error was to be judged by the standards of another community, in which the lines between truth and fiction are never meant to be crossed. Her moral judgment was sound, her newsmaking judgment was not (see Glasser & Ettema, 1989, p. 15; see also Gans, 1980, p. 293).

The real Jimmy was never found. Reporters are still sent out to find and tell true stories. The information, spectator theory of journalism
preval (see Carey, 1989, pp. 76-86; also see the following discussion). Objectivity remains the goal, and although there may be (Glasser & Ettoma, 1989)

'enduring values' upon which the claim to objectivity depends... such values are not consistent, and their application to the situation at hand is seldom clear. Appropriate objective standards are rarely self-evident, and the task of 'empirically determining' them is rarely simple. (p. 2)

Janet's story makes this clear. Furthermore, as Stuart Hall (1982) suggests, the very conditions that produce objectivity are themselves social productions.

Paraphrasing Glasser and Ettoma (1989, p. 17), who paraphrase Hall (1982), the press actively fashions and simultaneously legitimates the very forms of objectivity it ostensibly conveys and uses when it evaluates news stories. There can be no firm and solid division between newsmaking judgments (objectivity), the so-called facts of the real world, and moral judgments about these facts and their reporting—what is called the normative ought (Gans, 1980, p. 183; Glasser & Ettoma, 1989, pp. 2, 15).

Janet Malcolm: The Journalist and the Psychoanalyst

During a 7-month period in 1982 and 1983, Janet Malcolm interviewed Jeffrey Masson, a psychoanalyst and former Sanskrit scholar, who had lost his job as secretary of the Freud Archives (Malcolm, 1984, p. 59). The tape-recorded interviews occurred in Berkeley, California, Manhattan, New York, and over the telephone. In 1983, Malcolm published a 48,500-word, two-part series in the New Yorker under the title 'The Freud Archives.' This series was then published as a book, with the same title, by Malcolm in 1984. The five quotes in question are contained in the 1983 New Yorker article. The profile was based on tape-recorded interviews with Masson. The federal jury ruled for Masson, concluding that Malcolm had fabricated the five quotations and that two of them met all of the criteria for libel as defined by the Supreme Court: They were made up or materially altered. Malcolm knew they were defamatory and acted with 'reckless disregard' for their accuracy, and Masson had been damaged by them (Gross, 1993b, p. A1).

Four of the five quotes were not on tape, although Malcolm had typewritten notes that included three of them (Gross, 1993e). Malcolm asserted that these quotations were real and not made up, and that Masson could not remember having said them. In the quotes in question, Malcolm put quotation marks around words she had rearranged through the compression of long interviews that occurred several months apart and in different places (Carmody, 1993). In one instance, the locale of the quoted material was changed by Malcolm's editor (also her husband) to simplify the narrative line (Carmody, 1993).

The following are the five quotations in question. The first quotation asserts that the members of the Freudian establishment considered Masson "to be like an intellectual gigolo." The second quote describes what he would do with Anna Freud's London Home; that is, "turn it into a place of sex, women and fun." In the third quote, Masson claims that after his 1984 book, members of the profession would consider him, after Freud, "the greatest analyst that ever lived." The fourth quote refers to a statement Masson made at a conference about the "sterility of psychoanalysis." The fifth quote, on the tapes but edited in print, has Masson saying that the director of the Freud Archives "'had the wrong man' if he expected him to swallow his dismissal in silence" (Gross, 1993e).

Masson's case turned on proving that Malcolm had maliciously and deliberately fabricated the five quotations, knowing that they were defamatory, while acting with reckless disregard for their accuracy (Gross, 1993b, p. A1). Malcolm's journalistic practices were at issue. Masson's attorney established that Malcolm combined or compressed "several conversations into one seamless monologue" (Gross, 1993d). He further contended that she rearranged events and created conversations that did not occur where she said they occurred. In one instance, Malcolm set a conversation in a Berkeley restaurant when it actually involved many remarks made in several telephone conversations and during a visit to her home.

It took eight jurors—seven women and one man—3 1/2 days to reach a verdict: Quotes two and three were libelous. The jurors argued that Malcolm had been warned by the legal staff at the New Yorker about the "sex, women and fun quote. They also believed that Malcolm altered the
fourth quote to change its meaning. She had been given the opportunity to change it while working with her editor, and Masson had said that he wished he had not made that remark.

