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'PERSONA AND AUTHENTICITY IN THE WAR REPORTING MEMOIR'

CREATIVE COMPONENT

***SHOOTING BALIBO* (NON-FICTION BOOK MANUSCRIPT)**

ACCOMPANIED BY AN EXEGESIS

BY

ANTHONY MANIATY

M.A. (MEDIA), MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY 2006

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STUDENT NUMBER: 40392023

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THESIS ABSTRACT

PART ONE: An extract of 45,000 words constituting the first half of a book-length, non-fiction manuscript titled *Shooting Balibo: Blood and Memory in East Timor*[1], which forms the creative component of my doctoral dissertation. The full manuscript was published in 2009 by Penguin Books. *Shooting Balibo* focuses on two events - my coverage as an ABC News journalist of the 1975 conflict in East Timor, in particular the killings of five Australian-based colleagues (the 'Balibo Five') by Indonesian-led forces; and my return to the independent nation of Timor-Leste in 2008 with the cast and crew of the feature film *Balibo*[2], a drama based on the events of 1975. The book was written as a memoir of my experiences as a war reporter, and the resulting trauma which I experienced; it further explores how young and inexperienced journalists handle conflict environments. These elements are juxtaposed in the book with my return to Timor-Leste in 2008, a journey aimed at finding some release from past fears by helping to recreate the events of 1975 on the film set and writing about them. The book drew strong reactions to my interpretation of events, raising questions about the power of the memoir in the public sphere, and the authenticity and reliability of literary representations of war reporting, which became the focus of my thesis research.

PART TWO: An exegesis of 57,000 words which aims to illuminate the influences, processes and research that resulted in a substantial work of non-fiction, and also, by including further research and analysis, to broaden understanding of the creative production context in which a specific literary genre - memoirs written by war correspondents - has developed over the past century. Canvassed are issues regarding representation of the authorial persona[3], and issues of authenticity which arise in relating both the 'fact' and 'feeling' of conflict reporting experiences. The exegesis also researches war reporting as a journalistic sub-culture, and includes analyses of two major influences on the creation of *Shooting Balibo* - Michael Herr's memoir of the Vietnam War, *Dispatches*, and the war reporting memoir of the 1975 Angolan conflict by Polish correspondent Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Another Day of Life*.

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[1] Maniaty, Tony, *Shooting Balibo: Blood and Memory in East Timor*, Penguin, Melbourne, 2009.
[2] *Balibo*, Arenafilm, Sydney, 2009.
[3] The term 'persona' has many interpretations, but in this exegesis I use it in the Jungian sense: the outward manifestation of the author's personality, his or her presentation to the world, the mythic sense we as authors have of ourselves as fellow humans, and how we represent ourselves on the page. In so doing, we also assume an 'inner' self who regulates, with varying degrees of success, this complex web of impressions and emotions.

STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE

I hereby certify that this thesis entitled 'Persona and Authenticity in the War Reporting Memoir' has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was conducted using only previously published and publicly available sources and therefore did not require approval by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee.

Signed

ANTHONY EMANUEL MANIATY
STUDENT NUMBER: 40392023
1 January 2013

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I also wish to thank all those who gave support and encouragement over the course of my candidature, with special thanks to Galina Lazareva and to my sons Nikos and Alexias.

Anthony (Tony) Maniaty
1 January 2013

THESIS

PART ONE

CREATIVE COMPONENT

OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

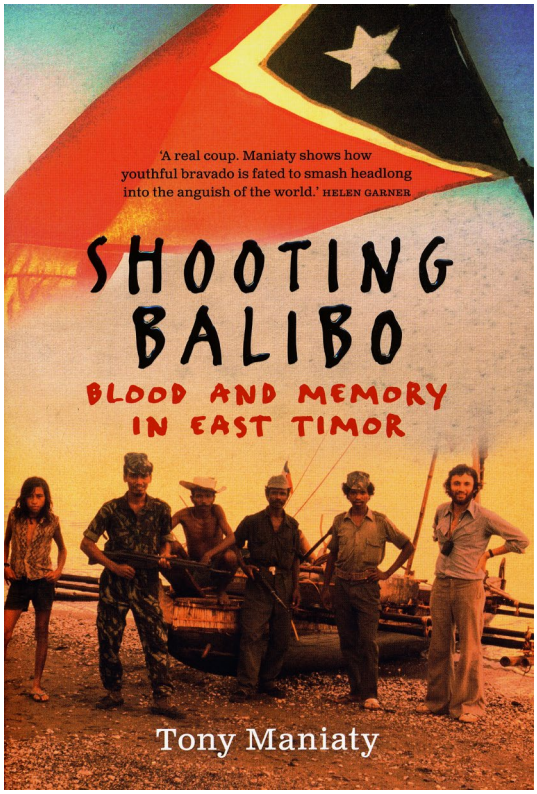
'SHOOTING BALIBO: Blood and Memory in East Timor'

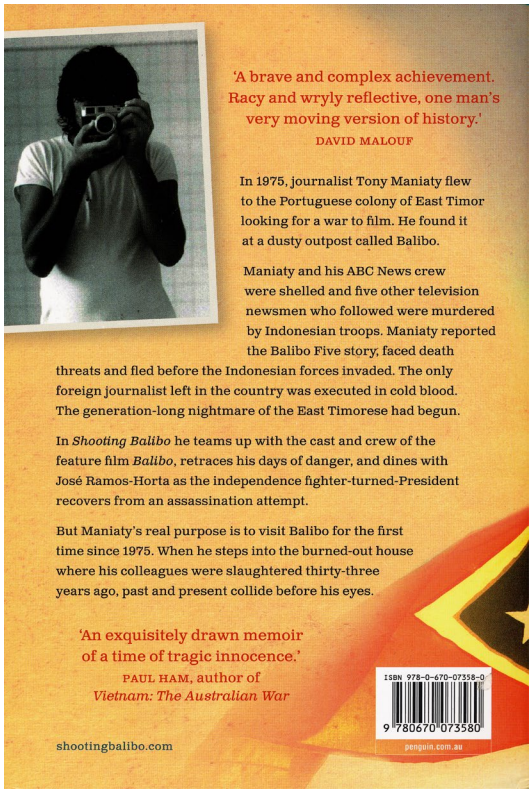
A work of non-fiction

by

ANTHONY (TONY) MANIATY

NB: This extract of 45,000 words constitutes the first half
of the manuscript of *Shooting Balibo* as submitted to the publisher.
The completed manuscript, of 110,000 words, was published
by Penguin Books Australia in 2009 (see Page 13).


'A real coup. Maniaty shows how youthful bravado is fated to smash headlong into the anguish of the world.' HELEN GARNER
SHOOTING BALIBO
BLOOD AND MEMORY IN EAST TIMOR
Tony Maniaty


'A brave and complex achievement. Racy and wryly reflective, one man's very moving version of history.'
DAVID MALOUF
In 1975, journalist Tony Maniaty flew to the Portuguese colony of East Timor looking for a war to film. He found it at a dusty outpost called Balibo.
Maniaty and his ABC News crew were shelled and five other television newsmen who followed were murdered by Indonesian troops. Maniaty reported the Balibo Five story, faced death threats and fled before the Indonesian forces invaded. The only foreign journalist left in the country was executed in cold blood. The generation-long nightmare of the East Timorese had begun.
In Shooting Balibo he teams up with the cast and crew of the feature film Balibo, retraces his days of danger, and dines with José Ramos-Horta as the independence fighter-turned-President recovers from an assassination attempt.
But Maniaty's real purpose is to visit Balibo for the first time since 1975. When he steps into the burned-out house where his colleagues were slaughtered thirty-three years ago, past and present collide before his eyes.
'An exquisitely drawn memoir of a time of tragic innocence.'
PAUL HAM, author of Vietnam: The Australian War
shootingbalibo.com
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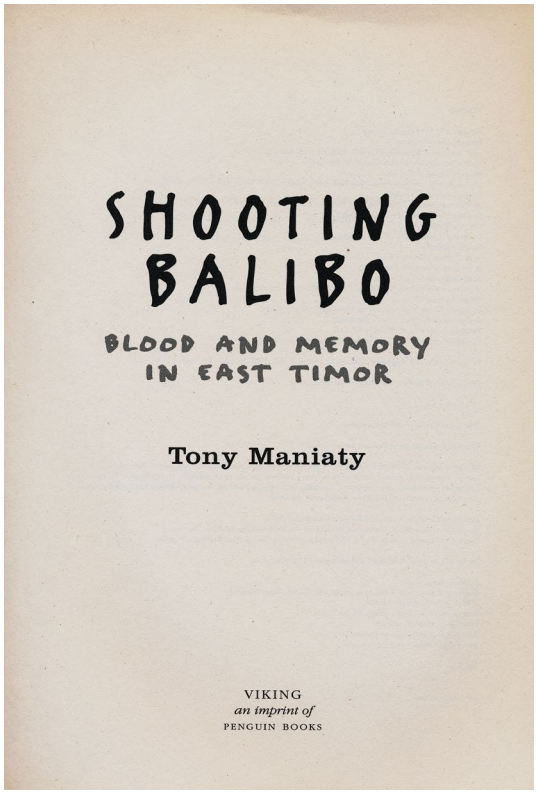
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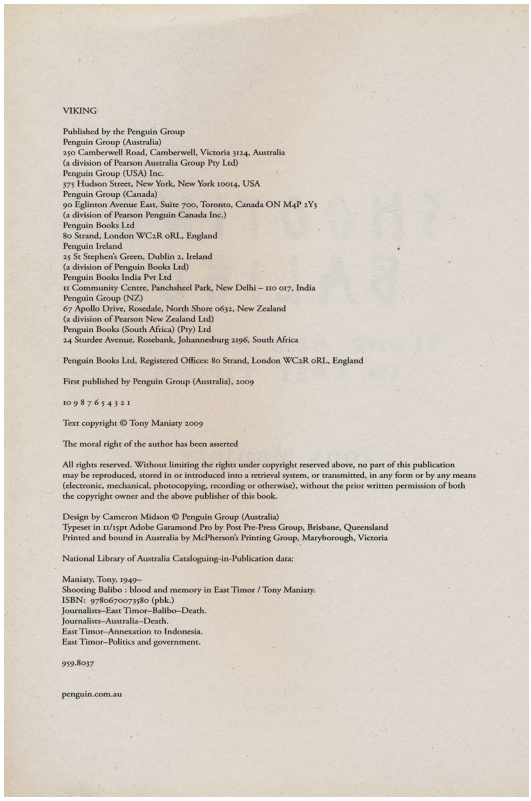
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THESIS

PART TWO

EXEGESIS COMPONENT

OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

‘PERSONA AND AUTHENTICITY IN THE WAR REPORTING MEMOIR’

This exegesis is dedicated
to the memory of Eiji Hasegawa,
‘My Timor friend’

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

The terms ‘war correspondent’ or ‘war reporter’ have historically been used to describe journalists working in war zones and producing newspaper, news agency or magazine stories in print, or radio or television stories for broadcast. (The abbreviated term ‘warco’ appeared in World War Two, but did not subsequently gain wide acceptance.) In recent decades, the roles of media workers in war zones - including journalists, photographers, camerapersons, soundpersons, producers and others - have blurred considerably; with advances in portable technologies and in an industry effort to reduce costs, a single person often performs many or all of these formerly separate roles. As a result, the terms ‘war correspondent’ and ‘war reporter’ are now commonly used across the news industry to describe any media person working in war zones, and I have adopted this contemporary usage in my thesis. Likewise, the terms ‘the press’ and ‘the media’ are employed here interchangeably.

PROLOGUE

The feature film Balibo *claims to be 'a true story'. Where does the truth lie?*

In 2009, amid a limited marketing campaign but with extensive media publicity, the Australian low-budget film *Balibo* was released in cinemas, the first feature film ever made in Timor-Leste - and the first to tackle the controversial subject of Australia's role in that tiny nation's anguished journey from Portuguese colonialism to independence. The film's central plotline focused on the killings of the 'Balibo Five', five Australian-based television newsmen who had travelled to East Timor in 1975 to cover fighting there in a post-colonial vacuum, as Indonesian forces amassed on its borders for what would become a full-scale invasion. The film's central character and its driving 'persona', however, was a sixth newsman, Roger East (played by Anthony LaPaglia), who travelled to East Timor in late 1975 to cover the ongoing conflict but also to determine, if he could, how the Balibo Five newsmen had been killed, and by whom. East's mission was doomed from the outset; when the Indonesians invaded the territory on 7 December 1975, he was captured and is widely presumed to have been executed. (*Balibo* reinforces this presumption with a graphic climax scene showing East being dragged to the wharf in Dili, the territory's capital, shot by Indonesian commandos and falling into the water.)[6] East is partnered across roughly half of the film by the character of Jose Ramos-Horta (played by Oscar Isaacs), at the time a leading Fretilin official and later President of Timor-Leste; most of their scenes involve the use of 'invented' dialogue rather than actual conversations confirmed by historical evidence.

Details surrounding the deaths of the Balibo Five newsmen had, for over two decades, been shrouded in political, diplomatic and military cover-ups and dense layers of bureaucratic fog, while, in the same period, the status of the Balibo Five had risen in Australia to near-mythic levels - converted from typical working television journalists of the 1970s to heroic martyrs who gave their lives in the cause of a people's freedom. A degree of balance was

[6] The events portrayed in *Balibo* had direct and deep significance for me, since I had also been in East Timor in the same period in 1975, had met the Balibo Five and Roger East, and had reported the deaths of the Balibo Five to the world. Because of my personal involvement with the story, and my detailed knowledge of television news reporting in the 1970s, Robert Connolly appointed me as a consultant to the film, in which the character of Tony Maniaty (played by Simon Stone) would also appear. I did not at any stage have a role in writing the script of *Balibo*, and my book *Shooting Balibo* was written after the film was produced.

restored by the findings of a New South Wales Coroner's report in 2007, which determined with a high degree of forensic investigation that the five newsmen had been murdered at Balibo on the instructions of Indonesian military officers, but also that they had failed to withdraw from Balibo with East Timorese forces when warned by them to do so, thereby leaving themselves unprotected and contributing to their own terrible fate. These official findings formed the factual basis of the Balibo Five elements of the *Balibo* film script written the by the film's director Robert Connolly. (The script was also attributed to 'co-writer' David Williamson, who in fact created only earlier drafts, with a substantially different story focus)[7].

By contrast, factual knowledge of the exact fate of Roger East remains scant to this date. There has never been a formal investigation by police or the Australian government into his death, despite East having been an Australian citizen who was most likely murdered in cold blood.[8] In creating a narrative around the East Timor story of 1975, this continuing vacuum of knowledge in 2008 became critical, and problematic: Robert Connolly was left a gap in which the factual 'authenticity' of the central character in his reality-based narrative could not be assured; yet this also allowed him freedom as a film artist to create a powerful drama around his central character without the constraints of confirmed facts. It also allowed the actor Anthony LaPaglia to create a character, a persona called Roger East, peeling back the surface layers - the known facts about the real Roger East - and digging ever-deeper into an imagined character (also called Roger East), an older, somewhat dissolute journalist playing out his final hand in order to expose the murders of the Balibo Five. To that degree, East's persona was shaped to serve what both LaPaglia and Connolly saw as the underlying theme of the film: the lengths that governments will go to in order to conceal the truth, and the equal lengths some individuals will go to in order to unearth and expose the truth. Connolly chose to make East the protagonist of his story - of his *version* of the East Timor story - and East's presumed (but still unconfirmed) death the dramatic climax of his film, rather than making the Balibo Five the film's 'collective protagonist', or indeed Greg Shackleton (with the most intriguing personality of the Five) his main character. In so doing, Connolly chose to exercise his creative right as an artist over concerns he may have held, as a filmmaker of recognised social responsibility, about his ability to portray factual accuracy, in a situation

[7] Author conversation with Connolly and *Balibo* producer John Maynard, Dili, East Timor, October 2008. I was shown email exchanges between Connolly, Maynard and Williamson which confirmed Williamson's role.
[8] In *Shooting Balibo* I raise a number of doubts about claims that East was executed on the Dili wharf, and I propose an alternative death scenario; there also remains the outside possibility that East was not even killed, since no forensic evidence has been linked to his death.

where the known facts were limited.[9] In doing so he was challenging the very notion of authenticity in the filmic representation of a real-life event, and entering a field of contention which would have critical repercussions on the film's release.

The text which unfolds in the opening titles of *Balibo* attests to the film's claims to be something more than a fictional invention, yet avoids the protective phrasing typical of the genre - such as '*based* on real events' - generally used to deflect any charges of failure to adhere to historical accuracy. The film opens with wide landscapes of East Timor over which Connolly superimposes the following script: 'In 1975, the small nation of East Timor declared independence after 400 years of Portuguese rule. Nine days later, Indonesia invaded East Timor. The world turned a blind eye. For more than 30 years, the events of those days have been shrouded in mystery.' After further landscapes, on the screen appear unambiguously the five words, 'This is a true story.' Helping to reinforce this claim is the considerable use of actual locations across East Timor where specific historical events took place, and the use of archival television news footage at the end of the film, featuring the real Jose Ramos-Horta, with the superimposed text, 'Jose Ramos-Horta represented his country in exile for 24 years. In 1996 he received the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1999, East Timor was liberated from Indonesian rule and Jose Ramos-Horta was finally able to return to his homeland.' We then hear the voice of the real Jose Ramos-Horta, rather than that of the actor Oscar Isaacs seen throughout the film: 'They made you suffer and yet you kept fighting. You opened the way for us. You turned night into day. Together we'll build a hew house, a new land.' As perhaps a final endorsement of the film's authenticity, the end credits feature the words, 'Based on the book *Cover-Up* by Jill Jolliffe.' Jolliffe's account, based on her lifelong engagement with the East Timor story, is a scholarly and authoritative history of the Balibo episode.

