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 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 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 the Black Power Movement and the hippies of Woodstock, to take 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

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[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 truest 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.

and aesthetic products of both the Pranksters and the New Journalists, as both groups attempted to achieve a new means of expression, of total audience immersion and intersubjectivity, and of the true present-tense. For example, Kesey and the Pranksters experimented with different forms of expression, such as spontaneous "rapping," ululation, and musical and poetic improvisation. In his text, Wolfe describes "rapping" as:

> a form of free association conversation, like a jazz conversation, or even a monologue, with everyone, or whoever, catching hold of words, symbols, ideas, sounds, and winging them back and forth and beyond . . . the walls of conventional logic. (*EKAT* 58)

The goal of "rapping" was to bring the participants closer, to reach a level of linguistic unity as one participant adopted and rephrased the words of the previous speaker. Likewise, the bus itself was equipped with speakers, microphones, and variable lag machines, so that the sounds of the road, the environment, and the people outside, could be mixed into the "rapping" sessions, thus, bringing the outside in and the inside out. The Pranksters also practiced musical improvisation such as making "Human Tapes," during which they wrote musical scores, assigned each other instruments, and then "sang" the score, as described in *EKAT*:

> They would take wax pencils, different colors, and scrawl out symbols for each other to improvise on: Sandy the pink drum strokes there, and he would make a sound like *chee-oonh-chunh, chee-oonh-chunh,* and so forth, and Kesey the guitar arrows over there, *broinga broinga brand brand* [. . .].
> (57)

Like "rapping," the sessions brought the participants together by removing the standard conventions of speech and allowing the participants to dictate each other's expression through mimicry or "scoring." As a result, a sense of intersubjectivity or the "group-mind" develops between participants.

The "group-mind" is the psychologically-disorientating sensation of group intersubjectivity often felt during an acid high, where "the barrier between the subjective and the objective, the personal and the impersonal, the *I* and the *not-I* disappear[s] . . . that *feeling* . . ." or "the Unspoken Thing" (*EKAT* 45, 114). In order to artificially reproduce this sensation, the Pranksters experimented with music, films, strobe lights, and dance. The aim was to overload the body's senses and bring everyone into the same experience so that "'the audience forgot it was an audience and became part of the action. . . . A man could become – for a

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 imag[in]ed or made [bildet] by a structure of temporality: the time of *Jetztzeit*. This time is filled or fulfilled [erfüllte] 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. (Bahti 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:

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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 "pivot 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.

We are all of us doomed to spend our lives watching a *movie* of our lives –
we are always acting on what has just finished happening. [. . .] We think
we're in the present, but we aren't. The present we know is only a movie of
the past, and we will really never be able to control the present through or-
dinary means. That lag has to be overcome some other way, through some
kind of total breakthrough. (*EKAT* 132)

This "total breakthrough" culminated in the Acid Tests, arguably Ke-
sey'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 experi-
enced.[4] Kesey's eventual goal for the Acid Tests was to achieve the *kai-
ros* 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 "Country Joe and the
Fish," 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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[3] In a similar vein, some critics have argued that the bus, the Acid Tests, and the tech-
niques 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 edge of representability'" (Whelan 69). As a re-
sult, 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 "flashes" that illuminated the beginnings of the major religions: "Christianity,
Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, [and] Hinduism" (*EKAT* 116-17).
Kesey, however, constantly refutes his position as leader of a mystical group by calling
himself the "non-navigator," or "the non-teacher" or by dismissing the argument en-
tirely, 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 Eliot 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 "creat[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 Charles 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 Voices* 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).[7] 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 Barthe'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

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[7] Like Wolfe's adoption of unconventional punctuation, as per "The Brothers Serapion," he adopts the use of the historical-present from fellow-writer Emil Ludwig (see Wolfe, Interview with George Plimpton). Also like the emotional punctuation, the use of the historical present reduces the objective distance as the narrator gives the impression of being in or near the action as it happens.

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 smokescreen 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, "[The 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:

> Haul ass, Kesey. Move. *Scram. Split flee hide vanish disintegrate.* Like *run.*
> Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrevrevrevrevrevrevrevrev 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 ("*Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrevrev . . .*"), though attributed to the Wolfe-narrator, recalls Sandy and Kesey's language as they imitated drums and guitars in the "Human Tapes": "*chee-oonh-chunh, chee-oonh-chunh [. . .] broinga broinga brand brand*" (*EKAT* 57). Similarly, the development of the list of imperative verbs also calls to mind the "rapping" sessions; the initial complete sentence, "Haul ass, Kesey," degenerates to single-word commands until finally reaching a list of imperatives with no grammatical compunction: "*Scram. Split flee hide* [. . .]" Like the Wolfe-narrator's previous implicit participation in the "Human Tapes," here the Wolfe-narrator holds a free-form word association conversation with himself, a "jazz conversation," building the different modes of escape on top of each other before finally returning to relative narrative "normality" with "Like *run*." Thus, without explicitly referring to them, Wolfe's text clearly replicates some of the Pranksters' experimental means of expression.