During the course of the trial, William Shawn, the legendary editor of the New Yorker, defended Malcolm’s use of compression, which she used (Gross, 1993c)

to turn months of interviews and impressions into a coherent narrative. . . . This is done frequently for literary reasons, it must never be done to distort or deceive anybody or done to the disadvantage of anybody. It is an acceptable technique with our kind of writers who are responsible people. (p. A10)

The jurors disagreed.26

Much is at issue in the Malcolm-Masson trial and related libel cases. Disgruntled subjects can now sue a writer, “on grounds that render irrelevant the truth or falsity of what was published” (Malcolm, 1990, p. 7). A journalist’s “demeanor and point of view . . . can become an issue to be resolved by jury trial. . . . Newspaper and magazine reporters . . . can . . . be sued for writing truthful but unflattering articles” (p. 7).27

Journalistic and ethnographic betrayal are always possibilities. The writer-subject relationship can be one of mutual exploitation. Subjects want their side of the story told. The writer wants a good story and may have few compunctions about representing the subject in an unflattering light, and some subjects make this easy to do.28

Accurately reproducing what a subject says is also problematic. The writer of nonfiction is under a contract to “the reader to limit him/her to events that actually occurred and to characters who have counterparts in real life, and he [she] may not embellish the truth about these events or these characters” (Malcolm, 1990, p. 153). All writing, however, requires narrative construction, fitting statements to contexts and persons, and making sense of what was said. “The literally true may actually be a kind of falsification of reality” (p. 154).

Tape-recorded, actual speech is filled with nuance, hesitation, and “bizarre syntax, hesitations, circumlocutions, contradictions” (Malcolm, 1990, p. 155). Transcribed speech, as discussed in Chapter 4, is embalmed speech—filled-out speech fitted to standard readable English, not “tape-recorderese” (p. 155). Reporters (and ethnographers) write dialogue in English (Malcolm, 1990):

When a journalist undertakes to quote a subject he/she has interviewed on a tape, he/she owes it to the subject, no less than to the reader, to translate his/her speech into prose. Only the most uncharitable (and inept) journalist will hold a subject to his/her literal utterances and fail to perform the sort of editing and rewriting that, in life, our ear automatically and instantaneously performs. (p. 155)

Readerly prose, faithful to the content and meaning of a speaker’s words, will not perfectly reproduce the actual, spoken text.

Tape-recorded speech has historically functioned as an aide to the writer’s memory. Recent libel suits make it necessary for “journalists to have an electronic record of what a subject said” (Malcolm, 1990, p. 156). There is a danger here, however, because the journalist and ethnographer may be turned into stenographers as lawsuits degenerate into what a subject did or did not say (p. 156). The idea of a reporter “inventing rather than reporting speech is . . . repugnant. . . . Fidelity to the subject’s thought and to his [her] characteristic way of expressing him/her=sel is the sine qua non of journalistic quotation” (p. 157). The task is obvious. Trustworthy quotation involves the translation of tape recorderese into English, maintaining, in every instance, fidelity to the subject’s thoughts and intentions (p. 157).

As ethnographers move more deeply into experiments in narrative, steps must be taken to ensure that the words they put in subject’s mouths were in fact spoken. In the case of composite characters, words that could have been spoken are rightfully employed. The compression of long stretches of narrative material into single monologues is appropriate when fidelity to meaning and intention are maintained. The ethics of textual production argue for meticulous checking—the verification that particular statements were in fact made. Still, care must always be taken when contexts are changed, interviews compressed and edited, and events are reordered for dramatic purposes. The reader must always be informed about the author’s narrative strategies of the author. There is no such thing as “a work of pure factuality, any more than there is one of pure fictitiousness” (Malcolm, 1990, p. 154). The degree of creative mediation that occurs in any text, including changes
in what was said and what is reported, must be indicated. It is not that there is a single reality to which a text refers. To repeat the Wallace Stevens quote (as quoted in Updike, 1995, p. 21) at the opening of this chapter, “Reality is not what it is. It consists of the many realities which it can be made into.”

**What to Make of It All**

The basic unit of analysis for the new writers was not the fact. They focused on the scene—the situation in which the event in question occurred or would happen (Wolfe, 1973, p. 50). As Zavarażadeh (1976, p. 219) stated, the nonfiction text “is written not about facts, but in facticities.” These facticities are treated as extensions of real life in its multiple forms and in its many realities. These many versions of reality are then made visible and interpreted by the writer.