Despite framing the film with these and other signifiers of 'reality', and thus implying authenticity, Connolly included a number of situations and scenes in *Balibo* which were demonstrably not 'true', i.e. as events in real life happened, as when Roger East and Jose Ramos-Horta come to physical blows in a swimming pool (an event which Connolly admitted to inventing for the purpose of building dramatic tension), and, more critically, where Roger

[9] In his earlier features as writer/director, Connolly focused on, and was critically acclaimed for, a strong emphasis on contemporary social concerns: *The Bank* (2001) highlighted corporate corruption, while *Three Dollars* (2005) explored the impact of unemployment on family relationships. Connolly has subsequently maintained his social focus with *Underground: The Julian Assange Story* (2012), a biographical study of the Wikileaks founder as a teenage computer hacker.

East is shown exploring by moonlight the blood-stained house where the Balibo Five were executed (when East in fact never reached Balibo). These and other liberties taken with historical accuracy, employed to shape East's on-screen persona, sparked a significant debate when *Balibo* was released.

Foremost among complainants was journalist John Pilger, who had filmed secretly inside East Timor in 1993, had long supported the East Timorese struggle for independence, and who claimed Indonesia had conducted a 'holocaust' in its 25-year-long occupation of the territory. Pilger's critique, which appeared in the prestigious British film journal *Sight and Sound*[10], focused largely on Connolly's decision not to give more attention to the Australian government's alleged complicity in the journalists' murder, a theme which Pilger claims was 'graphically depicted' in eight of the 16 drafts of David Williamson's original screenplay for *Balibo* - only to be cut from the final shooting script. Pilger was charging Connolly and *Balibo* with inauthenticity less on the basis of what was in the film, but for what was largely absent: the role of the Australian government in the debacle. (The then Australian Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, is heard in the film - not seen - telling reporters, 'I will say no more on East Timor. I will not elaborate on the statement I made.' Apart from a newspaper photograph of Whitlam meeting the then Indonesian President Suharto, *Balibo* makes no other reference to what PIlger rightly asserted was a critical factor in the East Timor saga.) Pilger's charge, writ large, was in effect 'lies by omission'. Pilger had additional concerns about *Balibo's* authenticity:

> The "true story" of the film is, in any case, largely fictitious. Finely dramatised, acted and located, the film is reminiscent of the genre of Vietnam movies, such as *The Deer Hunter*, which artistically airbrushed the truth of that atrocious war from popular history.

Pilger's criticism was echoed by another well-established journalist with strong ties to East Timor, Paul Cleary[11], who faulted *Balibo's* neglect of the Australian government's role in the 1975 disaster, charging that Connolly had deflected attention from that aspect of the story by depositing virtually all blame for the disaster on the Indonesians. Cleary claimed 'about two-thirds of the film is pure fiction', and specifically noted, 'Connolly spends a vast chunk of the film on a fictional journey to Balibo by the sixth journalist, Roger East, and Jose

[10] Pilger, John, 'The Great *Balibo* Cover-up,' *Sight and Sound*, Vol. 19. No. 10, 2009, pp. 10-11.
[11] Cleary is a former adviser to the East Timorese government, and author of *Shakedown: Australia's Grab for Timor Oil*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2007.

Ramos-Horta.'[12] In both these criticisms of the film, the measure of the authenticity (or the lack of it) of the work created was entirely about script content rather than other core cinematic elements such as acting, art direction, musical score etc.

Connolly countered the political aspect of these criticisms in an interview with *Screen Hub*, noting that he had dropped the 'political realm' of the earlier drafts to focus on the personal dramas of the main characters: 'It just felt like that was going to serve us well emotionally… Mostly with history we're interested, yes in the grand sweep of history and politics, but also in the personal dimension of why people do what they do.'[13] Connolly was supported by novelist and critic Luke Davies, writing in *The Monthly*, who called the decision 'not to make the film too didactic' wise: 'Connolly doesn't try to answer such [political] questions, but rather lets them echo in the film'.[14] Regarding scenes which did not conform with known realities, reviewer and journalism academic Susie Eisenhuth wrote in *Pacific Journalism Review*: 'Criticisms have been made of the fictional elements in Connolly's film, but for the most part the variants are minor - educated suppositions to sustain the story's flow.'[15]

Connolly's position on these issues was later articulated in filmed interviews included with the DVD edition of *Balibo*, where he talked of 'dealing with historical events in the context of fiction':

> I've always had a great interest in how works of fiction can explore our history in a way that really cuts right to the bone of the human condition. […] The issue of whether the film will be depicted as fiction versus truth is one you grapple with as a feature-film maker, not a documentary maker, and you'd only dramatize events within any film to try to make the film work as a piece of cinema in a compelling way. […] *Balibo* is a war film. You know, it's got a thriller dimension to it but if falls very clearly into a whole genre of war films that explore real historical events.[16]

Connolly's remarks, as thoughtful as they appear, do not quite answer the charge; for to 'dramatize events', as he states, is by no means the same as to 'invent dramatic events'. A

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[12] Cleary, Paul, 'Balibo Verdict: Truth, Drama and Tragedy', *The Sun-Herald*, 16 August 2009, p.14.
[13] Richey, Anne, '*Balibo*: Robert Connolly Reflects on Process', *Screen Hub*, 20 July 2009, at http://www.screenhub.com.au/news/shownewsarticleG.php?newsID=28132, accessed 14 May 2012.
[14] Davies, Luke, 'Luke Davies on Robert Connolly's *Balibo*', *The Monthly*, Melbourne, August 2009, p. 60.
[15] Eisenhuth, Susie, 'Telling Stories That Nobody Wants to Hear', *Pacific Journalism Review*, Vol. 16, Issue 1, May 2010, pp. 205-208.
[16] *Balibo*, DVD Two, Madman Entertainment/Footprint Films, Melbourne, 2009.

broader question is thus raised: in dealing creatively with representations of real events, and the lives of real people, is there a clear line to be drawn between the idea of interpretation and that of invention? How much of Roger East's persona as represented in *Balibo* reflects the person as he really was and how much was created to serve the dynamics of the script, to enrich the film experience? Returning to Pilger and Cleary's criticisms, to what degree should the social, political or even economic contexts of any narrative be highlighted in the interests of authenticity? The debate over such narrative interpretations of history is hardly new: the issue of 'factual truth and accuracy' versus 'creative and emotional authenticity' resonates throughout expressions of literature and cinema based, to whatever degree, on historical events. Yet it is more pronounced where the subject matter itself is controversial, and is further exaggerated in that highly charged, contestable area of human activity called war. The addition of journalists into the equation all but guarantees contestation. These debates were not confined the script of *Balibo*; by association they spread to my book *Shooting Balibo*, much of which was about the creation of the film.

With the example of the *Balibo* film controversy a useful and relevant starting point to questions of persona and authenticity, the exegesis which follows expands to address a broad range of issues which arise in the writing of the war reporting memoir, itself a contentious and complex area of literary production.

1. INTRODUCTION

i. FORMULATING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The subject under consideration is considerable in its scope. Since my major research interests straddle war reporting and book-length narratives, I will focus here on my research into these areas, and will include, in the body of this exegesis, two stand-alone dissertations which I intend to develop for later publication and use as the basis of deeper research.

The issue at the heart of these considerations is the one of authenticity. This, as already indicated, has been a constant shadow over any creative enterprise connected to the East Timor story, but indeed haunts all accounts - whether factual, fictional or a combination of both - of war and human conflict. Authenticity implies truth and, in Western intellectual thought at least, the notion of truth is regarded as absolute, since half-truths or near-truths do not count as 'the truth'- yet the notion of authenticity is itself viewed increasingly as a subjective and debatable proposition. It is widely perceived as a scalable value, rather than an absolute one. Modernism and postmodernism have added to what might be called 'the uncertainty of authenticity': the Campbells soup cans of Andy Warhol, the deliberate 'fake classicism' of Charles Jencks' architecture, the ubiquity of Photoshop and the cut-and-paste proclivities of an entire computerized generation all bring into doubt notions of what is real, what is copied or fake, and whether the difference even matters. (The exegesis will provide examples showing that this also is not a new phenomenon: the world of war reporting, and of written and cinematic accounts of such reporting, is equally awash with a sub-history of inventions, frauds and plagiarisms.[17]) Concurrently, the flood of 'inauthenticity' across the world has produced a parallel desire and demand for 'authenticity of experience'.

Thus the creator of narrative works based on real-world conflicts faces the seemingly contradictory task of having to represent what others regard as objective reality through the

[17] In this context, the rise of 'fake news' shows in the United States, such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, is telling; one survey of Americans under 30 noted that comedy shows featured almost as often as newspapers and evening network news programs as regular sources of election news (Pew Research Center, 2004; at http://www.journalism.org/search/node/jon+stewart+2004, accessed 22 February 2012.)

use of subjective forms, i.e. written and cinematic languages, which by their very nature require selectivity of both potential content and its sequencing and shaping, along with a unique persona on the page, an authorial 'voice' or 'eye' (a quality itself often deemed to be a signifier of creative 'authenticity'), while equally being scrutinized and often criticized for any perceived variations in, or absences of, commonly shared notions of 'the truth'.

This creative dilemma leads to the core research questions posed in the exegesis: 'What constitutes "authenticity" in any creative representations of war reporting? What are the specific elements that bring "authenticity" to such works? What role does the persona of the narrator play in creating "authenticity"?' The exegesis sets out to answer these questions with the application of my research findings to the book form of the war reporting memoir genre (other forms might include documentary films, novels, feature films) and analysis of specific, critically valuable works. A range of subsidiary questions is also triggered, including questions relating to changes in journalism practice and audience expectations and their impact on notions of authenticity in the genre.

The research is conducted against a backdrop of major transitions in nearly all areas of journalism, not only in technology but as long-established notions of media authority and objectivity come under considerable strain, and concepts of professionalism, authenticity and morality among practitioners are closely examined and questioned. In late 2012, Stuart Allan described journalism as being in 'a state of legitimization crisis', and observed that institutionalized war reporting was Ground Zero in this crisis:

> We are seeing traditional definitions of journalism increasingly open to challenge. We are seeing its preferred norms, its values and the beliefs underpinning its prescriptive framings of reality threatening to unravel. And this is nowhere more so than where journalism relies on official sources, and their shared investment in the language of objectivity and impartiality, to sustain their respective truth claims.[18]

For this reason, it is important to place the research in historical context, to measure it within its proper social and professional framework, and to observe the evolution of this creative reflective genre to the present day. This provides the framework of my exegesis. As

[18] Allan, Stuart, Professor of Journalism, Media School, Bournemouth University, 'The Politics of War Reporting: A Critical Symposium', Birkbeck College, London University, UK, 2 November 2012, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-MlYLaOJuQ, accessed 1 December 2012.

the practice of journalism changes, so too do representations of it; by examining these, we may also be better able to understand the crisis that Allan refers to - and the changing role of the war correspondent in contemporary society and within that crisis, to which issues of authority and authenticity are crucial. As democratization of the media expands globally and strengthens at all levels, journalists engaged in the professional production of information and knowledge will rely increasingly on their personal reputation, as evidenced by recent conflicts and social upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East.

In framing my research around the concept of 'creative works', I have focused on the journalistic memoir, in particular those written by war correspondents. For the purpose of simplification, I have given this genre the generic title of the 'war reporting memoir'. (Non-fiction books which are essentially journalistic in content, i.e. which report events but do not reflect on the practice of frontline reporting or its psychological impact, are not included.[19]) In conclusion I will discuss how the research outlined in the exegesis relates specifically to the process of creating *Shooting Balibo*.

ii. THE JOURNALISTIC FIELD AND WAR REPORTING

Journalism is, in Bourdieusian terms, a broad field of cultural production, interacting widely with a range of social, political, cultural and economic fields, and generating configurations of power fueled by - and equally, producing - what Bourdieu[20] calls 'symbolic capital'. Within the field of journalism exist 'subfields', each with their parameters, hierarchies, and sets of rules: their *habitus*, to use Bourdieu's term, which is structured by shifting power relations within the field, and becomes, over time, a self-sustaining and adaptable entity. Within the *habitus*, behaviour is largely consistent and agreed upon, to the point where the rules and conditions are rarely if ever discussed. As Markham notes,

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[19] Such works include the anthologised investigative reporting of outstanding correspondents such as Jon Lee Anderson (*The Lion's Grave: Dispatches from Afghanistan*, Grove Press, New York, 2003; *The Fall of Baghdad*, Penguin, London, 2005) who, like numerous other writers of such calibre, are or have been connected with *The New Yorker*, a publication hailed equally for championing the more creative possibilities of conflict reporting under examination here.

[20] Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) was a French sociologist and philosopher. In *The Field of Cultural Production* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1993) and other works, he explored his notion of cultural capital, in which cultural production takes place in 'fields' of social, political and economic forces undergoing constant change and influence on each other.

> This 'perfect fit' means that we judge the motivation of our behavior as being not the imperative to act correctly or appropriately, but simply that it seems the natural thing to do.[21]

Traditional modes of journalism, at once regulated by formats, deadlines and audience expectations yet inhabited largely by irregular personalities with high ambitions, fitted the Bourdieusian model well - the media and its entourage, forever shifting and reforming, and growing stronger over the 20th century, has always been powered by such symbolic capital. Until the second decade of the 21st century, this applied, to an even greater degree, to the journalistic subfield of war reporting, a field described by Markham as 'highly individualized, irreverent towards power and guileful.'[22] For those who consistently toiled (and risked their lives) in this field, it did indeed seem 'the natural thing to do', not least because it was exclusively their field, and tightly held.

Traditionally its members came from general news reporting, bringing with them the fundamental building blocks of the *habitus* of that roughly tribalised world, including its gatekeeping mechanisms and hierarchies of power, and further shoring up rigid codes of inclusion and exclusion. As wars came and went, the field of war reporting followed, more often than not oblivious to national and cultural boundaries. Increasingly the same names, same bylines appeared, with the same Hemingwayesque swagger: the field at its inception was exclusively male, remained largely a male domain in World War Two, and continued to be male-dominated into the Balkan and Middle East conflicts of the late 20th century. This pervasive sense of 'maleness', in perception and in practice, meant that entry to the field for women was extremely limited; even in the early 21st century, when women outnumbered men in many newsrooms, the historical gender imbalance in war reporting remained pronounced.

In World War Two, female journalists - mostly Americans - began to penetrate this male stronghold by reporting from the Allied frontlines, although they faced restrictions often not placed on male colleagues. *Life* photographer Margaret Bourke-White was denied access to

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[21] Markham, Tim, 'The Political Phenomenology of War Correspondence', Political Studies Annual Conference, Swansea UK, April 2008, at www.psa.ac.uk/journals/pdf/5/2008/Markham.pdf, accessed 4 October 2012.
[22] Markham, Tim, 'War Reporting in the 21st Century: A Political Phenomenological Perspective on Pooling, Embedding, ICTs and Citizen Journalism', paper to the International Communication Association Annual Conference, Singapore, 24 June 2010, at http://www.academia.edu/1668913/War_Reporting_in_the_21st_Century_A_Political_Phenomenological_Perspective_on_Pooling_Embedding_ICTs_and_Citizen_Journalism, accessed 13 May 2012.

cover the Allied invasion of North Africa, on the basis that the flight there was considered too dangerous - for a woman. Bourke-White took a boat instead, which was torpedoed; she managed to board a lifeboat with her cameras, and subsequently became the first woman to fly on an American combat mission. Martha Gellhorn, wife of Ernest Hemingway, gained a reputation for bravery, as did Dickey Chapelle, who later became the first American female war correspondent killed in action (in Vietnam). In all, of the 1,600 reporters registered with the United State armed forces as war correspondents, only 127 were women.[23] Bourke-White, Gelhorn and another prominent female war correspondent Marguerite Higgins all inspired biographies, and Gelhorn published two works of assembled reportage, *The Face of War* and *The View from the Ground*, but none published what could be described as war reporting memoirs.

In the postwar world, women reporters increasingly found their way to the frontline; in Vietnam, their courage and determination was typified by French photographer Catherine Leroy, who became the first accredited journalist to take part in a combat parachute jump. Leroy was subsequently captured by the North Vietnamese forces but managed to talk her way out; she admitted to being scared, but also to being addicted to combat:

> You are alive like you've never felt alive before. It's not something that's pleasurable in a sensual sense. It's pleasurable in the sense of sheer animal survival. It's your primary brain, your reptilian brain; you are alive as an animal is alive. It's very low and very primal.[24]

In the conflicts of the late 20th century, the ratio of female to male war reporters began to rise, but not dramatically. The most prominent of female practitioners was Kate Adie, who as the BBC's Chief News Correspondent covered the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere from 1989 to 2003. Adie gained a reputation for her abrupt, 'no-nonsense' style of reporting, in which her own emotions were rarely displayed; her memoir *The Comfort of Strangers* reflects this, being largely a war-by-war account of her reportage rather than of her views on war or on the personal effects of being a war reporter. In her memoir *Flirting with Danger: Confessions of a Reluctant War Reporter*, CNN correspondent Siobhan Darrow likewise described her coverage of the conflicts in post-Soviet Georgia and Chechnya, but

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[23] Jenkins, Mark, 'Gal Reporters: Breaking Barriers in World War Two', *National Geographic News*, 10 December 2003, at http://news.nationalgeographic.com.au/news/2003/12/1210_031210_warwomen.html, accessed 17 August 2012.