In addition to the irregular syntax and spelling, the narrative perspective and typography create a sense of literary intersubjectivity. For example, by the end of the second paragraph, the Wolfe-narrator adopts a familiar "downstage voice" of Carolyn "Mountain Girl" Garcia. Known for her country-lingo and drawl, the phrase "*come git you*" is repeatedly attributed to her throughout *EKAT*. Thus, though she is not physically present with Kesey, by adopting her language, her "outside" presence is re-imagined into the metaphysical space of his hotel room. Likewise, the section in capital letters is emblematic of Kesey's mental state, speaking in his characteristic language ("ROTOR ROOTER [. . .] they be slow and sneaky") and referring to himself in the second-person ("you"). The typography also characterizes this section as Kesey's unspoken, internal monologue as the capitalized letters emphasize his DMT-induced paranoia. This paranoia is further off-set from the rest of the overall section with the return to narrative "normality," as the scene is established in a near-journalistic fashion, where the rules of grammar, spelling, syntax, and language are more present than in the preceding lines. Thus, within a relatively short paragraph, the changes in literary methods – from novelistic and almost free-verse poetry, to internal monologue and non-fiction description – place the reader within the mind-set of three characters, the Wolfe-narrator, Mountain Girl, and Kesey, while also characterizing Kesey's altered consciousness on DMT. Perhaps more importantly, however, through these methods, Wolfe's text produces this literary intersubjectivity by adopting the Pranksters' linguistic and psychological experiments.

In a similar manner, Wolfe documents the Pranksters' attempts to bypass the body's sensorial lag-time by manipulating the narrative verb tense, as seen during a meeting between Wolfe, the Pranksters, and several LSD groups in San Francisco:

> *I'll have to hand* it to the heads. They really want to end the little games. Their hearts are pure. *I never found* more than one or two cynics or hustlers among them. [. . .]
> And the Pranksters . . . by and by . . . *I find them* in the Calliope garage on Harriet Street, the old garage, the ex-pie factory in the bottom of the old hotel. I kept peeking around in the crazy gloom of the place [. . .] and *I couldn't figure* out what they had to be so exultant about. It beats me. *As I look back on it, they were all trying to tell me . . .*"
>   (emphasis added; *EKAT* 334).

The section opens with the future ("I'll have to hand it") and present tenses ("They really want" and "I find them in the Calliope hotel"), which imply that the Wolfe-narrator centralizes the narrative-NOW and the story-NOW, intensifies the narrative, and achieves a literary sense of the Pranksters' *Now*: the narration and the events are happening at the same time. These future and present tenses are, however, refuted with the phrases "I couldn't figure out" and "As I look back on it." With the first example, an analysis could claim that the Wolfe-narrator could not discern the reasons for the Pranksters' exaltation *while* he was with them at the garage. However, the following present tense phrase, "As I look back," implies remembering and reflecting upon a past situation – i.e. that of the Pranksters' exaltation – from a *more recent* narrative time-frame. As a result, the Wolfe-narrator demonstrates that even the literary *Now* is unachievable as the narrative was never present-tense but rather, a memory considering during the act of writing; the initial present tense was, in fact, historical present. Thus, in non-fiction, as in life, the narrative mix of past and present allows the reader to "think we're in the present," only to realize that "the present we know is a movie of the past" (*EKAT* 132).

From these examples, *New Journalism*'s unique negotiation of subjective journalism and fictional social-realism allows Wolfe to accurately document the activities and techniques of the Pranksters leading up to the Acid Tests. Wolfe does not just describe, or simply tell, what happens during Kesey's time in La Honda, Mexico, or San Francisco, but instead, he *shows* how the events occurred, the noises that were made, even the delirium that was felt; subsequently, the reader is placed within the story, within the minds of the characters who were there. In addition to this immersion, Wolfe's focus on the mannerisms, gestures, and lan-

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 worldcraze 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 *ecstasy*, 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 Foster 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 light-bulbs, fuses blow, blackness – wowwww! – 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, [. . .] a mass closer and higher than any mass in history, it seems most surely, and Kesey makes minute adjustment, 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 it" 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 emotion-
ally" (*The New Journalism* 28). Thus, in these passages illustrating the in-
dividual techniques and the combined aesthetics in the Acid Test, Ke-
sey's conflicts – linguistic, psychological, and physical – find a unique
means of expression in Wolfe's conflicting techniques – applying novel-
istic 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, re-
duces the journalistic accuracy, Wolfe's text nonetheless remains, as
Fremont-Smith wrote in 1968, "not simply the best book on the hip-
pies, 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 manu-
> script 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 accu-
> rate 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 de-
finitive account of the Sixties' psychedelic counter-culture. In compari-
son 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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