The new writers refused to locate reality in events per se. Rather, the real, in its multiple forms, was anchored in the experience of the text itself. This called for a new form of reading. They produced texts that challenged readers to read reflexively, to read between the lines, to erase the distinction between fact and fiction, and to reread experiences, altering prior understandings based on new information (Frus, 1994, p. xx). This new information was contained in the reflexive text that disrupted temporal sequence, rearranged events and their chronology, and constantly altered the past in light of new understandings (Frus, 1994, pp. 209-210). The reality of the text could not be verified in external experience or in concrete external facts (see Frus, 1994, p. xx). The facts were reconstituted in the telling and in the experience of reading.

The appeal of the New Journalism and the new writing was not that it offered “the certainty of the factual” (Frus, 1994, p. 233). The appeal was more complicated. The new journalists resisted the call to facts. They wrote, instead, in a way that questioned the “natural relationship between narrativer the ‘reality’ they appear to represent” (p. 233). They created reflexive texts requiring self-conscious readers. With their readers, these writers shared the view that the world outside was filled with “pseudoevents and precreated experiences” (p. 233). The new writing produced texts and textual experiences that closely corresponded to this view of the world (p. 233).

These works mirrored the reader’s process of self-formation and self-understanding. They did this in their structured ambiguity and internal complexity. They did it in their hesitations and certain uncertainties and in the way they called attention to language and its use. They did it by challenging journalistic representations of truth, even as they challenged their own ability to represent reality. In these ways, these works created readers who shared the same uncertainties and who doubted the truths they were given by the media, the government, and by science. These works undid old dichotomies such as fact and fiction, journalism and science, and literature and ethnography. It is doubtful that we can go back to the age where such easy distinctions so automatically operated.

The critics, of course, would have none of this. Recall James W. Carey’s (1989, pp. 76-86) analysis of the two views of newsmaking—the informational, spectator model and the storytelling, participative model. Traditional journalism (and ethnography) relies on a spectator, ocular, visual epistemology. This is a representational model. In it communication (and ethnography) is “a way of seeing things aright” (p. 77). Journalists secure accurate representations of reality, and these representations shape the formation of a correct, accurate, and well-informed public opinion (p. 81).

The storytelling framework rejects the visual model of communication. It emphasizes conversation, hearing, and listening as the chief participatory modes of knowing and learning about the world (Carey, 1989, p. 80). In this view, public opinion is formed through discussion, conversation, and storytelling. As Carey states,

> [The] purpose of news is not to represent and inform but to signal, tell a story, and activate inquiry. . . . We lack . . . the vital means through which this conversation can be carried on: Institutions of public life through which a public can be formed and can form an opinion. (p. 82)

To elaborate, we lack a communitarian journalism that treats communication and newsmaking as value-laden activities and as forms of social narrative rooted in the community, not in some atomized public (Christians et al., 1993, pp. xii, 113, 121).
The new writers attempted to create a new community of discourse in America—a community critical of what was happening in the cinematic society. They turned newsmaking and ethnography into storytelling. As performers, they brought good and bad news to the American public and attempted to open a conversation that would bring this country back to its senses. Seeing themselves as moral compasses, the new writers used narrative in new ways to tell new stories about themselves and their relationships to American society. They argued for a new way of telling things about society. They used their life stories, their autoethnographies, as "the dial of an instrument that records the effects of a particular stage of civilization upon a civilized individual" (Spender, 1984, p. ix).

Their legacies are multiple and have yet to be built on. Ethnography has not embraced, let alone learned from, the many narrative turns taken by these new writers. The preferred strategy, instead, has been to stand outside, as critics, or to take up the structural approach to narrative, learning how to dissect rather than how to write stories. This second variation on the narrative turn is the topic of the next chapter.

Notes

1. To repeat, the narrative turn sees culture as a performance and privileges the linguistic and textual basis of knowledge about society. That is, things are known through textual, narrative representations and performances (see Roche & Waugh, 1995). All narratives are performative texts (see Frus, 1994, p. xiv). Following the modernist formulations of Polkinghorne (1988, pp. 13, 51, 111) and Miller (1990, pp. 66, 74-79), I define narrative as the performative process of making or telling a story. A story is the narration of a series of events in a sequence. A story and a narrative are thus nearly equivalent terms (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 13). A story and a narrative contain certain basic structural elements, including plot, setting, characters, locale, and temporality. Stories begin with an initial situation. A sequence of events lead to the disturbance or reversal of this situation. The revelation of character and setting are made possible by this disturbance. A personification of characters (protagonist, antagonist, and witnesses) also occurs. The resolution of this predicament leads to stories in which there is a regression, progression, or no change in the main character's situation (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 15). Postmodern, nonfiction writers, including Capote (1966), Mailer (1966, 1979, 1995), Thompson (1967, 1973), Wolfe (1969, 1973, 1987), and Didion (1968, 1979, 1992), challenge these conceptions of narrative (see Zavazadeh, 1976, pp. 41, 84-88, 224-227).