[24] Leroy, Catherine, *q.v.* Howe, Peter, 'The Death of a Fighter', *Digital Journalist*, August 2006, at http://digitaljournalist.org/issue0608/the-death-of-a-fighter.html, accessed 4 November 2012.

offered little insight into their personal impact. 'I struggled, to find the right words to give meaning to what I was seeing,' she wrote. 'I hoped, mostly in vain, that reporting on this desperate situation would somehow help improve it.'[25]

The exclusion of women from frontline reporting is typified in the ranks of arguably the world's most esteemed photography agency, Magnum, founded in 1947 by Robert Capa, Henri Cartier Bresson and David Seymour. Capa in particular helped create the stereotype of the frontline photojournalist, living a glamorous lifestyle while shooting images of conflict in the Spanish Civil War, World War Two and in French Indochina, where in 1954 his lucky streak ended when he stepped on a landmine. ('I am a gambler', he famously pronounced in his 1947 memoir-novel *Slightly Out of Focus*.[26]) Magnum's reputation as a recorder of the human experience was built around dramatic conflict photography, which still constitutes a major part of its operations. Yet 60 years after the agency was founded, a group photograph of photographer-members attending the agency's annual general meeting in New York in 2007 features 50 members, three of whom are women; only one of those, Susan Meiselas, is known for her war reportage, in Nicaragua. While battlefront reporting is now open to reporters of both sexes, the number of women engaged remains disproportionately low. In exploring the war reporting memoir, the researcher finds numerous examples written by men, and an equally scarce number written, until quite recently, by women - a reflection more likely on continuing sexism in the news industry rather than in publishing.[27]

In television coverage of war, the barriers to entry until the early 21st century were also pronounced, due to the status implied to correspondents 'on air', and to the substantial costs of coverage - if one was going to assign a cameraperson and soundperson and half a million dollars worth of news equipment to the battlefield, one might as well send the most experienced war reporter to accompany the crew rather than a talented but inexperienced junior. The 'club' of war reporting thus remained a closed shop to all but a privileged few. In interviews conducted in El Salvador, anthropologist Mark Pedelty identified two narratives among war correspondents based on the stories they told of their frontline exploits; stories

[25] Darrow, Siobhan, *Flirting with Danger: Confessions of a Reluctant War Reporter*, Knopf Doubleday, New York, 2002, pp. 101-102.
[26] Capa, Robert, *Slightly Out of Focus*, Random House, New York, 2001, *q.v.* Lardinois, Brigitte, *Magnum*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2007, p.7.
[27] In the past decade, several female war reporters have made powerful and innovative contributions to the genre; among these are the Norwegian journalist Asne Seierstad's *A Hundred and One Days: A Baghdad Journal* (Virago, London, 2003) and Carolin Emcke's *Echoes of Violence: Letters from a War Reporter* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007). The latter work is examined in detail later in the exegesis.

which had shaped their self-image, their working 'persona'. They proved revealing. The first focused on the extraordinary achievement of a journalist or photographer; the second, on the failure of others, which was used as a negative example of what should be avoided in professional practice. In both cases, Pedelty concluded, such storytelling turned into 'a mythological narrative with initiating properties that mark the entrance of the young correspondents into the veteran group.'[28]

Generally those who, filled with idealism, made it through the club gates and survived their first encounters under fire, were quickly absorbed into the *habitus*. Bourdieu himself noted how new entrants to the field internalised the rules of the journalistic game and mimicked the regulating norms of the field in professional practice (a situation all too obvious to those who watch repeated formulaic nightly news reports from the frontline.)[29] For the older war reporting hands, as Markham observes, cynicism and irony were the weapons of choice, and were never 'simple negations', but were rather 'implicit alternate constructions… invariably marked by a distinct knowingness which, crucially, does not lead to further explication':

> This simultaneous refraining from forming a value-judgment, the suggestion of requisite knowledge to make such a judgment, and the instantaneous preclusion of further articulation, had the effect of establishing a legitimacy which can only remain implicit - and thus, mystified.[30]

While a degree of courage is required, it is this mystification (rather than 'mystery') and knowingness which generates much of the perceived aura around war reporting. This in turn for many practitioners becomes a perpetual trap, locking them into the hermetic field of war reporting and its arcane codes and professional camaraderie with little chance of liberation back to their former world of daily news reporting, or indeed to any existence that does not include the terrible *frisson* of war. This opportunity is replaced by a deepening identification with their chosen field, a drug-like (and often drug-supported) attachment to danger, and, for many, an ever-deepening nostalgia for wars gone by. Their attachment to the *habitus* is thus absolute, and irreversible. (In this way, as Coole observes, war correspondents become part of a reflexive, self-referential game in which actual wars are

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[28] Pedelty, Mark, *q.v.* Thussu, Daya Kishan, and Freedman, Des, eds., *War and the Media: Reporting Conflict 24/7*, Sage Publications, London, 2003, p. 224.
[29] Bourdieu, Pierre; see Markham, Tim, 'The Political Phenomenology of War Correspondence', *Op. cit.*
[30] *Ibid.*

the canvas on which their lives are played out, a 'blue screen'[31] onto which any war backdrop can be inserted.[32]) It is from these complicated ranks that emerge those who - some seeking celebrity so far denied, some to make quick money, others as a form of psychological therapy, a few to satisfy the shouldering creative urge - pull out battered notebooks and sit down to write their frontline memoirs, or to pull together a novel, based on what they have witnessed firsthand at war. It is this relatively small group of reporters that we will investigate more thoroughly.

In the 21st century, much has changed in journalism and its impacts. Across the media, fragmentation has become the norm, fuelled by a potent blend of globalization, digitization and ever-cheaper news production and information technologies. The relatively stable and organized Bourdieusian world of fields struggles to stay in place, permeated at all levels not by other, distinctly identifiable fields but by something more amorphous and fluid, defined less by its membership and codes than by a lack of clear framing, structures and shared rules. Nowhere is this revolution in journalism more apparent than in the practice of conflict reporting, where the stance of rugged individualism (much diluted in an era of media pooling, military embedding, shared resources and citizen journalism) is under threat, and the field's traditional claims to journalistic authority based on professional experience become ever harder to sustain. The exposure of audiences to the conflict environment through non-traditional media such as blogs and video diaries posted by freelancers, military personnel and local observers raises, Markham suggests, 'the very real possibility that the experience of war (and war reporting) is no longer systematically mystified, mystification traditionally underpinning the valorized symbolic form of 'war reporter' in contemporary media culture.'[33]

Even the physical isolation of war reporting, part of its earlier 'capital', becomes irrelevant with the spread of technologies that place the correspondent in near-constant contact with head office, while the question of how to enter the 'club' is largely redundant, since anyone with a few thousand dollars - neophyte, freelancer, tourist, student journalist, clerk,

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[31] 'Blue screen', or alternatively 'green screen', refers to the chroma-key process in television studio production which allows a presenter to stand before changing images projected onto a blue or green screen and seemingly become part of the integrated image; it is commonly used in weather forecast presentations.

[32] Coole, Diana, Professor of Politics and Social Theory, Birkbeck College, University of London, speaking at 'The Politics of War Reporting: A Critical Symposium', Birkbeck College, London University, UK, 2 November 2012, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-MlYLaOJuQ, accessed 1 December 2012.

[33] Markham, Tim, 'War Reporting in the 21st Century: A Political Phenomenological Perspective on Pooling, Embedding, ICTs and Citizen Journalism', *Op cit*.

plumber - can purchase a laptop computer, a high-definition video camera, an air ticket to Kabul, and in two days be shooting frontline war stories and selling them to global networks. Women are no longer barred, while social status, nationality, race, religion play no significant part. The door is wide open. This does not mean, of itself, termination of the Bourdieusian field of war reporting; while one version - the world synonymous with safari jackets, hard drinking and the charade of all-knowingness - loses its symbolic capital, another version driven by new technologies and social media reshapes the *habitus*.

This state of rapid change, and resulting rise of amateurism, confronts those who have devoted their working lives to war reporting as a professional career. Photojournalist Tim Hetherington, a veteran of wars in Africa and the Middle East, referred negatively in 2011 to 'the unbelievable number of young kids running around Libya with cameras', shortly before his own death there under fire.[34] Michael Kamber, a war photographer with *The New York Times*, was equally disturbed: 'To me and some of the older crowd, there was a nagging suspicion that these packs of "green" photographers were not taking war seriously - that they were joyriding, with all the casual privilege the term implies. […] The idea of a 20-year-old running around Libya with a cell phone and no flak jacket is, frankly, quite disturbing. It conveys a disrespect for the profession and for the civilians involved and it incorporates a certain callousness, at least in my opinion, toward the gods of war.'[35] The irony, of course, is that Hetherington, Kamber and all other veterans also had to start somewhere; indeed, the golden age of war photojournalism, in the jungles of Vietnam, was heavily populated with beginners who became journalistic legends, and models for those who followed.

iii. THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY

The notion of authenticity has many interpretations, and inhabits not only the realm of creativity writing as explored here but also engages with journalism in all fields, including war reporting. It has deep roots in modern institutionalized media, where, as Hayes, Singer and Ceppos note, 'using authenticity as a framework for assigning credibility has its advantages for the public, the news organization, and the journalist. The journalist gains a

[34] Hetherington, Tim, *q.v.* Kamber, Michael, 'Photographing Conflict for the First Time', LENS: Photography, Video and Visual Journalism Blog, *New York Times*, 25 October 2011, at http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/25/young-in-libya/, accessed 4 May 2012.
[35] Kamber, Michael, 'Photographing Conflict for the First Time', *Ibid*.

ready-made reputation rather than one that has to be built up word by word, story by story.'[36] The public does not need to assess the work of individual reporters, nor generally does it have the time or to the desire to: 'The overall association, and the degree of trust that goes with it, attaches primarily to the organization, not the individual journalist.' In the digital age, traditional values of accountability and authenticity still count for much, as evidenced when journalists 'screw up' or are caught plagiarizing the works of others.

For war correspondents, particularly those working in the television medium, these issues are magnified. On-air, their individuality cannot be subsumed behind the network's logo, nor in most cases do they wish it to be; many, such as the BBC's John Simpson or Kate Adie, have become household names and even major celebrities from their reporting in serial conflicts. Thus any lapses of judgment or of fact which they make are broadcast not only to millions, but also to their peer group of war correspondents, their *habitus*. For freelancer reporters, such lapses in accountability or sense of authenticity can spell career disaster, particularly if a major network is subsequently the recipient of public anger or mistrust. The rising speed of delivery enabled by the new media environment, and demanded by increasing levels of industry competition, make such lapses and negative perceptions more likely, not less.

What is it to be authentic? As Hardt observes:

> The definition of authenticity emanates from philosophical considerations of the modern individual and from the problems of understanding the meaning and value of existence and co-existence in a world of powerful and competing interests. At the center remains the question of what it is to be a human being as a concrete way of entering the world.[37]

The concept of authenticity grew out of the Enlightenment as a response to a European culture seen by Rousseau and other thinkers as artificial, debased by sophistry and loaded with presumptuousness. The spread of 19th century industrialization and urbanization also gave rise to social and ideological debate about authenticity in human life, as did the rise of Nazism and Communism in the early 20th century. It continues to underline human concerns about the role of the self in increasingly homogenized societies (Rousseau's call for a return

[36] Hayes, Arthur; Singer, Jane; and Ceppos, Jerry, 'Shifting Roles, Enduring Values: The Credible Journalist in a Digital Age', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, Vol. 22, Issue 4, 2007, pp. 262-279.
[37] Hardt, Hanno, 'Authenticity, Communication and Critical Theory', *Critical Studies in Mass Communications*, Issue 10, March 1993, p. 50.

to Mother Nature, to passions and the life of the 'noble savage' has its contemporary echoes in quests for ethnic music, organic food and adventure travel) and the place of independent practice in all fields of existence. In the modern idiom, authenticity can also be a call for toleration and diversity, for *actual* contact over the digital, for truth over spin and lies.

Thus it can, as Frosh observes, be defined 'as "truth-to-oneself", a project of ontological fidelity that takes particular discursive forms: in the aesthetic realm, it stresses the creativity of the individual artistic personality… and the formal and expressive uniqueness of the artwork (the artwork is "true to" its own internal formal necessity, and often transgresses accepted formats.)'[38] However, in the closely managed, increasingly corporatized world of global media, such a worthy definition flies in the face of market-based economic models for creative production of journalism which stress the consistent over the irregular, the simple over the detailed and more complicated, and - of relevance here - the politically safe over the dangerous. In this generation of 'news content', individuality, originality, and any form of transgression are neither called for nor encouraged. For the war reporter, career survival (as distinct from battlefield survival) usually means finding a bearable balance between sticking one's neck out and toeing the line; on-air anti-government rage is not encouraged, neither is unquestioning submission to the official line. Delivering to such a formula under pressures of tight deadlines while remaining authentic ('true to oneself') is, as many correspondents have noted, at best frustrating and, at worst, generates a degree of self-loathing, for in any war zone there is always more context to be explained, and more shocks and horrors to expose. The sense of 'short-cutting' the story, and thus short-changing both the audience and the reporter's integrity as a trusted witnesses to war, can be strong, and even debilitating.

For a handful of war correspondents, including those whose works will be examined, the escape route to a personalised sense of authenticity is found not in producing formulaic journalism from the battlefield, but in writing, many with a raw honesty, about their lives as frontline reporters and trauma that such work produces. Yet this is never easy. Stripped of their journalistic 'mask' and corporatized identity, many find this a painful process; the 'urge to purge' after so many years of suppression is strong, but so too is the instilled caution of

[38] Frosh, Paul, 'To Thine Own Self Be True: The Discourse of Authenticity in Mass Cultural Production', *Communication Review*, Issue 4, 2001, p. 542.

the mass media reporter whose lifelong task has been to report what he or she sees as a professional, paid observer, rather than to turn the lens inwards and expose, to the world, emotions either long buried or never explored within himself or herself. How then to shape the voice of this narrator: the persona of the author? If the objective is, as it should be, to recreate events and the author's place in them with veracity, with authenticity, how deeply must the author explore those more complex, less public spaces within the mind and the memory, and expose them on the page, in order to serve the truth of the story? In this, the work of German philosopher Martin Heidegger[39] on authenticity and existentialism, which Hardt notes, 'examines the potential status of art as an emancipatory creative expression', is a useful model. The writings of French philosopher Paul Ricouer[40] on space and time, and expressions of memory, are also relevant.

Heidegger, creating his masterwork *Time and Being* in the tumultuous 1920s - an era still struggling to understand the catastrophe of World War One and lunging into the unexplored potential of Modernism in all its creative and socio-political guises - was acutely aware of the alienation felt by 'modern man', of the individual's place in contemporary life. The real key to authenticity, he believed, was for individuals to separate their existence from others, not to surrender it to the broader powers and interests that affected and controlled day-to-day life. Heidegger contrasted this individual state of being-in-the-world (which he called *Dasein*, literally the German word for 'being-there') to existing in a world shared by others (*Mitwelt*): these two co-existent and co-dependent 'states of being' affected the authenticity of the individual's life. In the *Dasein*, the elements of life that create conformity - social, political, economic and other imposed factors - are absent; in the *Mitwelt* of the 1920s and beyond, such elements began to consume individual lives and, despite the apparent radicalism of the times, were themselves reduced to levels of superficiality and conformity. (Heidegger saw the critical role of language in this, and believed the rise of media power in mass society was a fundamental driver of entrenching social and political authority.) In this rapidly altering social space, the individual feels further alienated and less authentic.[41]

[39] Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, trans. by Macquarie, John & Robinson, Edward, SCM Press, London, 1962.
[40] See Reagan, Charles and Steward, David, eds., *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of his Work*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1978; also Valdes, Mario, ed., *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1991.
[41] Hanno Hardt explores these themes further in 'Authenticity, Communication and Critical Theory', *Op. cit*.

Transported to the issue of war correspondents and the intense socialization of their role, Heidegger's thinking offers a portrait consistent with what many reporters have said about the frustrations that drive them to write more intimately about their frontline experiences; the reflective narrative mode is perhaps their only chance in a relentless professional life to 'be themselves', to express not only to an audience but also, importantly, to themselves, a vision of who they really are, and to explore the personal meaning of what they do.

For Ricouer, the problem of authenticity is tied up with creating a distinctive identity while acknowledging that each individual's existence cannot be separated from the existence of all others. 'Man is this plural and collective unity,' he wrote, 'in which the unity of destination and the differences of destinies are to be understood through each other.'[42] It is the struggle between the individual and their surrounding world that creates each individual's distinctive identity and their true sense of personal freedom. This struggle is based on communication and our ability to communicate with others, Ricoeur argues, which itself ensures that we are never entirely cut off from others; the individual state of being, and the struggle to affirm that state by seeking recognition, also confirms the existence of a wider humanity.[43] From this stance, it is possible to read the war correspondent's need to write intimately of his or her frontline experiences as a quest for both personal affirmation *and* for recognition of their social function as a conflict reporter.

Ricouer is further valuable in identifying key issues which arise in the writing of such memoirs. At the heart of these issues is the question of creating a coherent and consistent narrative out of the disparate elements of a life lived, of unstoppable time, of the fallibility of memory. How is the author to impart a sense of authenticity to the 'text in time' when the life described is itself written by a changed identity from the one described, and the events being described have been recreated and reframed endlessly within the mind? Are we as authors doing what fiction writers have always done in order the create the illusion of reality, in order - as Ricoeur would argue - to make our lives intelligible to us, to give them shape, substance, meaning? 'As for the notion of the narrative unity of a life,' he observed, 'it must be seen as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience. It is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of fiction to organise

[42] Ricoeur, Paul, *Fallible Man*, trans. Kelbley, Charles, Fordham University Press, New York, 1986, p. 138.
[43] For further elaboration of Ricouer's theories, a useful starting source is Dauenhauer, Bernard and Pellauer, David, 'Paul Ricoeur', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition)*, Zalta, Edward (ed.), at http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/ricoeur/, accessed 7 July 2012.

retrospectively, after the fact, prepared to take as provisional and open to revision any figure of emplotment borrowed from fiction or from history.'[44]

In essence, the battlefront memoir relies as any novel does on tying the substantive elements of the story together with a compelling plot - in which the memoirist becomes the protagonist, relating what happened and what their role was, what their motivations were. In so doing, the writer makes sense of their life by creating a story about their life; indeed, by creating a viable persona. Included, as in any novel, are the secondary characters, whose lives intersect with the protagonist's life, and thus, using Ricouer's idea, give recognition to the protagonist and their place in a wider world. As with all narratives, the protagonist also presents the ethical dimensions of his or her world, imparting deeper meaning to the events described and to the protagonist's role. Thus, readers are invited to evaluate their character and ethics. As we will see, these elements are - to varying degrees, whether wittingly or otherwise - used by war reporters to tell their life stories.

Themes explored by Heidegger and Ricouer also underline, to a great extent, the work of American academic John Merrill, who created the term 'existential journalism', a concept with some value here. In the postwar era especially, journalism developed into a mass media industry in which the individual's drives were subsumed by the organisation's needs, to what Merrill bluntly called 'routine ways of doing things'.[45] New entrants found themselves 'gladly sacrificing individual authenticity to adapt nicely to the highly regimented, depersonalized corporate structure.'[46] For many practitioners, this sooner or later chafes against personal conscience, while also encroaching on their freedom as journalists to determine the rights and wrongs of whatever they are reporting; hence notions of both professional and personal authenticity come increasingly under pressure. (This is a concern consistently expressed by war correspondents, for whom escape from such constraints is an important initial factor in choosing to report from the battlefield - often coded as a desire to 'get out of the office' - although most discover that, even in a war zone, they too will be pressured to comply with corporate expectations.) These workplace frustrations, Merrill suggests, could be answered with a moral and ethical framework which

[44] Ricoeur, Paul, *q.v.* Thompson, John B., ed., *Paul Ricoeur: Hemeneutics and the Human Sciences, Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, 1981, p. 17.
[45] Merrill, John, *Existential Journalism*, Iowa State University Press, 1977, revised 1995, p. 7.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 97.

he calls 'existential journalism', a form which implies 'an attitude of freedom, commitment, rebellion, and responsibility'.[47]

The existential journalist, in Merrill's view, gains authenticity by making responsible professional choices and actions that reflect not an institutionalized code of conduct but rather their own ethical and moral beliefs, i.e. being 'true to oneself'. For frontline correspondents this is particularly relevant, influenced as they are by reporting templates which reflect not only organizational codes but also audience expectations. How is one to break out of these codified templates within the formulaic strictures of broadcast television news or other daily news media? As Holt observes, heading down this existential road reveals 'anxieties about the consequences of leveling, alienation, and anonymity resulting from an increasingly artificial, superficial, and media saturated milieu.'[48] What might be possible for a long-form journalist (feature writer, documentary maker) is infinitely more difficult for a reporter expected to file hourly updates of only one or two minutes duration, where the scope for self-expression is severely limited and often non-existent. For many, the answer to this frustrating double bind is to wait until the war is over, to then reclaim their own 'authentic' persona, and to write their own story.

[47] Merrill, John, 'Overview: Foundations for Media Ethics', in Gordon, A., and Kittross, J., eds., *Controversies in Media Ethics*, New York, 1996, p. 28.
[48] Holt, Kristoffer, 'Authentic Journalism? A Critical Discussion about Existential Authenticity in Journalism Ethics', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, Vol. 27, Issue 1, 2012, at http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.lib.uts.edu.au/doi/full/10.1080/08900523.2012.636244, accessed 15 November 2012.

2. SHAPING THE GENRE

i. WHO ARE THESE MAD PEOPLE?

What personality types are drawn to this form of reporting, how do they cope with the pressure of their work, and what are their motivations for doing it? For a professional group engaged in exploring the lives of others, journalists are notoriously reticent about revealing their deep emotions, an act regarded by many as unprofessional and unworthy of those who witness on a daily basis the emotional and physical trauma suffered by victims of conflict. Nevertheless, a survey of relevant memoirs and interviews offers some insights.

Often, motivations are couched in broad, non-personal terms. The American journalist and essayist David Rieff, who covered the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, declared 'I am interested in war because it is war. War is the norm in human history.'[49] In her essay 'Confronting the Worst: Writing a Catastrophe', the German war reporter Carolin Emcke almost mocks the question: 'Why do you do this job? Why do you go to these places where you get shot at, arrested, deported, threatened, or beaten up on a relatively regular basis?' Her response - 'to give a voice to the people who have become silent'[50] - is no doubt sincere, yet taps into only part of the broader motivations of war reporters. Harold Evans, celebrated for his editorship of *The Sunday Times*, has divided the profession into two distinct types:

> They see themselves as 'war junkies,' flamboyantly there for the hell of it. I think this is more a rationalization than a true reflection, but there is a rough distinction, historically and today, between the undeniable 'cowboys' and those who could be categorized as 'believers.' Believers tend to be less reckless than the adventurers; they are not in it for the exhilarating scent of danger or the adrenaline rush. They calibrate the risks, trying to recognize the moment when the story becomes secondary to survival.[51]

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[49] Rieff, David, *q.v.* Leith, Denise, *Bearing Witness: The Lives of War Correspondents and Photojournalists*, Random House, Sydney, 2004, p. 293.
[50] Emcke, Carolin, 'Confronting the Worst: Writing a Catastrophe', *World Voices 2005*, PEN American Center, at http://www.pen.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/679/prmID/217, accessed 5 July 2012.
[51] Evans, Harold, 'Reporting in a Time of Conflict', at http://www.newseum.org/warstories/essay/firstdraft.htm, accessed 30 March 2012.

But the two types are by no means exclusive: cowboys can also be believers, and many correspondents - such as the knockabout Dutch photographer Hubert ('Hugh') Van Es, who covered the Vietnam War and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan - embody both types:

> You go there to show the truth. As it really is. Show how bad war is with your photos. You soon realise that that doesn't work. There was always war and there always will be war. […] You have to distance yourself. You see war as a photograph. You loom through a lens and see a photo. That's the way I see it. If you do give into your feelings, it can destroy you. If you remember everything, you go crazy. You can't bottle it up. Find a release. In Vietnam you went on a drinking binge for a few days when something terrible happened.[52]

The BBC's Jeremy Bowen, an experienced frontline reporter, did his first tour of duty in El Salvador in 1989, not for any higher reason than 'I saw a chance to make a name for myself.' Yet he soon found the heady atmosphere of war seductive: 'If you haven't done it before, it's scary. Scary. When I got there, in the first day, and there was shooting, and I wasn't killed, then it was fantastically exciting. That was a powerful drug.'[53]

Few correspondents will state publicly what many will acknowledge privately, that war reporting is exciting, enjoyable work, and can be fun. As Nora Ephron wrote in 1973, 'It is impossible to realize how much of Ernest Hemingway still lives in the hearts of men until you spend time with the professional war correspondents. […] The awful truth is that for correspondents war is not hell. It is fun.'[54] British reporter Anthony Loyd called his memoir *My War Gone By, I Miss It So*, and was open about his pleasure at working in war zones: 'I cannot apologize for enjoying it so. I took the freedom and light that fighting offered, feeling truly earthed with the Bosnian War once more. It was like falling in love again.'[55] A veteran of the Vietnam War, *Life* photographer Tim Page responded with horror to the idea of a book that would take the glamour out of war, exclaiming,

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[52] Van Es, Hubert, *q.v.* documentary film *The Cat with Nine Lives*, Netherlands, 2012.
[53] Bowen, Jeremy, *q.v. On the Frontline*, Executive Producer Paul Woolwich, BBC, 2005, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Alx7af4H-iI&feature=share, accessed 18 May 2011.

[54] Ephron, Nora, *q.v.* Evans, Harold, 'Reporting in a Time of Conflict', *Op. cit*.

[55] Loyd, Anthony, q.v. Evans, Harold, *Ibid*.

> Ohhhh, war is *good* for you, you can't take the glamour out of that. It's like trying to take the glamour out of sex, trying to take the glamour out of the Rolling Stones. […] Ohhh, what a laugh! Take the bloody *glamour* out of bloody *war*![56]

It was also, as Page and many others would discover, extremely lethal. Page was bombed, strafed and badly injured, later describing the experience as being like 'the worst nightmare on the planet.'[57] The International News Safety Institute - a London-based coalition of news organisations, journalist support groups and individuals working to improve news safety in dangerous zones - produces, in collaboration with Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, an annual report, *Killing the Messenger*, which details the extent of media deaths, particularly in war zones. Its first report, in 2007, observed that '1,000 journalists and support staff have died trying to report the news around the world in the past 10 years: an average of two a week.'[58] Not unexpectedly, the news industry, confronted with such figures, reverts to talk of bravery, courage, and the desire of Evans' 'believers' to report 'the truth' at any price, include the loss of their own lives. Indeed, Evans, in his introduction to the 2007 report, asked:

> What was common among the desperate circumstances of their deaths? Their aspiration. They believed in the purpose of journalism. […] Nothing in the record diminishes the conviction that they believed theirs was an honorable craft - profession if you like - rooted in reason, dedicated to truth, sustained by a sense of common good, given inspiration by the achievements of others around the world in a universal brotherhood.[59]

Perhaps some victims held these lofty beliefs, but others no doubt go to war for adventure, for ambition more than 'aspiration', for the visceral excitement of smelling and reporting a good story. Some may have lost their lives in the single-minded pursuit of truth, but others have died chasing personal glory, and others still simply seeking a good time. Their common experience, the singular element that linked them, was risking their lives to get the story.

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[56] Page, Tim, *q.v.* Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, Pan Books, London, 1978, p. 199.
[57] Page, Tim, *q.v. Camera Martyrs of Vietnam*, television documentary in series 'Unsung Heroes 3', Arts and Entertainment Network, New York, 2001.
[58] International News Safety Institute, *Killing the Messenger* report, 2007, p. 7, at http://www.newssafety.org/page.php?page=20461&cat=about-insi, accessed 23 June 2012.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 5.

No work comes closer to grappling with this specific dilemma than the 2003 text, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*[60], by Chris Hedges, a former *New York Times* war reporter who, in an earlier life, was a seminary student. Hedges' work in covering Serbo-Croatian struggles and bloody revolutions in Central America offers a possible template for how to approach writing journalistic war memoirs, by choosing as their starting point the absurdity of war. In Hedges' view, 'nationalist and ethnic conflicts are fratricides that turn on absurdities.' To see deadly conflict as an absurdity may seem facile in one sense, yet repeated episodes of absurdity - emerging from the struggle between long-cherished myths and illusions of a better world - often underline the humanity of conflicts as well as their terrifying lethality. The frontline reporter is trapped in the middle of this irrational, dangerous equation.

In Nicaragua, Hedges had been accompanying a convoy of reporters in cars marked with "TV" in masking tape on their windshields, moving with rebel forces who came under heavy fire. Trapped, he could not move but began to pray. He felt 'powerless, humiliated, weak'. One rebel died 'yelling out in a sad cadence for his mother'. The firefight seemed to go on for eternity:

> I cannot say how long I lay there. It could have been a few minutes. It could have been an hour. Here was war, real war, sensory war, not the war of the movies and books I had consumed in my youth. It was disconcerting, frightening, and disorganized, and nothing like the myth I had been peddled. There was nothing gallant or heroic, nothing redeeming. It controlled me. I would never control it.[61]

Hedges' confession, which also suggests the creation of that 'wound' from which can stem powerful and insightful prose, masks a harsh and unpleasant reality: that for all the coverage that war generates in the media, the worst always occurs beyond the general public's view, seen only by the combatants and professional observers, and neither of these groups can be seen to admit publicly or with total honesty the absolute depths to which war takes them. To do so is to admit weakness, or defeat, or - in the case of war reporters, arguably worse - to risk withdrawal by their editorial masters from a drug and a myth they cannot not live without. This too forms the *habitus* of their chosen field.

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[60] Hedges, Chris, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, Anchor Books, New York, 2003.
[61] *Ibid*., pp. 32-33.

As Hedges points out, 'None of us is immune. All find emotional sustenance in war's myth. It blinds those who swallow it.'[62] Hedges writes thoughtfully on this disease - the call of war, the thrill of being inside a lethal conflict - describing it as a savage beast that rolls across the globe, 'swallowing new news' and consuming the lives of those who report it:

> They become frozen in time, walking around newsrooms years later with eyes that see things others do not see, haunted by graphic memories of human cruelty and depravity, no longer sure what life is about or what it means, wondering if they can ever connect with those around them. The beast moves on. It leaves them behind. It consumes new fodder, those young idealists who go to war to change the world and come home betrayed, bearing the awful mark of Cain.[63]

ii. WRITING ABOUT THE SELF

Transforming these complex emotions into literature as memoir raises a fundamental question, which leads from Hedges' observations. To what degree is writing one's reflections as a war correspondent an exercise in truth telling, and how much is it an exercise in myth making? Do we report the war we *see*, or the war that takes shape in our head between the moment of *seeing* it and the moment of *writing* about it? And if it is the latter, then within that confused and dangerous space do we bring to our war reporting, no less than to the writing of fiction, our prejudices and fears, our own histories, our hopes and self-delusions, our failures? In shaping our authorial persona, do we fall prey to fiction, to re-plotting reality into something more akin to a literary narrative? Is that cheating, or are we merely doing what fiction writers do in order the create the illusion of reality, in order - as Ricoeur would argue, and in its favour - to make our lives intelligible to us, to give them shape, substance, meaning? In other words, to create a persona that we can control, rather than leave to chance the evolution of a persona that might easily slip from our control.

To say 'war changes people' is a truism; the reality is that we are - all of us, and always - being constantly changed by events; while we cling to illusions of consistency, of being 'who

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[62] *Ibid*., p. 37.
[63] Hedges, Chris, in Feinstein, Anthony, *Journalists Under Fire* (foreword), at http://wareabouts.wordpress.com/2010/06/14/journalists-under-fire-dr-anthony-feinstein/, accessed 10 July 2012.

we are', and of reporting things 'as they are', we are constantly mythologising the space we move in, along with the context of our thoughts and self-image; in Ricoeur's view, we are - all of us, always, to some degree - fabulising our actual experience, constantly pitting what we have just seen against what we have seen before, and, even more so, against who we think we are, and what we believe in. 'From journalism to the essay to the memoir,' writes Vivian Gornick, 'the trip being taken by the nonfiction persona deepens, and turns ever more inward.'[64] For any writer, or indeed reporter, to acknowledge this is to be plunged - willingly or not - back to their past, of which only traces remain, and from which the attempt will be made to represent that past in the present. The vehicles by which writers access these traces are memory and written history, both of debatable accuracy; thus the memoirist faces the need for some degree of fabrication, and, from that, the possibility of misrepresentation. More positively, the passing of time allows for deeper consideration of events and placing them in broader context; without these attributes, the war reporter as memoirist is reduced, in literary terms, to the role of a diarist, or of an anthologist of reportage published earlier. Fabrication with a high measure of authenticity, then, becomes - for the war reporter as would-be memoirist - the art, the requirement and the challenge.

In this sense, the war reporter approaching the memoir long after the events it intends to describe is not unlike the war veteran who, having served his or her country in war, starts to record events and their impact long after they occurred. In her paper 'Soldiers' Stories of the Falklands War: Recomposing Trauma in Memoir', Lucy Robinson considers examples by two veterans of the Falklands War 'who make sense of the past in the process of narrating it.' Ex-combatant memoirs, she notes, like all life histories, compose both the narrative and the narrator; thus their books tell us not only about their experiences at war, but equally about the process of making sense of, or composing, those experiences as memoirs in the years since.

> For these writers, publishing their stories marked the disconnection of their military identity, where their individuality had been subsumed into the regimental collective. Writing about war therefore composed a subject in two places at once: as both the composed soldier and the composing veteran.[65]

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[64] Gornick, Vivian, *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 2001, p. 17.
[65] Robinson, Lucy, 'Soldiers' Stories of the Falklands War: Recomposing Trauma in Memoir', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 25, Issue 4, 2011.

Likewise the war correspondent; although, ironically, the reporter will often have many more wars of which he or she is a veteran than the soldier. Interviewing war correspondents who had covered the 1990-91 Gulf War, Markham found that 'wars did not exist as discreet units in their memory, instead forming part of a narrative that is part individual and past collective.' This litany, he found - depending on the correspondent's age - extended from the Bangladeshi war of independence to Vietnam, the Falklands, Grenada, the Gulf War, Bosnia and Kosovo through to Afghanistan and the war in Iraq from 2003 onwards. Many reporters had 'served' in more than one war, and 'the ready availability of an established narrative framework… means that there is a stable, collectively recognized chain of signifiers by which war reporters can make valorisations and enact their own professional dispositions.'[66]

Nevertheless, while the backdrop of war may seem unchanging, or at least stable in its signifiers, the war reporting memoirist cannot escape, and must confront, the changes that have occurred within themselves: looking back at the person they once were, but are no longer. The writer is not able to return to the state of mind they possessed when these events took place, given that memories are elusive and often contradictory; decades of recomposed memory about the events ensure they have become another person. (The English author Henry James, on rereading one of his early works, noted how he thought of the author of the book as 'quite another person than myself'; he has, as Strawson observes, 'no doubt that he is the same *human being* as the author of that book, but he does not feel he is the same *person* as the author of that book'.[67]) Yet, to create any sense of authenticity, and engagement with readers, the writer must 'become' that person again on the page.

Thomas Larson's *Memoir and the Memoirist: Reading and Writing Personal Narrative*[68] proves useful in navigating these issues, including the primary one - the narrator's voice. How does the writer understand the person he or she was then in light of the person they are now? 'I am not exactly him nor am I free of him,' Larson observes. 'It feels natural to see the remembered self as a character who has an independent life, chooses for himself,

[66] Markham, Tim, 'War Reporting in the 21st Century: A Political Phenomenological Perspective on Pooling, Embedding, ICTs and Citizen Journalism', *Op. cit.*
[67] Strawson, Galen, 'Against Narrativity', *Ratio*, No. 17, 2004, p. 430, *q.v.* Battersby, James, 'Narrativity, Self, and Self-Representation', *Narrative*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Ohio State University, January 2006, pp. 28-29.
[68] Larson, Thomas, *Memoir and the Memoirist: Reading and Writing Personal Narrative*, Swallow Press, Athens, OH, USA, 2007.

indulges free will.' Yet memoirists should avoid such self-casting, he warns; and in any event, they cannot achieve the memoir's aim by doing so.