2. A paradox must be immediately noted: What is experimental in one setting may be old hat in another. Some of the new journalists, for example, reused the traditional methods of social realism (see Wolfe, 1973, pp. 31-32). What was radical was that journalists were using time-worn techniques invented by nineteenth-century novelists while challenging the notion of journalistic objectivity. Similarly, much experimental ethnography is experimental because it uses techniques not previously deployed in ethnographic writing. Few ethnographers have moved into nonfiction texts or into the kinds of postmodern writing discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 (e.g., mobile observers recording a moving world, etc.).

3. It is useful to immediately distinguish two branches, or versions, of journalism: the so-called objective, informational school that produces valid accounts of events and the so-called New Journalism (Sims, 1984, 1990; Wolfe, 1973), which emphasizes narrative and storytelling (Eason, 1981, p. 120). The first mode emphasizes the relation between the report and an event, whereas the second stresses the relation of the report to the reader (see Eason, 1981, p. 128). Informational journalism is evaluated on epistemological grounds, whereas narrative journalism is judged by aesthetic criteria, how well the story coheres, and so on.

4. The New Journalism has passed through four interrelated historical waves (Frus, 1994, pp. 134-135; Schudson, 1978, pp. 71-72, 75-81, 88-90, 121-122): the penny novel papers of the 1880s, the journalism of Pulitzer and Hearst in the 1900s and 1910s, culminating in the yellow journalism of the 1920s, and the movement labeled the New Journalism by Tom Wolfe as the New Journalism in the 1960s and early 1970s (Wolfe, 1973). The 1960 movement is alive and well in the recent works of Wolfe (1987), Mailer (1995), Didion (1992), and others.

5. If, as Doctorow (as cited in Fishkin, 1985, pp. 207) asserts, there is no longer any such thing as a distinction between fiction and nonfiction, only narrative, then all narratives assemble their respective versions of fact, fiction, and truth. In this context (Denzin, 1989a, p. 23), a fact refers to events that are believed to have occurred. A facticity describes how facts were lived and experienced. A fiction is a narrative—a story that deals with real and imagined facts and factitudes. Fictions are made up, fashioned out of real and imagined happenings (Clifford, 1986, p. 6). Truth references statements that are in agreement with facts and facticities as known and commonly understood within a community of knowers (Peirce, 1905). Ethnographic writings are narratives. Every work constructs its version of what is truthful and factual, what could have happened, what did happen, or will happen here. In contrast, Paul (1990, p. 122), drawing on Heyne (1983), preserves the distinction between fictional and factual texts. Fictional texts make no claim to factual status or factual accuracy. Factual texts claim to be factual, and their facts can be checked and are subject to public debate. After making this distinction, Paul (1990) then states, "all narratives are fictions" (p. 122). He conflates matters by invoking, but not naming, Peirce (1905), arguing that "to say a report is true is to affirm that it speaks the consensus of some actual community of interpreters. In turn, disagreements over truth signal appeals to different conceptions of intersubjectivity, with their own standards of evidence, significance, and style" (Pauly, 1990, p. 122). Therefore, truth is a social construct, and narratives about the world are judged "according to their coherence and correspondence to the world we recognize... . They do not correspond to the events themselves but to other narratives (Frus, 1994, p. xiv).

6. For example, serious American novelists (Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Gardner, Updike, Mason, Roth, Mason, Roth, Doctorow, Oates, Boyle, and Amis) write
fiction, whereas Mailer and Capote (in their nonfictional novels) are not doing great literature, and the new journalists—for example, Wolfe (1969), Talsee (1972), Dildon (1968), and Thompson (1973, 1967)—were dismissed for writing “zippy prose about inconsequential people” (Wolfe, 1973, p. 38; see also Frus, 1994, pp. 151-152; Pauly, 1990, p. 113).