> The memoir writer does not situate himself in a recreated world as though he were a literary character. What the memoirist does is connect the past self to - and within - the present writer as the means of getting at the truth of his identity.[69]

This points to the fundamental difference between autobiography and memoir. 'As a discourse of identity, delivered bit by bit in the stories we tell ourselves day in and day out,' writes Paul Eakin, 'autobiography structures our living. We don't, though, tend to give much thought to this process of self-narration precisely because, after years of practice, we do it so well.'[70] As a literary form, autobiography, as Larson notes, is written by the public person who tells the birth-to-death story of his or her persona. 'By contrast, the memoir allows the authentic self to lift the mask and tell the story of how mask and self have been intertwined. […] The memoir's aim is to beget the authentic self to come forward, to assume the mantle: expose the inauthentic.'[71] This unmasking becomes 'a liberating act.' [72]

The problem then becomes not the past, but the present: where to locate this 'present' voice within a narrative, disconnected not only from the past it describes but also from any significant reality to anchor it to the here-and-now. As Larson observes, 'This I-then and I-now (the pairing comes from Virginia Woolf) rings in memoir's paradox. Though much time and many realizations may separate these two I's, it is nigh impossible to keep the voices of today's narrator and of yesterday's narrator apart. They are always in flux...'[73] It is this flux that can be used, he suggests, to weave together the book's two streams of time.

If the book is to have meaning for the memoirist, it must show the writer has, in a sense, 'grown up'; that they have come to terms with their past, with fears and failures, and with who they now are. It will reflect not only their resulting maturity, but also the personal and social value of that maturity. (Jung asserted that 'a human being would certainly not grow to be seventy or eighty years old if this longevity had no meaning for the species.'[74]) It will also

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[69] *Ibid*., p. 38.
[70] Eakin, Paul, 'What Are We Reading When We Read Autobiography?', *Narrative*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Ohio State University, May 2004.
[71] Larson, Thomas, *Op. cit*., p. 143.
[72] *Ibid*., p. 144.
[73] *Ibid*., p. 38.
[74] Jung, Carl, quoted in Thomas, *Ibid*., p.176.

reveal to the writer and his or her readers the value of the long perspective, of considering issues over time and coming to deeper understandings as a result.

John Laurence, who had reported the Vietnam War for CBS News from 1965 to 1970, felt that his brief television news reports could never tell the story he had really wanted to tell. 'I need to write something more substantial, more personal,' he recalled in his memoir *The Cat from Hue*.[75] (This work will be examined later in more detail.) 'I had kept notes for that purpose but didn't know what form they might take.' Laurence's experience, far longer at the Vietnam frontline that most reporters of that era, was rich with detail and anecdotes, none of which translated into content suitable for his television reports, which relied on immediacy and shunned complexity:

> At my age, twenty-eight, I thought I was tough-minded enough to take it, absorb it, digest it, and send it home as hard news coverage without looking back. Later I was to discover how naïve that was. I also thought I understood the war. In truth, I knew very little, understood less. All I knew was what I had seen and what I had been told, which wasn't necessarily the right information.[76]

A troubled period followed, in which Laurence found it difficult to discuss his long tour of duty: 'I wanted to forget about Vietnam, to put it out of my mind entirely, to leave the war behind.' Yet he also needed to resolve years of doubt about his behaviour, 'feelings of guilt about what I had done and had left undone.' Bringing his emotions into the open, he found that by 'putting it into perspective as a reasonably mature adult, the scattered fragments of my time in Vietnam began to fall into place, to take shape, to become a coherent story.'[77] In that phrase, 'a coherent story', Laurence identifies the primary need of the war reporting memoirist: finding the means by which to assemble the disparate fragments of 'their' war into a narrative which is not only compelling but also coherent, and so becomes a book of literature in its own right. In this, however, lies a danger: that the quest for coherence might also lead to a polished text in which authenticity is sacrificed for order, even to the point where known facts are modified in the telling. The quest for a sense of the truth cannot be sacrificed in the name of art; indeed, art demands that the writer's version of the truth be told. The options are limitless, but never exhaustive: as Battersby observes, 'There are…

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[75] Laurence, John, *The Cat from Hue: A Vietnam War Story*, Public Affairs, New York, 2002, pp. 87-90.
[76] *Ibid*., p. 87.
[77] *Ibid*., p. 89.

many truths we can tell, in long and short forms, about selves, and many ways of telling them, but there is no way to get at the whole truth in any way of telling.'[78]

In negotiating this maze of possibilities, authenticity in the war reporting memoir, as in all works of memoir, becomes less about what is stated and more about what is earned. The writer has to engender trust by creating a reliable narrator, a persona brought into being by the writer's imagination. In Gornick's view, 'The connection is an intimate one; in fact, it is critical.' It is, she observes, 'the instrument of illumination. Without it there is neither subject nor story.'[79] Yet to fashion a persona out of one's own undisguised self is difficult, since the persona in a nonfiction narrative is an unsurrogated one:

> Here the writer must identify openly with those very same defenses and embarrassments that the novelist or the poet is at once removed from. […] Think of how many years on the couch it takes to speak about oneself, but without all the whining and complaining, the self-hatred and the self-justification that make the analysand a bore to all the world but the analyst. The unsurrogated narrator has the monumental task of transforming low-level self-interest into the kind of detached empathy required of a piece of writing that is to be of value to the disinterested reader.[80]

iii. THE ROLE OF HISTORY

Behind all memoirs is a sense of history, a stream of events that backgrounds and gives content to the created narrative of the self, of the persona. Writers of the war reporting memoir cannot avoid what is often a very dramatic 'external' canvas that has shaped their experience, and must be thus woven into the story, and can potentially overwhelm the story which the writer sets out to tell, of their own experience. What exactly is the nexus between memoir and history, and how must they be balanced - or separated? The problem is well articulated by Patricia Hampl and Elaine Tyler May in their work, *Tell Me True: Memoir, History and Writing a Life*:

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[78] Battersby, James, 'Narrativity, Self, and Self-Representation', *Narrative*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Ohio State University, January 2006, p. 43.
[79] Gornick, Vivian, *Op. cit*., pp. 6-7.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 7.

> Memoir and history regard each other across a wide divide. In effect, they're goalposts marking the extremes of non-fiction. The turf that separates them - and of course connects them - is the vast playing field of memory. Though both forms are narrative and require the storytelling arts, they reverse each other - memoir being personal history, while history offers a kind of public memoir. A tantalizing gray area exists where memory intersects with history, where the necessities of narrative collide with mundane facts. The record always contains blank spaces - whether the record emerges from archival sources or from personal memory. Onto that blank space writers in both genres bring the remnants of the past they select in telling their stories.[81]

This space, they assert, is 'the uncomfortable location' where the historian and the memoirist do the work of interpretation and imagination. History claims the authority of documentary record and, as such, charts the big picture, while memoir offers a more intimate portrait. Yet, for the war reporter especially, history and historical fact are usually inseparable from the personal story to be told: often the historical events form not so much a backdrop as a narrative stream in which human characters, the protagonist most of all, swim for their lives; not all will survive, and those who do retain widely differing views on what actually happened. The frontline playing field of memory becomes a minefield of assertions and possible interpretations, and of selective facts.

In his essay, 'A Choice of Fictions: Historians, Memory, and Evidence'[82], James Wilkinson examines this line between evidence and history. He defines 'fictions' in historical research as deliberate attempts by individuals to misrepresent what they remember; in other words, to rewrite history to their own benefit. This makes it hard to untangle the truth of what happened from the fictions used to subvert that same truth. As Wilkinson notes, 'To detect and describe a distortion of the truth requires an independent standard. But where does that standard come from? Indeed, what sort of objectivity allows the historian to stand outside history?' His question (and lack of any solution) parallels that of George Orwell, writing in his Spanish civil war memoir, *Homage to Catalonia*, where he declared:

> It will never be possible to get a completely accurate and unbiased account of the Barcelona fighting, because the necessary records do not exist. Future historians will have nothing to

[81] Hampl, Patricia, and Tyler May, Elaine, *Tell Me True: Memoir, History and Writing a Life*, Borealis Books, St Paul MN, USA, 2009, pp. 3-4.
[82] Wilkinson, James, 'A Choice of Fictions: Historians, Memory, and Evidence', *Modern Language Association*, Vol. 111, No. 1, January 1996, pp. 80-92, at http://www.jstor.org/stable/i219830, accessed 15 June 2011.

> go upon except a mass of accusations and party propaganda. I myself have little data beyond what I saw with my own eyes and what I have learned from other eyewitnesses whom I believe to be reliable. I can, however, contradict some of the more flagrant lies and help to get the affair into some kind of perspective.[83]

For the war reporting memoirist, 'some kind of perspective' might seem a reasonable ambition for those who, like Orwell, are not trained historians but are news reporters with ambitions to write a form of literature. How then to achieve that? Assembling a book-length manuscript is a substantial challenge for reporters more at home with filing relatively brief, fact-based daily news reports, or the occasional, more exploratory feature article. In their essay 'History as Literature'[84], Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath confront the issue of how to combine narrative, analysis and description in a single, seamless work. As they observe, that one question raises more questions. 'How chronological should I be, how thematic? How do I describe something that changes over time? Do I simply tell a story, or do I discuss what is happening, compare this story with other stories, and draw conclusions? How do I make my story interesting, so that people want to find out what happened?' In tackling these issues, the war reporter as memoirist needs essentially to tell two parallel stories, in two eras of time: one of the war (or wars) they covered and their involvement in that conflict, and one of the subsequent person they have become as a result of that involvement. Telling both stories can, by definition, create discontinuities; the two strands need, in the reader's mind, to become one if the content is to produce a seamless book, a work of literature, yet one in which the element of suspense, and thus readability, is not sacrificed.

> For readers of a history book to care about what will happen next, two things need to happen: they need to care about the key people in the story and there should be a sense of several possibilities. Because historians (and often their readers) know the outcome, and what happened next, it is all too easy to forget that people at the time did not. It is actually quite difficult to convey this sense of uncertainty, to create a sense of surprise. Yet this is the task of the historian, to try to recapture that sense of not knowing what would happen next, to place the reader in the position of the people of the past and help him or her see what dilemmas they faced, and why they made the decisions they did.[85]

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[83] Orwell, George, *Homage to Catalonia*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1989, p. 216; also at http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0201111.txt, accessed 6 June 2012.
[84] Curthoys, Ann, and McGrath, Ann, 'History as Literature', *Agora*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2010, pp. 25-30.
[85] *Ibid*.

What is required is thus not a collision, but a confluence of many diverse elements. As Curthoys and McGrath advise, ‘A well-written history will break its narrative from time to time to draw attention to places, contexts, ideas, parallel events and much more.’ The same can be said of a well-written memoir. As we shall see, what results in the war reporting genre is a surprising range of outcomes.

3. OLD PERSPECTIVES, NEW POSSIBILITIES

i. ANTECEDENTS IN BATTLE

The war reporting memoir in varying forms can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century and the rise of newspaper coverage of warfare, although it would take another century of conflict for its contemporary literary embodiment to appear during the Vietnam War (1962-75). Until then, the genre almost universally took the form of collected writings from the battlefield, with the reporter/narrator's involvement either diminished or entirely absent from the text. Thus we can read the dramatic 1854 report of the Charge of the Light Brigade in Crimea by William Russell of *The Times* of London, written with a full flourish of British patriotism, yet learn nothing of Russell's psyche at this most bloody of battlefields.[86] (Authenticity then carried an entirely different meaning, self-censorship being underlined by pervasive notions of valor and duty.) In the American Civil War (1861-65), the appearance on the battlefield of photographic cameras brought to newspaper readers the graphic horrors of war, although here too the implied authenticity was also tainted by staged images, photo montage and other unreliable forms of narration[87]; again, the reporters reported what they saw and what they wanted to see, but, by and large, not what they felt personally.

World War One and World War Two, both subject to strict military censorship of media reporting, saw a flood of authorised books by 'warcos', but few with any deep insights into a correspondent's persona. Even those published well after 1945 focused on external events; the war memoir of Australian correspondent Noel Monks, who had earlier reported the Spanish civil war (1936-39) and covered the global conflict in both Europe and Asia, gave readers vivid accounts of what he witnessed, but the sole reference to his personal state - in a book of 336 pages - appears in the final words of the last paragraph, when he refers to his daughter's fifth birthday, and adds, in conclusion, 'In the Mediterranean I had a birthday,

[86] Knightley, Phillip, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq*, Andre Deutsch, London, 2003, p. 1.

[87] Photographic historian William Frassanito, for example, discovered two images of the same dead soldier taken at two locations 72 yards apart, to satisfy market demand. 'Once repositioned, the dead Confederate soldier was posed again', while the very same items, a blanket, a gun, a cap, 'appear in photograph after photograph'. *Q.v. Frassanito: Battlefield Photography Then & Now*, in 'Unknown Civil War' television documentary series, Arts and Entertainment Network, New York, 2005.

too. I was forty-six, and I felt as old as the hills…'[88] Such emotions (or studied lack of them) indicated a journalistic environment in which facts trumped feelings, and in which it was considered a major professional transgression for 'the reporter to become the story'.

As an emotional (as distinct from patriotic) landscape for journalism and for foreign correspondents, the Spanish Civil War had no equal; taking sides was considered not only appropriate but mandatory, and propaganda flourished on both sides. Radio had appeared, newspaper circulations in Britain and the Continent were rising fast, and reportage from the frontline was in vogue: a scenario exemplified by the presence of George Orwell, who found himself in the roles of combatant, reporter, essayist and, subsequently, memoirist. Unlike many of those who covered the war, Orwell retained a degree of balance, openly criticizing the Republicans while he supported their cause in principle. This, and his plain but precise and descriptive prose, gave his work *Homage to Catalonia* a special place in the eyes not of those who would later report World War Two (when such freedoms were not possible) but for those who emerged in postwar journalism and sought more expressive models of war reporting, in which the narrative might include, or even be centred on, the journalist's presence and his political views. This accords with Orwell's place in the profession, and his skepticism about so-called journalistic objectivity. He began work as a journalist, according to his wife Sonia, because 'he wanted to be effective, to raise his voice against the folly, stupidity and despair he saw and felt…'[89] Yet Orwell could not help seeing himself as a writer first, who aimed 'to tell the whole truth without violating my literary instincts.'[90] Subsequent war reporting memoirists would attempt this difficult balancing act, of being 'who they are' while creating a 'literary persona' with varying degrees of success.

Spain also saw the dramatic rise of photojournalism with the introduction of the compact German Leica 35mm camera, used by the Hungarian photographer Robert Capa to afford a graphic sense of authenticity to the war as witnessed by distant audiences. The pinnacle of his achievements was the image 'The Falling Soldier', published in *Life* magazine on 12 July 1937, purporting to show a Republican soldier at the moment of death by shooting. While Capa told the *New York World-Telegram*, 'The best pictures are there, and you take them.

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[88] Monks, Noel, *Eyewitness*, Frederick Muller, London, 1955, p. 336.
[89] Orwell, Sonia, 'Introduction', in Orwell, Sonia, and Angus, Ian, eds., *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Vol. 1, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968-70, p. 14, *q.v.* Bromley, Michael, 'Objectivity and the Other Orwell: The Tabloidism of *The Daily Mirror* and Journalistic Authenticity', *Media History*, Vol 9. No. 2, p. 124.
[90] Orwell, George, 'Why I Write', 1946, reproduced in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Vol. 1, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968-70, p. 29, q.v. *Ibid*.

The truth is the best picture, the best propaganda'[91], 'The Falling Soldier' has since become, as Alex Kershaw notes, 'the most debated picture in the history of journalism'.[92] Many critics have questioned its authenticity, if not its power to shock - in the view of one prominent documentary maker, 'there is no way of knowing from Capa's still image itself whether the man has accidentally slipped, is being killed, or has been asked to simulate the moment of death.'[93] What has never been in doubt, as Kershaw notes, is that its publication marked a point of no return, from which journalism and war would forever be powerfully entwined. The rapidly spreading use of newsreel movie cameras, and growing demand for magazine essays, would help; in Spain the meshing of the media and the military began. They would merge into a single propaganda entity in World War Two, but war reporting would again see its more creative release in the terrible conflict in Vietnam. There, too, the war reporting memoir as a distinct literary genre would find its champions, and its audience.

ii. VIETNAM AND OBJECTIVITY

Marked by up to two million deaths including 58, 220 American servicemen and women[94], and the setting for America's only military defeat, the Vietnam War continues to influence Western culture in many areas, including literature and journalism - and specifically war reporting. The war's domestic repercussions may have brought the United States to the brink of social collapse, but it remains a temple to which many young correspondents pray, a seductive if now all-but-lost journalistic culture of danger, freedom and escape. For many who grew up in the postwar era, monochromatic visions of the Vietnam War on the nightly television news became their representation of what conflict was, and looked like, just as newsreel visions of Normandy and Pacific beach landings had been implanted deep in the psyches of the previous generation. Although daily newspapers and magazines remained strong and influential in this era, television news lay at the heart of Vietnam War coverage,

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[91] Capa, Robert, *q.v.* Kershaw, Alex, *Blood and Champagne: The Life and Times of Robert Capa*, Pan, London, 2002, p. 38.

[92] Kershaw, Alex, *Ibid*.

[93] Jeudy, Patrick, *q.v.* Kershaw, Alex, *Ibid*, pp. 38-39. The debate over photojournalism 'fakes' continues. In 2003, *Los Angles Times* photographer Brian Walski filed a striking image from Basra, Iraq which was circulated to news outlets worldwide, and was subsequently found to be a composite of two separate photos which Walski merged on his laptop to create a more powerful image. (See Carlson, Mike, 'The Reality of a Fake Image: News Norms, Photojournalistic Craft, and Brian Walski's Fabricated Photograph', *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 2009.) Numerous other such fake photographs from Middle East wars have been circulated by global news agencies before being exposed and retracted.

[94] United States National Archives, *Statistical Information about Fatal Casualties of the Vietnam War*, at http://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html#content, accessed 13 July 2012.

hence its reputation as 'the first television war'. The implications of that were not remotely understood in 1965, when the American networks - cornerstones of the Cold War media Establishment - set up their bureaux in Saigon and started filming the war.

Would television reporting of warfare change the role of the war reporter? Would TV change anything, or perpetuate old ideas of war and heroism and national supremacy? Would the Baby Boomer journalists in all media transfer the driving anger of Bob Dylan's protest songs, of road movies like *Easy Rider*, to their filmed coverage of war? Would they personalise their reports, step beyond the boundaries of accepted wisdom and received thought, and into the journalistic unknown? And when, in distant rice paddies, all the risks were faced down, the civilian horrors filmed and the simplistic war stories filed, what then? What of this emerging celebrity otherwise known as the 'TV war reporter', whose existence was both elevated by war and reduced by it, who vied for public accolades while his psyche was being eaten cancerously by accumulated visions of hell on earth? In 1965, these were all questions waiting for answers: television had never before been to war. For reporters in all media, covering Vietnam would in one sense be the same as covering previous wars: a state of being from which they never clocked off - a complex adhesive, an occupational rash that at once empowered and enervated the journalist. Yet covering the Vietnam conflict would also be a task in which the old rules of reporting were upturned or bypassed; in which new, uncertain energies would be released; in which professional journalistic experience counted for relatively little and a beginner could score a major story or prize-winning photograph; where the introduction of television news cameras would fundamentally change how war was portrayed; and where, as a result, new pages in the history of journalism, and of literature, would be written.

Vietnam brought out the best and worst in war journalism. Most coverage by Western correspondents, in the period leading up to the Tet Offensive of 1968, was predictably supportive of the American war effort; the framing of the news discourse around the war was intense if unseen, politicised into stagnation with familiar Cold War rhetoric. Of the few early dissenting voices, one that counted for much was that of David Halberstam of *The New York Times*, whose 1965 book *The Making of a Quagmire*[95] foretold of the disaster to come unless the United States did not change its military strategy. Despite the outrage which his

[95] Halberstam, David, *The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam during the Kennedy Era*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1965.

daily reporting generated in the White House, Halberstam did not go as far as to advocate American withdrawal; as the historian Bernard Fall noted, 'As a good reporter, Halberstam does not offer any solutions but simply states his facts.'[96] Underlying that approach was a professional devotion to seeking out the truth: 'You go for the truth and the truth tells you,' Halberstam declared in a 2001 documentary. 'You don't tell the truth, you don't send any of these people [photographers] 200 or 300 miles to slog through the boonies, to risk their lives, to get shot and then say, "Okay, now let me fake a photo."'[97] As the first journalist in Vietnam to publish his personal (and largely negative) views on the conflict in a best-selling book, Halberstam played a significant role in the evolution of the war reporting memoir.

The contents of his 1965 work, and the anguish it caused in official circles, also presaged what would become a hallmark of the war - the rift between what journalists were seeing and what the U.S. government was saying, a schism that would drive reporters increasingly to break from hitherto sacred adherence to 'objectivity' and to write with more attachment and emotion about what they witnessed; this would open the way for a range of subjective narratives in longer form journalism, including books. 'David changed war reporting forever,' said the veteran U.S. State Department diplomat Richard Holbrooke on Halberstam's death in 2007. 'He made it not only possible but even romantic to write that your own side was misleading the public about how the war was going.'[98] Halberstam, while revealing little of himself in his text, had transferred growing interest in, and concern about, the conflict from the daily press columns to book publishing, to a readership closer to history and the essay than to hard news, thus paving the way for those who followed.

In Vietnam, the notion of authenticity in war reporting came under forensic examination. Critics argued the media was biased for reporting events clearly at odds with the Pentagon version; critics claimed the reporting was one-sided, failing to balance accounts of American atrocities with those of the Communist forces. Above all, critics argued that the television coverage of the war was undermining America's efforts to win, turning the American public against the war and demoralising troops on the ground.[99] The details of these debates are of less interest in analysing the genre of the war reporting memoir than the fact that they

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[96] Fall, Bernard, 'Errors Escalated Too', *The New York Times*, 16 May 1965, at http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/15/home/halberstam-quagmire.html, accessed 23 April 2011.
[97] Halberstam, David, *q.v. Camera Martyrs of Vietnam*, *Op. cit*.
[98] Holbrook, Richard, *q.v.* Packer, George, 'David Halberstam', *The New Yorker*, 7 May 2007, at http://www.newyorker.com/talk/2007/05/07/070507ta_talk_packer, accessed 4 May 2011.
[99] For a thorough account of the media in Vietnam, see Hammond, William, *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War*, University Press of Kansas, 1998.

generated a visceral degree of controversy, and thus created a space in which a range of writer/reporters were drawn to Vietnam who otherwise might not have gone there. 'The conflict was born in contradiction,' notes William Hammond, 'and grounded in ambiguity.'[100] While not a recipe for clear-minded daily news coverage, this suggested fertile ground for journalists with more creative flair, and literary ambitions. The rise and domination of television coverage, with its emphasis on visuals and immediacy, also left to prose writers the territory of more nuanced, reflective and interpretative reporting of the war. The merging of these factors would see the war reporting memoir emerge as the Vietnam War's most significant literary legacy.

Yet the persistence of the traditional, 'objective' model of Western journalism cannot be overlooked, for the majority of press coverage out of Vietnam was built on this bedrock. In this version of news discourse, as Alison Young notes, the 'objective' presentation of news is also the 'authentic' presentation of news.[101] Historically, few exceptions were permitted; for example, the BBC's internal guidelines in 1971 stated:

> There are some respects in which the BBC is not neutral, unbiased or impartial. The BBC cannot be neutral in the struggle between truth and untruth, justice and injustice, freedom and slavery, compassion and cruelty, tolerance and intolerance. It is not only within the [BBC] Constitution, it is within the consensus about basic moral values.[102]

In general, American news organisations championed the objectivity 'norm' well ahead of their British or European counterparts, arguing that it helped guide journalists 'to separate facts from values and to report only the facts', and to report news 'without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way.'[103] To this end, even the reporter-subject interview was suspect; as late as 1926, Schudson notes, the Associated Press prohibited its reporters from writing interviews.[104] (In 1925, its general manager, Kent Cooper, announced: 'The journalist who deals in facts diligently developed and intelligently presented exalts his profession, and his stories need never be colorless or dull.'[105]) News organisations presented themselves as mirrors of an audience's society rather than

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[100] Hammond, William, *Ibid*., p. 292.
[101] Young, Alison, 'Appeals to Valuelessness: Objectivity, Authenticity and the News Discourse', *Textual Practice*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1009, p. 39.
[102] British Broadcasting Corporation, *Principles and Practices in News and Current Affairs*, London, 1971, p. 8.
[103] Schudson, Michael, 'The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism', *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 150.
[104] *Ibid*., p. 157.
[105] Cooper, Kent, *q.v. Ibid*., pp. 161-162.

champions of causes, and critical to this was the concept of impartiality and the 'valuelessness' of news as presented. All this of course denied the reality that the personality and subjectivity of individual reporters cannot be extracted from the reporting process, yet - in one American study in 1977 - 98-percent of journalists surveyed 'explicitly defined the process of reporting and the idea of objectivity as coterminous.'[106] In Vietnam, adherence to this objectivity norm would produce anything but an accurate account of the war being conducted by America in the name of freedom.

While television delivered unpalatable images to Western news audiences, it too did not generally penetrate the fog of official interpretations of the war. Technically it was crude and cumbersome; its inbuilt bias was towards graphic images over informational content, analysis and wider context. 'No pictures, no story' was the industry mantra. There were later exceptions - Morley Safer's CBS account of a village burned by U.S. Marines, which enraged President Lyndon Johnson - as well as extraordinary moments caught on film, such as the 1968 killing of a Viet Cong suspect by the Saigon police chief, or a Vietnamese girl burned by napalm and running naked towards the television camera - but many print journalists and photojournalists continued to look down on television news, regarding this brash new medium as shallow, insincere, attuned more to audience ratings than to the great wheel of history. Some American domestic critics, including *The New Yorker's* television reviewer Michael Arlen, felt television coverage was reducing the war's immense complexity:

> …the cumulative effect of all these three-minute and five-minute film clips, with their almost unvarying implicit deference to the importance of purely military solutions and with their catering to a popular democracy's insistent desire to view even as unbelievably complicated a war as this one in emotional terms (our guys against your guys), is surely wide of the mark, and is bound to provide these millions of people with an excessively simple, emotional, and military-oriented view of what is, at best, a mightily unsimple situation.[107]

Ward Just, head correspondent for *The Washington Post* in the early days of the war, returned to America in 1966 where he paid close attention to television news shows, and identified what he saw as television's weakness as a war reporting medium:

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[106] Phillips, B., 'Approaches to Objectivity: Journalistic Versus Social Science Perspectives', in Hirsch, P. et al, eds., Strategies for Communications Research, Sage, Beverly Hills, US, 1977, *q.v.* Young, Alison, 'Appeals to Valuelessness: Objectivity, Authenticity and the News Discourse', *Textual Practice*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1009, p. 41.
[107] Arlen, Michael, *The Living Room War*, Tower Publications, New York, 1969.

> What astonished me was how on the evening news it wasn't real. I mean, the blood didn't look like blood. I knew by then what blood looked like, and the blood that you saw on NBC was not the way it looked in the field. None of the film could capture the enormous tension and weight of a battle - the way the people looked, the way the soldiers moved. This had nothing to do with the skill of the correspondent or the skill of the cameraman. It had to do with the limitations of film. And I thought to myself that a skilled writer can probably get closer to the bottom reality of a seriously violent action than a motion-picture camera.[108]

The notion of journalism as the purveyor of reality, and hopefully truth, sat uneasily at the best of times with the demands of manufactured, televised entertainment; in the war zone, the credibility gap strained to the limit. Most television journalists of the era had taken part in the charade of 'setting up shots', of having their subjects pick up telephones or walk into rooms, which may have seemed harmless enough. But in Vietnam, reporters and producers transferred the charade to the conflict zone in ways small and large. 'Can we do that once again?' might have been be an invitation to improve the final product, but when soldiers were asked to fire at imaginary enemies, or to unleash artillery at distant, unseen foes for the sake of the camera, the news media entered the realm of narrative fiction, by 'making things up', capturing on film (and later, on video) a reality that was not real but skillfully manufactured, or to use the industry term, 'produced'.

Another correspondent in Vietnam, Peter Arnett, who filed print stories for The Associated Press, was equally unimpressed by the new medium - although he would, in the Persian Gulf War of 1991, become a noted on-air reporter for CNN International. 'We tended to ridicule the show biz aspects of TV,' he recalled, relating an episode when CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite visited the 173rd Airborne Brigade, whose soldiers were 'fascinated by a CBS light man who carried a battery-powered sun gun (spotlight) to keep the shadows off the anchorman's face - quite ironic in a war zone where soldiers applied elaborate camouflage makeup to create a shadow effect on their faces.'[109] Arnett criticised the inherent falsity of

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[108] Just, Ward, *q.v.* Ferrari, Michelle, ed., *Reporting America at War [An Oral History]*, Hyperion, New York, 2003, p. 158. Just subsequently wrote fiction. His novel *A Dangerous Friend* (Mariner Books, New York, 2000) evokes the complexity of the Vietnam war with the very precision that he insisted television could not. ('Just has a veteran war reporter's eye for the telling detail - light from phosphorus flares "so fierce you could see it with closed eyelids" - and a reporter's skepticism about his Government's stated objectives,' opined *The New York Times*, at http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/05/02/reviews/990502.02mcmanut.html, accessed 2 October 2012.)

[109] Arnett, Peter, *Live from the Battlefield: From Vietnam to Baghdad, 35 Years in the World's War Zones*, Corgi, London, 1994, p. 189.

much television news reporting, recounting a story told by a U.S. military sergeant who was assisting with the coverage of the Cronkite visit:

> We staged some sexy footage of troops 'moving out' into the jungle, and then Cronkite did a walking interview with the battalion commander, a major. […] 'Cut,' cried Ron Bonn [of CBS], directing the epic for Cronkite. 'Back up and wade through the water.' The battalion commander looked at me a little odd and I shrugged and they walked through the water. 'Cut,' shouted Bonn a second time. 'Now back up and come through it again.' […] 'You look disgusted, Sergeant,' Bonn said to me later, and I responded, 'I didn't mean to let it show.' Bonn explained tolerantly, 'This is what we call produced reality. When this is cut up and put together in New York it will make great stuff.'[110]

The degree of guilt generated in television reporters (rather than their producers and directors) in the process of rearranging reality was often acute, a professional pressure rarely acknowledged publicly. Had the words 'Produced Reality' been superimposed over the news footage as it went to air, would that have assuaged the reporter's feelings of guilt, of basic journalistic dishonesty, of a blatant lack of authenticty - or would it add to them? During the Vietnam War and well beyond, a cone of professional silence surrounded this routine deception.

In contrast to this was the working methodology of Australian television news cameraman Neil Davis, who covered Vietnam and remained in Saigon to the very last moment - to film a North Vietnamese tank charging victoriously into the grounds of the Presidential Palace. For his part, Davis abandoned both the 'produced reality' route and any slanting of coverage towards one side or the other (he was one of the few Western reporters to shoot the war also from the Viet Cong side). His filming was so closely enmeshed with the fighting that his survival was considered by most of his colleagues a postponement of the inevitable. (He died while filming a coup d'état in Thailand in 1985.) In his authorised biography, Davis related how he battled with editors in London to have his stories screened as filmed:

> History must not be tampered with in any way whatsoever, not even if it's harmless - that is, if the editors want to run the film longer. If they think there is not enough footage of helicopter gunships attacking in the air and want to put in say twenty-five more seconds, it is possible to splice in similar footage from coverage the day before. Nobody will know the

[110] Arnett, Peter, *Ibid*, p. 191.

> difference. But it is not the same. It's not the same helicopter, and if you could not get that footage on the same day, it's unacceptable. There should be no exceptions whatsoever. It must be one hundred per cent historically correct. I want to be able to say at the end of my working life that I recorded history faithfully.[111]

This, then, was the context in which a handful of journalists gathered material not only for their daily reports, but for literary projects still taking shape and to be written at a later date, when time and distance from the war permitted: a war in which official lies and deceptions were standard currency, in which the graphic impact of television had largely replaced the considered text report, and in which large sections of the Saigon press corps assisted the military in promoting unchecked the myth of eventual American victory. As such, it was, perhaps both an unlikely and obvious place to engage in literary experiments.

iii. ENTER THE NEW JOURNALISM

Much has been written about the New Journalism, a term coined in the Vietnam War era and a form of journalism whose innovations and energies owe much to the social rebellions engendered by that conflict, and to the impact of television coverage of the war. From the outset, as Richard Kallan observed, the literary movement headed by American writer Tom Wolfe caused division among critics: one claimed Wolfe 'writes like a master', while another saw him as 'a demagogic parajournalist'.[112] Essentially, the New Journalism took the basic techniques of fiction, from the use of highly detailed descriptive passages to extended use of apparently verbatim dialogue, to bring the 'real' world to readers in a way that straight news reporting could never do. Moreover, in this New Journalism, old notions of objectivity might (or might not) be supplanted by a determined subjectivity: the reporter could not only insert his or her views, but insert himself or herself at the centre of the story, in some examples becoming the main character in events. Robert Boynton summed up the key principles:

> The New Journalism uses complete dialogue, rather than the snippets quoted in daily journalism; proceeds scene by scene, much as in a movie; incorporates varying points of

[111] Davis, Neil, *q.v.* Bowden, Tim, *One Crowded Hour*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1987, p. 209.
[112] Kallan, Richard, 'Style and the New Journalism: A Rhetorical Analysis of Tom Wolfe', *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 46, March 1979, p. 52.

> view, rather than telling a story solely from the perspective of the narrator; and pays close attention to status details about the appearance and behavior of its characters.[113]

In theory, then, not so much a radical departure from the objectivity norm but a fresh approach to it, or even a return to the distant journalistic past: as the publisher of the *New York World*, Joseph Pulitzer, commanded his staff in the 1880s, 'Never drop a thing until you have gone to the bottom of it. Continuity! Continuity! Continuity until the subject is really finished.'[114] In immigrant-filled America, human narratives were everywhere, and 'literary journalism' became fashionable until supplanted in the 20th century by fact-filled and fact-based journalism. In the field of war reporting, a dominant force in the 1960s, this radical shift in approach invited participants to experience the joy of invention, the attraction of a fresh audience, and an opportunity for the more literary to indulge their Hemingwayesque fantasies (as Boynton observes, novelists had until then been warned 'by Flaubert, Joyce, and others that writing journalism would harm their fiction, further diminishing journalism's status in the literary world.'[115]) Few in Vietnam took up the challenge; those who accepted found in this new form not only stylistic freedom but the potential for a new journalistic authenticity, albeit one that would be quickly and forcefully contested.

One of the earliest exponents of the New Journalism in war reporting was in fact not American, but British. In 1966, *The Sunday Times* in London ran a feature, 'The General Goes Zapping Charlie Cong', written by its Saigon-based correspondent Nicholas Tomalin. 'The General Goes Zapping Charlie Cong' is designed to grab the reader's attention and hold it: by the 1970s, in a world grown weary of the Vietnam debacle, this would have been technically useful; in 1966, when the article appeared, with the war effort building up and casualties mounting, the opening paragraph carried - and was obviously shaped to carry - impact:

> After a light lunch last Wednesday, General James F. Hollingworth, of Big Red One, took off in his personal helicopter and killed more Vietnamese than all the troops he commanded.[116]

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[113] Boynton, Robert, ed., introduction, *The New New Journalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 2005, p. xvi.
[114] Pulitzer, Joseph, *q.v.* Emery, Michael, Emery, Edward, Roberts, Nancy, *The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 2000, p. 172.
[115] Boynton, Robert, *Op cit*., p. xxvi.
[116] Tomalin, Nicholas, 'The General Goes Zapping Charlie Cong', *The Sunday Times*, 5 June 1966, at http://jmsc.hku.hk/courses/jmsc6025spring2012/files/2012/01/Nicholas-Tomalin-The-General-Goes-Zapping-Charlie-Cong.pdf, accessed 4 February 2011.