7. A fourth form of representation, advertising, must be added to this list of postmodern discursive forms. Advertising texts have “become the site of representational politics” (Giroux, 1994, p. 4). These multimedia, performance texts certainly redefine the connections between public culture, everyday life, and “the politics of representation and the representation of politics” (Giroux, 1994, p. 5). Of course, these texts, as a form of collective, public fantasy, totally disregard the issues of fact and fiction, stressing instead the emotional power of the story that is told—the emotional identification of the viewer with the issues (and personalities) at hand. Thus, we have real people (Larry Bird and Michael Jordan) doing imaginary things (making baskets by bouncing basketballs over highways, tall buildings, and through narrow windows; the winner gets the Big Mac).

8. Thus, traditional journalism (in the information mode) invokes the norms of objectivity and impartiality and deploys a writing style that makes the narrator invisible while privileging the visual and honoring brevity (Frus, 1994, p. 58). In contrast, the New Journalism emphasizes the production of compelling stories that convince readers of the truth of a situation (Eason, 1984, p. 127). These works locate the narrator in the events reported on. There are important differences between those new journalists who work in the ethnographic realist mode and those who follow a cultural phenomenology (see Eason, 1984).

9. At least three approaches to storytelling can be taken: the modernist, totalizing novel or ethnographic text that imposes a narrative (and theoretical) framework on the events reported on (see Note 1); the postmodern, nonfiction novel that refuses to impose a modernist narrative framework on the events described; and the critical approach, which attempts to unravel the ideological foundations of the narrative itself (i.e., how it functions to bring order and meaning out of chaos). On this, Lentricchia (1990, p. 335) observes, “The storyteller’s most powerful effect comes when he [she] convinces us that what is particular, integrated, and different in a cultural practice...is part of a cultural plot that makes coherent sense of all cultural practices as a totality; not a totality that is there, waiting for us to acknowledge its presence, but a totality fashioned when the storyteller convinces us to see it [her] way.”

10. Here, Whyte is referring to and answering criticisms of his work (see Whyte, 1992; “special issue,” 1992).


12. Hollowell (1977, p. 12) notes that African American writers (Malcolm X, Claude Brown, James Baldwin, and Eldridge Cleaver) were also taking a lead in this discourse through the use of the autobiography, confessional, and personal essay.

13. This often led to the use of the technique called compression: “combining quotations spoken at different times and different places into a single monologue” (Gross, 1990a). Compression became a major issue in the Malcolm-Masson case.

14. When did the New Journalism and the writing of nonfiction texts start? Maybe it all started in 1957, the “year the Soviet Union’s Sputnik shocked America” (Zavaradze, 1976, p. 38). It might have started in 1963 when T. F. X. was murdered, or it might have started in 1968 when the political assassinations increased, ghetto's went up in flames, students fought on American college campuses, an aging Hollywood idol became governor of California, and a new generation ran away from home in search of a new frontier. The novelistic drama of the Watergate hearings (1972-1974) further eroded the public's confidence in what a fact was (Zavaradze, 1976, p. 38). The center no longer held firm.

15. Working side by side with the nonfiction writers, the new journalists argued that they were reclaiming the territory long occupied by the realist novel (Wolfe, 1973, pp. 48-49). According to Wolfe (pp. 40-41), mainstream fiction writers had given up realism. He called them the Neo-Fabulists (pp. 40-41), contending that they wrote about fictional characters as if they had no history, social class, ethnicity, or nationality. The traditional devices of realism, including dialogue, status detail, and point of view, were no longer used. These writers (Barthes, Borges, Gardner, and Marquez) wrote fables, fairy tales, and epic history, creating a void that the new journalists and the nonfiction writers attempted to fill.

16. Alternatively, following the distinctions in Chapter 2, the ethnographic realists wrote modernist texts, presuming a stable world recorded by a stable observer. The cultural phenomenologists presumed an unstable world recorded by a moving, mobile mind. They produced postmodernist texts.

17. This criticism persisted, even though these writers inevitably referenced public documents and the interviews they conducted. Wolfe (1973, p. 32) called this saturation reporting.

18. In Hunter S. Thompson’s (1979, p. 120) brand of the New Journalism, the gonzo journalist is a performer, a film director—the main character in the films he writes, directs, films, and produces. On this point, I thank Richard Bradley.

19. Actually the Malcolm-Masson case started nearly 10 years earlier in 1984, when it was dismissed by the original judge, dismissed again by an appellate court, and then ordered back to trial in 1991 by the Supreme Court, which limited the trial to five quotations (Gross, 1993a). A March 14, 1994, date was set for the retrial of the previous trial completed on June 2, 1993. The June 1991 trial found the New Yorker innocent of libel charges but held against Malcolm while disagreeing on the amount of damages to be paid Masson. In setting a new trial, the judge ruled that the amount of damages could not be separated from evidence on whether Masson had been libeled by Malcolm (“March 14 Retrial,” 1993).