Tomalin's writing of this singular episode of the war conveyed a deliberate lightness (yet never flippancy), a counterpoint to the casual horrors being described, not least through the General's own mouth:

> 'I don't know how you think about war. The way I see it, I'm just like any other company boss, gingering up the boys all the time, except I don't make money. I just kill people, and save lives.'[117]

Tomalin had drawn himself right into the narrative, had repositioned the role of the journalistic narrator from the opaque background to the dynamic, blood-soaked foreground. His voice as narrator conveyed this spirit. 'The General is magnanimous in his victory over my squeamish civilian worries', assuring the reporter (and thus the reader) this is a new kind of war, 'flexible, quickmoving', with the helicopter adding a new dimension to battle:

> There's no better way to fight than goin' out to shoot VCs. An' there's nothing I love better than killin' Cong. No, sir.'[118]

Nothing in Tomalin's article suggested that what he was reporting was not true, did not actually happen, or in any way had been reimagined or recreated. This was still reportage, but it carried the punch and pull of fiction. Indeed, it carried the declared tenets of the New Journalism in less than 2,000 words, and complied with the views of Truman Capote, author of *In Cold Blood*, that such reportage was the new literature:

> I've always had the theory that reportage is the great unexplored art form... I've had this theory that a factual piece of work could explore whole new dimensions in writing that would have a double effect fiction does not have - the every fact of its being true, every word of its true, would add a double contribution of strength and impact.[119]

Tom Wolfe equally pronounced that the New Journalism had overtaken the novel as 'the main event' in literature. As Wolfe saw it, the essential difference between the new non-fiction and conventional reporting was that the basic unit of reporting was no longer 'the facts' but 'the scene'. Scene, such as the one so vividly created by Tomalin in 'The General

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[117] *Ibid*.
[118] *Ibid*.
[119] Capote, Truman, *q.v.* Newquist, Roy, *Counterpoint,* Rand McNally, 1964, p. 78.

Goes Zapping Charlie Cong', was what lay beneath 'the sophisticated strategies of prose'.[120] As well, Wolfe noted, 'it was possible in non-fiction, 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, or within a relatively short space,' to draw in the reader intellectually and emotionally.[121]

Over the course of the Vietnam War, the New Journalism seeped its way into feature journalism and into reflective books about the war, though in the latter case hardly with the reckless speed that its dynamic prose style might have suggested. Aside from histories told in a style derivative of the New Journalism - works such as David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest*[122] and Neil Sheehan's *A Bright Shining Lie*[123] - the number of such works with claims to literature published either during the conflict or in the decade after the war seems, from this distance, remarkably small. Ron Covic's *Born on the Fourth of July*[124] and Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War*[125] are powerful testaments to their authors' Vietnam military service, but both are reasonably conventional in style.

Caputo followed *A Rumor of War* with a war reporting memoir, *Means of Escape,* which focused on his post-Vietnam role as a foreign correspondent for *The Chicago Tribune*, when he was held hostage by Islamic extremists in Beirut, and followed the Mujahedeen fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s. This would seem ample material for a riveting 'straight' memoir, but Caputo chose - to capture what he called the 'emotional truth' of his experiences - to intersperse chapters of fact with fiction sketches entitled 'Disasters of War', inspired by Goya's artworks of the same name. As he explained in the book's introduction, the sketches were 'fictional re-creations of actual experiences, either my own or someone else's. Uncovering their inner truth as gracefully and economically as possible demanded a reassembly of their outward facts, sometimes the inter-weaving of two or three incidents, separated in time but united by a common theme, sometimes the creation of fictional characters, based on real persons.'[126] (Caputo noted equally that the autobiographical passages were 'as accurate and honest as my memory could make them'.)

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[120] Wolfe, Tom, 'Why They Aren't Writing the Great American Novel Anymore,' *Esquire,* December 1972, p. 278.
[121] Wolfe, Tom, 'The Birth of "The New Journalism"; Eyewitness Report by Tom Wolfe', *New York* magazine, 14 February 1972, at http://nymag.com/news/media/47353/, accessed 15 January 2011.
[122] Halberstam, David, *The Best and the Brightest*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1993.
[123] Sheehan, Neil, *A Bright Shining Lie*, Random House, New York, 1988.
[124] Covic, Ron, *Born on the Fourth of July*, Akashic Books, New York, 2005.
[125] Caputo, Philip, *A Rumor of War,* Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1977.
[126] Caputo, Philip, *Means of Escape*, Lyons Press, Guilford CT, 2002, author's introductory note.

This obtuse explanation left some critics unsatisfied; a 1991 review in *The New York Times* was followed by a terse exchange between Caputo and the reviewer, former CBS News correspondent in Vietnam, Morley Safer. Safer pointed out that Caputo in the brief prologue entitled 'An Explanation' asserted that *Means of Escape* is 'a kind of historical novel… a marriage of memory and imagination, or what I call the creativity of hindsight.'[127] 'But whose voice is it?' asked Safer. 'Is it the memoirist speaking or the character he has created? Intelligent people want to know. A little of both, he tells us…' Safer was not finished: '*Means of Escape* might have been a wonderful novel for this semiotic age: the struggle between truth and illusion, with illusion as the greater truth. Symbols of war and the war of symbols. Rambo meets Umberto Eco.' Safer contended that, ''Creativity of hindsight' may be one of the biggest howlers ever uttered by a journalist'.

In a letter to the editor, Caputo responded that Safer had not understood the prologue, 'nor did he understand that autobiography is, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "a life, *reshaped* [italics added] by recollection, with all of recollection's conscious and unconscious omissions and distortions… a *true* [italics added] picture of what, at one moment in a life, the subject wished - or is impelled - to reveal of that life.'[128] To use memory, or imagination, or - as Caputo seemed to be saying - was there no real difference? It remained unclear what Caputo was trying to achieve with this mixture of fact and fiction; he attempted to rectify the confusion in a later interview:

> Caputo: The dirty little secret of most autobiography is that a lot of it is fictionalized, or it's semi-fictionalized, and nobody ever says so. Michael Herr's *Dispatches,* which I think is a brilliant book, purports to be autobiographical, but Herr has told me, and he's told other people, 'I've made a lot of that shit up.' But out of real stuff.
>
> WLA: A noble lie.
>
> Caputo: You could say that.
>
> WLA: Maybe imagination is just a tool to make sense of memory.
>
> Caputo: Well said. I think, perhaps that's exactly what imagination is.[129]

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[127] Safer, Morley, 'War Stories', *The New York Times*, 27 October 1991.
[128] Caputo, Philip, letter to the editor, *The New York Times*, 8 December 1991.
[129] Neiberg, Michael; Bowie, Thomas; and Anderson, Donald, 'A Conversation with Philip Caputo at 58', at wlajournal.com/12_1/Caputo.pdf, accessed 12 July 2009.

iv. THE NEGLECTED CAT FROM HUE

Coming well after the event, John Laurence's memoir of reporting Vietnam, *The Cat from Hue*, published in 2002, is a more accomplished and substantial achievement, all the more remarkable for its being interrupted in the writing by bouts of depression and alcoholism.[130] A monumental reflection on his experiences (both on and off duty) from 1965 to 1970 as a television correspondent for America's CBS News, when he was mostly engaged in reporting nightly stories and, later, in producing a documentary (*The World of Charlie Company*[131]), the book project hovered in the shadows of Laurence's life from its commencement in 1978 until its publication 24 years later. (This may account for its relative neglect in Vietnam War studies to date.) At 800 pages long, crowded with material sourced from Laurence's news reports and field notes, its density at times as numbing as war itself, the narrative sprawls over the landscape of a worsening conflict and documents Laurence's many forays to the frontline fighting alongside the 'grunts', the American infantry troops. The book takes its title from a cat called Meo (Vietnamese for 'cat'), which appears to possess at least some of a feline's legendary nine lives as it accompanies Laurence around the battlefields.

Laurence fractures and reassembles time in his opus, and breaks the verbal bulk of *The Cat from Hue* into four digestible parts akin to four acts in a stage play or a movie. The first, set in Hue after the 1968 Tet Offensive, is about seduction; Laurence is seduced by a cat, needy and grubby in the rubble, and we are seduced into his story of war and violence by the use of such a tender motif. Then, lulled into security, we experience war at full intensity:

> The noise was overpowering - a furious pandemonium of popping, cracking, blasting - a weapon itself. As the truck sped along the road, the sights and sounds spun wildly out of control - fleeting images, gunfire, shouts, powder smells - holding me in the grip of overwhelming powerlessness, a feeling of being on the border of madness myself, not knowing nor being able to change or care what might happen next.[132]

Despite this frenetic introduction to battle, Laurence quickly affects the tone of fatalism expected of an experienced correspondent who also believes in 'daily miracles' of survival: 'No one wanted to spend any more time than necessary being shot at.' Further adding to the authorial persona - that of the hard-working professional newsman - there are

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[130] Laurence, John, *The Cat from Hue*, *Op. cit*., pp. 817-819.
[131] *The World of Charlie Company*, documentary; Russ Bensley (producer), CBS News, New York, 1970.
[132] *Ibid*., p. 15.

intimations of problems with alcohol and drugs as a temporary means of escape, caught with a drumbeat rhythm that Hemingway might have employed:

> Coming in out of the field, drinking and smoking were what you did to shift the memory of what you'd seen to a place where it didn't keep you awake at night. Sometimes it worked. If you drank or smoked enough, you didn't dream. Certainly you didn't remember your dreams, which was just as important. But the sleep did not bring rest. You often awoke as tired as you were the night before. After a few days, the need for rest became so acute the effects were as frightening as what you were trying to forget. Sometimes you didn't get straightened out until you were back in the field.[133]

The second part, which folds back in time to the Central Highlands in 1965-66, starts to fill out the backstory by taking us to the chronological beginning, when Laurence begins his tour of Vietnam as a bright-eyed 25-year-old television correspondent, filled with optimism and fuelled by ambition, and when the American forces seemed like 'warrior giants from another planet - tall, confident, fearless - an army of Martians'[134], when it appears to his beginner's eyes that American technological firepower could not help but prevail[135]. Here, Laurence adopts the naïve spirit of a youthful journalist eager to be part of his country's presumed victory, arguing illogically to himself that since 'the cause was honorable, that the result would be successful.'[136] Meanwhile he lives in a shabby room in the down-market Hotel Majestic on the Saigon waterfront, with a menagerie of bugs that pays homage to the Graham Greene-like pantheon of seedy tropical settings, 'predominantly mosquitos but also ants, lizards, dragonflies, geckos, household flies, spiders, beetles, cockroaches…'[137] Completing the picture, and hinting at the deeper ironies that will crowd his narrative (and indeed will come to mark the 'Catch-22'-like nature of the war), the walls are decorated with old posters offering seemingly ludicrous enticements such as 'Fly Pan-Am - Discover Viet-Nam'.

These elements also add to the sense of innocence; yet soon Laurence senses his initial judgment was flawed, that now 'the war was gathering terrible force, like a hurricane over the seas.'[138] Barely a year into his reporting tour, the scales are lifted from a young man's eyes: 'We had come to save the Vietnamese from their enemies and we had become

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[133] *Ibid*., p. 177.
[134] *Ibid*., p. 133.
[135] *Ibid*., p. 135.
[136] *Ibid*., p. 146.
[137] *Ibid*., p. 126.
[138] *Ibid*., p. 291.

enemies ourselves.'[139] Laurence begins to blend into his text the wider political and military narratives, at the point where the reader is eager to discover how this looming catastrophe - whose outcome we already know - could have happened, and why so few in authority could see it coming; hence the perspective broadens from the relatively narrow views of a single reporter to notions of 'blindness' that will affect the fate of the Vietnamese people.

A large part of that 'blindness', he readily acknowledges in *The Cat from Hue*, is caused by televised coverage of the war, of which Laurence himself would become a highly acclaimed practitioner. Here he plunges into the debate about objectivity, authenticity and truth. 'The true war,' he notes, 'rarely got reported. A multitude of facts were reported instead. […] A mighty flood of facts flowed out from Saigon and across the Pacific each day and washed over the American public in waves…'[140] Military versions of the truth were reported by the press without judgment; in the interests of so-called balanced reporting, notes Laurence, 'truth and falsehood got equal weight.' On television news, the imagery shown of the conflict was 'realistic and dramatic at times', but still not real:

> What viewers saw on TV was a tightly edited version of a few particular moments taken out of twenty or thirty minutes of exposed news film that had, in turn, been recorded selectively. […] Though everyone tried earnestly to write and edit honest representations of what was going on, what came out was only a limited version of the truth. It was called 'objective journalism' because what it reported was factually correct most of the time, but it was still highly subjective, more of a failed truth.[141]

Laurence's doubts about his own medium for covering the war, and the diaries he keeps, hint at his intention to one day write more deeply about his experiences, for, he says, the language of his daily journalism was insufficient. 'For all the facts we poured out of Vietnam, we might have better served the truth by broadcasting some of the letters the GIs wrote to their families.' He determines perhaps the only media for showing the war's truth is still photography: each image is 'a fragmentary symbol of someone's reality. By the nature of their ambiguity, those pictures gave viewers the privilege of using their imaginations to interpret the reality.'[142]

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[139] *Ibid*., p. 477.
[140] *Ibid*., pp. 402-405.
[141] *Ibid*., p. 403.
[142] *Ibid*., p. 405.

In part three, the narrative moves chronologically forward to 1967-68. Laurence and his team are filming intense fighting south of the Demilitarized Zone around Danang, Con Thien and Khe Sanh, leading into the Battle for Hue where the book began. Here the focus is on the grunts themselves, with Laurence making his affection and sympathy for them clear. His work is laborious and endless, directing his crew through advances and retreats much as a commander might; the text here is permeated with Laurence's sense of duty, to his network and colleagues, to his audience, to himself and even to the fighting men around him; in what is turning into hell on earth, the grunts are increasingly his touchstone to humanity. Yet his closeness to them comes at a terrible price; daily (and nightly) trauma is being assuaged with the same formula of drugs and alcohol used by the soldiers to keep going, leaving Laurence 'tired, nervous, depressed' and eager to go home himself.[143] Thus the war and its coverage has itself become a powerful drug he cannot live without; after breaks back in New York, he returns for more. His entire psyche is under pressure, yet his perceptions of what the war means are at the same time sharpening:

> The war was strange and ugly, stranger and uglier than anyone knew, strange and ugly and fantastic and emotionally moving at time because of the compassion it drew out of people. In the crucible of combat, incredible things happened: tough guys cracked, reluctant draftees turned into leaders, officers lost their minds, pacifists became heroes. […] Coming through a battle, soldiers were surprised to discover they had outperformed their expectations. Young men fulfilled their wildest fantasies. Others died trying. A few failed altogether: froze up, broke down, ran away, faked wounds, killed their own, shot civilians. The worst punishment was the memory. The war magnified everything, even perceptions of itself, creating images of compassion and cruelty as gallant or grotesque as the imagination allows. Each battle brought its own apocalypse. The incredible was routine.[144]

Part four moves forward to 1970, to the 1st Cavalry Division's lethal operations along the Cambodian border, by which time Laurence, after five grueling years of covering the war for daily news, is drinking heavily and smoking marijuana to stay on the job. The writing here, at once poetic and chilling, reflects Laurence's descent into what he visualizes as the fog of war '…infecting all who came into contact with it, Vietnamese and American, and poisoning and corrupting everyone in its glooming mists.'[145] It is here too, appropriately, that he reveals the most confronting and self-damning episode of his Vietnam experience. Laurence and his

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[143] *Ibid*., p. 417.
[144] *Ibid*., p. 377.
[145] *Ibid*., p. 83.

TV crew join an armoured column in Cambodia, chasing a retreating force of North Vietnamese regulars. As they advance, the American machine gunner beside Laurence opens fire, then calls on Laurence to pass water to cool the gun barrel, then screams for more ammunition. Caught up in the fury of war, Laurence does as ordered, thereby breaking the Geneva Convention that forbids journalists to engage in combat:

> This was the first time I had been truly engaged in combat, being useful, doing something constructive, even part of something so wildly destructive. […] Helping the crew gave me a sense of purpose. I felt energized. Fear and excitement were there but were under control, subdued by supremely heightened alertness, watching out, working. I felt part of the team.[146]

At that moment Laurence looks back - and sees a North Vietnamese soldier taking aim at him with an AK-47 rifle. 'My sense of time and place stopped, suspended, fracturing into the slowest fragments of visible motion. All my senses became superalert.' Laurence yells 'Gook!' and the gunner swings around and pulls the trigger.

> His body shuddered for an instant as the rifle flew away from his hands and hung in midair and his head bent slowly forward, bowing to us, as his arms went slack and the rifle tumbled and his body fell backward onto the ground in a fractured heap.[147]

Laurence is haunted by what he has done, even though the North Vietnamese soldier had shown no logic, had 'committed suicide when he could have escaped.' Yet Laurence cannot escape the equally illogical proposition, that somehow *he* had killed the man:

> The killing had let loose, if only for an instant, the darkest part of me, a part I hated, a killer-beast I did not want to accept. Thoughts terrified me. In the evenings I drank heavily. I fell asleep in a stupor but did not rest. Guilt was in everything. How could I have done that? […] I had become a participant in the war. […] His blood was all over me. Taking a life had killed the best part inside me, my sense of humanity. I told no one.'[148]

The book, section by section, moves through a war that has become by 1970 'a death machine', and through Laurence's parallel mental voyage, from professional eagerness and enthusiasm for the American mission, to journalistic cynicism and personal disillusionment, to a hollowing sense of futility and a secret guilt. Laurence manages, more successfully than

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[146] *Ibid*., p. 791.
[147] *Ibid*., p. 792.
[148] *Ibid*., pp. 795-796.

almost all other Vietnam-based writers in the genre to emerge, to balance his perspectives on the war raging all around him with his interior state of mind: to illuminate the complex interplay between Heidegger's individual state of being (*Dasein*) and the world the war reporter shares with others (*Mitwelt*), and their co-dependence.