20. This reading rested on analogical reasoning because Cooke used a composite case; she was exemplifying the New Journalism. A version of the intentional fallacy (Chang, 1992; Wimsett & Barsdeley, 1954), using an author’s intentions to interpret a text, was also operating. The fact that Cooke refused to discuss her story (Wahl, 1981) did not deter critics in their interpretation of her story as an instance of the New Journalism. Thus, the disconnected transgressions of the past were used to explain the transgressions in the present. This is a version of what Richard Bradley (personal communication, August 10, 1995) calls proleptic history.

21. The association of daily and weekly newspapers in the Maryland-Delaware-District of Columbia Press Association gave Cooke the second-place award in the news story category for Jimmy’s story. On April 23, 1981, they asked Cooke to return her award because the story was fabricated (“Press Group,” 1981). On August 7, 1981, Cooke, the Washington Post, and several of its editors were sued for $5.8 million in damages for publishing Jimmy’s story. The suit was brought by Washington, D.C. school board member R. Calvin Lockridge and his wife Mildred and a parent with children in the city school system who claimed that Cooke’s story caused abuse, harassment, and public ridicule as well as forcing many people to take considerable time to find Jimmy. The same parties also asked for $6.5 million in damages for the District of Columbia, which “they said,
among other things, sustained a loss in its efforts to gain statehood as a result of the story 
22. Consider the following: ‘‘Janet Cooke has made us aware of a problem. At least for a few weeks there was a lot of attention paid to the horror of juvenile addiction. Mayor Barry made a point of wanting to save ‘the real Jimmy.’ Well, children like ‘Jimmy’ are still out there’’ (Cohen, 1981, p. A12).
23. Ironically, Cooke’s story and biography remained “true” until she won the Pulitzer Prize and the authorities from Vassar and the University of Toledo started the process that lead to the discovery of the discrepancies in her personal history and then in “Jimmy’s” story.
24. At the time of the trials, the notes to document Malcolm’s assertions were missing. On the night of August 11, 1995, the missing notes were found by Malcolm’s granddaughter (Stout, 1995, p. B1); see also Lewis, 1995).
25. Mason’s legal complaint against Malcolm was amended and revised four times.
26. The case went back to trial in November 1994 when a jury in San Francisco “essentially ruled in favor of Ms. Malcolm. It found that while two of the five disputed quotations . . . were false and defamatory, none were written with the recklessness that constitutes libel” (Stout, 1995, p. B1).
27. These observations on journalistic betrayal were written by Daniel Kornstein (and quoted by Malcolm). Kornstein defended Joe McGinniss, the author of Fatal Vision, a nonfiction novel about convicted triple murderer Jeffrey MacDonald. MacDonald sued McGinniss for libel. Malcolm’s (1990) book, The Journalist and the Murderer, is the story of this trial. Malcolm’s book was read by critics as her response to her trial with Mason, and in an Afterword, she takes up the Mason suit, which had not yet come to trial (see also Malcolm, 1992).
28. Malcolm also speaks of her sense of betrayal when members of the journalism community accused her, (before the case ever went to trial) of fabricating quotations and marketing dialogue. She states, “I will no doubt always be tainted—a kind of fallen woman of journalism” (Malcolm, 1990, p. 152).
29. This legacy will be elaborated in Chapter 9 when I discuss public journalism (Charity, 1995).

CHAPTER 6

The Private Eye

Ethnography is . . . a superordinate discourse to which all other discourses are relativized and in which they have their meaning and justification.
—Tyler (1986, p. 122)

Crime fiction’s intrinsic interest in society—in the law and in the violation of the law—inextricably involves an exploration of the experience of modernity, of what it means to be caught up in this maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.
—Thompson (1993, p. 8)

Photography made it possible for the first time to preserve permanent and unmistakable traces of the human being. The detective story came into being when this most decisive of all conquests of a person’s incognito had been accomplished. Since then the end of efforts to catch a man in his speech and action has not been in sight.
—Benjamin (1973, p. 48)

My topic is crime fiction, detective stories, the Private Eye. In this chapter, I extend my analysis of the new journalists by examining another form of storytelling, the writing of the “Private Eye”—mystery, crime, and detective fiction (see Black, 1991; Bloch, 1988; Cavelli, 1976; Chandler, 1972; Fiedler, 1982, pp. 498-500; Glover & Kaplan, 1992;