A coda in *The Cat from Hue* sees the author returning to Vietnam in 1982, confronting his demons ('I had left Vietnam, but it hadn't left me'[149]), and writing his much-delayed book. The cat Meo survives, as Laurence has, and moves with him as he travels the world in search of personal resolution. 'I am old now,' he writes. 'All the life of the time between is gone, flown, fleeting as a memory of a long night's dream.'[150] Here the writing is less embracing and even cautious and, in that, also reflects the elusiveness of any attempt to explain to others what it was like to be engaged for so long as a reporter in such a seemingly pointless conflict. The tone becomes confessional, uncertain. 'War and courage and the lessons of what happens in war interest me less. Vietnam is far away.' The focus shifts quite suddenly from the idea of a war reporting memoir towards autobiography, of a summing up of one life, reflections on the journey told at the end. There is even, rather cloyingly, talk of love and compassion: 'So, what can I tell you about this journey of mine, this long voyage into the past? What have I learned? How has it changed me? Can someone who's made the trip say something worthwhile to someone who hasn't? We'll see.' The ending, as a result, is a disappointment, at dramatic tonal odds with the visceral narrative that precedes it.

Laurence's account, although set in the very years when the New Journalism was taking hold, does not itself reflect that movement's key writing tenets. While it does use dialogue from the battlefield to add flavor to the narrative, such dialogue is not central to his story, as the point of view remains resolutely that of the narrator/reporter: we see the unfolding war through Laurence's eyes, and hear of its impacts more on him rather than on the grunts he is constantly observing. Largely missing too are the many layers of character and setting detail so beloved of Wolfe and his acolytes - although there are moments of *homage* to the New Journalism, as when Laurence uses pounding repetition of the word 'bodies' as he reflects on television images of the war:

> And bodies, more bodies than anyone had ever seen: American bodies, Vietnamese bodies, bodies of soldiers, bodies of civilians, bodies of children, bodies in nylon bags, bodies on stretchers, bodies in ponchos, bodies piled on choppers, bodies in aluminum caskets -

[149] *Ibid*., p. 837.
[150] *Ibid*., p. 809.

> uniformly pale still bodies lying on the ground somewhere with ash-gray faces slowly turning to dust.[151]

It is ultimately the scale of *The Cat form Hue* that takes it beyond any form of journalism, New or otherwise. Laurence's text reads like a giant weight of material he has been carrying in a box for decades, a personal history *about* journalism and journalists in Vietnam which has spilled onto the page. Sometimes the narrative does not entirely make sense, like the war it describes, skipping from battlefields to hotel rooms to worse battlefields, and from incidents of shocking clarity to moments of phantasm; he pushes on through war as he lived it and now recalls it, exploring his ambitions, desires and weaknesses as a person and as a television reporter relentlessly covering repeated engagements in the war (yet making no concession in his writing to the graphic possibilities of that medium in his text); a slog like the war itself - one day at a time, one thing after another - to either death or escape. Thus his approach to discourse of war reporting, and his efforts to somehow be free of it, are summed up in a passage mid-way through the narrative:

> The war enclosed us in a hard shell of cynicism. We went out day after day to find what we could in one small corner of the war hoping to get in and out quickly and bring back a good story. Usually we did. But after a while the endless shocking succession of ruined lives became so emotionally shattering there was no room left for grief.[152]

Critical analysis of *The Cat from Hue* since its release has been limited, which could be attributed to its publication a quarter of a century after the Vietnam War's end (by which time discussions about Vietnam had moved on) yet less than a year after the events of 11 September 2011 (when America's focus on war had shifted to more immediate and shocking concerns.) In *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Philip Zelikow noted how Laurence 'matter-of-factly counters the familiar literary images of stylized characters in a surreal conflict' to produce a 'sympathetic observation of recognizably real Americans of every rank, and the everyday detail that accumulates into the experience of war.'[153] Stanley Kutler, in *The New York Times*, declared that 'Laurence's eloquent, at times acerbic recollection of Vietnam is one of the finest books of its genre, comparable to Michael Herr's *Dispatches*. His Vietnam reportage was exceptional, almost artful; his summary and recapitulation more than three

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[151] *Ibid*., p. 443.
[152] *Ibid*., p. 487.
[153] Zelikow, Philip, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2002, at http://www.thecatfromhue.com/Press.htm, accessed 3 April 2012.

decades later is formidable, gripping and always informative.'[154] David Halberstam, in a testimonial comment posted on Laurence's website, attests to its reflective qualities: 'More than any book I know it explains what happened in the complicated collision between those who fought the war and those who covered it.'[155]

A comprehensive survey of academic writings on history, literature and cinema associated with the Vietnam War, published in 2003[156], carries no mention of *The Cat from Hue*. A studied critique of the work remains to be written, and deserves to be, since Laurence's story - with its shifting persona, illustrating a reporter's long journey through an increasingly senseless conflict - is imbued with both narrative and reflective qualities that exceeds the calibre of the previously mentioned works by reporters who served in Vietnam, and is bettered in that regard by only one other book: Michael Herr's *Dispatches*.

[154] Kutler, Stanley, 'Apocalypse Then', *The New York Times*, 21 April 2002, at http://www.thecatfromhue.com/Press.htm, accessed 3 April 2012.
[155] Halberstam, David, at http://www.thecatfromhue.com/praise.htm, accessed 3 April 2012.
[156] Taylor, Mark, *The Vietnam War in History, Literature and Film*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 2003.

4. REASSESSING *DISPATCHES*: JOURNALISM ASTRAY OR LITERARY MASTERPIECE?

In contrast to Laurence's largely ignored work, Michael Herr's Dispatches[157] *has become a keystone of New Journalism history, much feted for its radical departure from war reporting norms and much emulated as a stylistic innovation. It is also held, by many critics, to be the authentic account of what it was like to take part in the Vietnam conflict; according to this perspective, which quickly emerged on the book's publication in 1977 and has solidified (and one might argue, calcified) in the three decades since, only writing of such unconventional nature could sum up with authenticity such an equally 'unconventional' war. (In its time, the conflict in Vietnam, fought by the Communists with guerrilla-style tactics, was regarded as irregular warfare as compared to, for example, the set battles of World War Two; against today's spread of urbanized, asymetical and borderless terrorism, Vietnam looks decidedly more conventional.) Herr's narrative, like John Laurence's* The Cat from Hue*, offers a highly personalised account of reporting the Vietnam conflict, yet is markedly different in its approach, not least because of the circumstances of its making.*

Michael Herr's *Dispatches* is based on his experiences, and his feature articles, as a correspondent for *Esquire* and other American magazines (including *New American Review* and *Rolling Stone*) from November 1967 to October 1968; in this unusual capacity, he was free to roam the disparate battlefields of Vietnam without the need to report on daily news developments, without having to meet daily or weekly deadlines, and was encouraged to inject into his frontline reportage as much literary flavour as he could summon. For its part, *Esquire* had a lengthy history of literary engagement; its 40th anniversary cover in 1973 featured such luminary 'alumni' as Ernest Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, Vladimir Nabokov, Truman Capote, Saul Bellow, John Updike, William Faulkner, Philip Roth and Tennessee Williams.[158] (*Holiday* magazine, for which Herr had worked in 1963-64 as an associate editor[159], also had literary antecedents, its contributors including Hemingway,

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[157] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*.; Everyman's Library edition, Alfred Knopf, New York, 2009. (Unless otherwise indicated, all page references for *Dispatches* are from the 1978 edition.)
[158] See Paper Pursuits, *Esquire* magazine 40th anniversary issue, at http://paperpursuits.com/magazine_detail.cfm?catid=33&subcatid=76&pid=2586
[159] See Chronology, *Dispatches*, Everyman's Library, *Op. cit*, p. xxii.

Faulkner and Bellow.) This gave Herr substantial freedom not only in what he reported, but also how he reported it; not having a background in news reporting but having been a travel writer and film reviewer, he was not beholden to values historically instilled into, and expected of, American news reporters, including the concept of 'objectivity'.

Unlike Laurence, Herr was already enmeshed in the counterculture when he landed in the war zone; he had also served six months on active duty with the U.S. Army Reserve to avoid the military draft[160], before writing freelance articles for *Esquire*, which, in 1967, sponsored his accreditation as a correspondent in Vietnam.[161] In an interview in 2000 with *The Observer* newspaper, Herr said he went to Vietnam 'as part of the [1960s] decade thing. I had done the decade, and it had to end in Vietnam'. He had lived in New York's Greenwich Village and, at the Fillmore East music venue, saw 'Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane and everyone except the Beatles.'[162] *Dispatches* is thus not only an anthem to the conflict which defined Herr's generation, but becomes a cultural reflection of that generation, a literary spectacle that conveys the energy of a rock concert, the speed of an action movie, the deluded insights of a drug trip, and the questioning and suspicion of Establishment authority. Yet, unlike many artefacts of that era, it has not dated. A close re-reading of *Dispatches* after more than a quarter-of-a-century reveals a text still imbued with contemporary - and universal and timeless - relevance.

For all its stylistic innovation, Herr's book is structured on classical lines. It opens with a section entitled 'Breathing In' and closes with one called 'Breathing Out'. We are as readers indeed sucked into the vortex of Vietnam at the outset, yet we leave the war unfinished, since Herr stays in the conflict zone for barely a year: 'Breathing Out' is his point of exit, and reflection. In between these bookends are dynamic sections with titles such as 'Hell Sucks', 'Khe Sanh' (the site of the war's most famous siege), and 'Illumination Rounds', all focused on war 'in the trenches'; and a stand-alone section, 'Colleagues', in which Herr examines the media presence in Vietnam, and his role in it. Thus the book appears to offer a journey. Yet moving from start to finish involves, like any game of chance, a random route without the comfort of narrative coherence or even an overarching argument; in other words, a perfect

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[160] *Ibid*.
[161] *Ibid*., p. xxvi.
[162] Herr, Michael, q.v. Vulliamy, Ed, 'It Ain't Over Till It's Over', *The Observer*, 16 July 2000, at http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/jul/16/film, accessed 4 September 2012. The influence of rock music in Dispatches is pervasive; in 1979, *Dispatches* the rock musical, by composer Elizabeth Swados, was staged in New York featuring an upbeat tune called 'Helicopter, Helicopter'. See 'Swados's Nightmare Cantata: *Dispatches*', at http://www.donshewey.com/theater_reviews/dispatches.html, accessed 4 September 2012.

reflection of the Vietnam War itself, one which the American military and nation stumbled into, found itself hopelessly lost in, and from which there was no way out other than defeat. While Herr describes battlefield events in 1967-68, he completed and published his book in 1977, two years after the war's conclusion; a sense of immediacy drives his narrative, but the value of authorial hindsight cannot be overlooked.

Opening with the section 'Breathing In', Herr establishes the hallucinatory quality that hovers over his story, describing an old map of Vietnam posted on his wall which depicts its former, French-colonial era territories, all of which have become something else:

> It was late '67 now, even the most detailed maps didn't reveal much any more; reading them was like trying to read the faces of the Vietnamese, and that was like trying to read the wind.[163]

The signal here is clear: we are heading into a vaporous, shifting, and unknowable space. The Vietnam we are familiar with from television news and magazine spreads, he suggests, the one which the media discourse has imbued with currency in what the grunts call 'the World', is not the Vietnam we will encounter in *Dispatches*, but rather a world turned upside down, filled with fantasies, lies, insanities, a constant sub-stream of absurdity, a world of delusions and darkness. A page later, Herr shifts the reader to the battlefield where he encounters an American fighter hyped up on pills 'like dead snakes kept too long in a jar.' Fellow soldiers describe him as crazy, and, if Herr cares to look into his eyes, 'that's the whole fucking story right there.'

> But he always seemed to be watching for it, I think he slept with his eyes open, and I was afraid of him anyway. All I ever managed was one quick look in, and that was like looking at the floor of an ocean.[164]

He tells Herr a story, 'as one-pointed and resonant as any war story I ever heard,' which consists of 18 simple words: 'Patrol went up the mountain. One man came back. He died before he could tell us what happened.'

> I waited for the rest, but it seemed to be not that kind of story; when I asked him what had happened he just looked like he felt sorry for me, fucked if he'd waste time telling stories to anyone dumb as I was.[165]

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[163] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. 11.
[164] *Ibid*., p. 13.

In just a few pages, Herr has managed to convey the key intentions of his narrative: to defy the conventional view of the war; to establish the overarching context of its 'unknowability'; to position himself not as a mainstream reporter but as an innocent abroad, moving into the war's darker corners with a dangerous blend of anxiety, curiosity and courage; and to attach his narrative perspective, and his fate - unlike the majority of correspondents in Vietnam - to the ground soldiers pursuing an elusive enemy and prosecuting an unwinnable war. Yet the risk he takes in shaping his readers' expectations is high; early indications of crazed fighters, drugs and dead snakes, and 'running around inside our skins like something was after us', might not suggest a work of serious intent; or, conversely, could act as a seduction that may not, ultimately, produce a satisfactory encounter. A confession that he always went to sleep stoned in Saigon[166], and the use of pyrotechnic, New Journalism prose, reminiscent of Jack Kerouac's classic of 'Beat' literature *On the Road* - as when awaiting an enemy attack, and possible death - is even more unsettling of the professional expectations, and literary conventions, of war reporting:

> No wonder everyone became a luck freak, no wonder you could wake at four in the morning some mornings and *know* that tomorrow it would finally happen, you could stop worrying about it now and just lie there, sweating in the dampest chill you ever felt. […] It came back the same way every time, dreaded and welcome, balls and bowels turning over together, your sense working like strobes, free-falling all the way down to the essences and then flying out again in a rush to focus, like the first strong twinge of tripping… […] And every time, you were so weary afterwards, so empty of everything but being alive that you couldn't recall any of it, except to know that it was like something else you had felt once before. It remained obscure for a long time, but after enough times the memory took shape and substance and finally revealed itself one afternoon during the breaking off of a firefight. It was the feeling you'd had when you were much, much younger and undressing a girl for the first time.[167]

Here we see Herr's ability to handle the narrative challenge of the Vietnam debacle: how to translate the unstructured complexity of the war into a narrative style that will suggest both the war's randomness and its extremities. The voice he conveys is conversational, colloquial, yet also secretive, as if Herr has access to codes denied to other, less 'plugged-in' and more conventional observers. He frequently reverts to the second person, drawing the reader into the text, even though the 'you' is really 'he', Herr; the implication is that we as readers are

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[165] *Ibid*., p. 14.
[166] *Ibid*., p. 34.
[167] *Ibid*., pp. 111-112.

being allowed access not only to war zones normally either off-limits to, or ignored by, more traditional correspondents, but also that we are privy to thoughts deep within Herr's mind. David Culbert draws a link here to television chat shows, arguing that 'The host is what the New Journalist wants to be.' This accords with Herr's privileged use of his persona at the centre of each scene. In Culbert's view,

> The New Journalist really wants to be seen in print - to be a television celebrity, or at least a visible reporter. Since he cannot be literally seen in print he does the next best thing: he injects part of a carefully constructed persona into his stories so that the reader is tempted to believe he can see the reporter who has written the story.[168]

Like other New Journalism practitioners, Herr makes strong use of aural and visual effects, creating rapid-fire, dazzling word pictures to describe the unfolding scene. Culbert also notes how visual media, especially television, was a major inspiration and influence on the growth of New Journalism in the 1960s; Richard Kallan argues likewise, noting how, 'As in television, a non-linear rhetoric emerges, the hallmarks of which are its *excitement*, *immediacy* and *credibility*.'[169] While Herr largely avoids the extreme verbal excesses found in Tom Wolfe's essays, his punchy style at times borrows heavily from television's fast editing and tight scripts:

> There were hundreds of these albums in Vietnam, thousands, and they all seemed to contain the same pictures: the obligatory Zippo-lighter shot ('All right, let's burn these hootches and move out'); the severed-head shot, the head often resting on the chest of a dead man or being held up by a smiling Marine, or a lot of heads, arranged in a row, with a burning cigarette in each of the mouths, the eyes open ('Like they're *lookin'* at you, man, it's scary'); the VC suspect being dragged over the dust by a half-track or being hung by his heels in some jungle clearing; the very young dead with AK-47s still in their hands ('How old would you say that kid was?' the grunts would ask. 'Twelve, thirteen? You just can't tell with gooks'); a picture of a Marine holding an ear or maybe two ears or, as in the case of a guy I knew near Pleiku, a whole necklace made of ears, 'love beads' as its owner called them; and the one we were looking at now, the dead Viet Cong girl with her pyjamas stripped off and her legs raised stiffly in the air.[170]

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[168] Culbert, David, 'TV.N.J.', *q.v.* Fishwick, Marshall, *New Journalism*, Bowling Green University Popular Press, Ohio, 1975, p. 73, *q.v.* Kallan, Richard, 'Style and the New Journalism: A Rhetorical Analysis of Tom Wolfe', *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 46, No. 1, 1979, p. 53.
[169] Kallan, Richard, 'Style and the New Journalism: A Rhetorical Analysis of Tom Wolfe', *Ibid*.
[170] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. 161.

Further removing his style from the expected, Herr abandons the motifs and imagery of earlier war writing, and the gravitas of tone that accompanied it, just as he will leave behind conventional notions of bravery and heroism as he ventures further into the unique horror of a hopeless, endless and pointless war. This is not a battlefield of confident commanders and patriotic, polished troops lined up in rows with visions of victory; in Herr's eyes, and in his narrative, there will be no shiny medals or songs of men marching off to war. These will be replaced with the confused and disillusioned, the hollow-eyed and drug-addled recruits and draftees flown on Pan American shuttles to Saigon, and their songs will be The Animals 'We Gotta Get Out of Here', The Rolling Stones' 'Have You Seen Your Mother Baby Standing in the Shadows', and Jimi Hendrix's 'Purple Haze'. In earlier wars, correspondents packed whiskey; 'We packed grass and tape.'[171] Yet, as Herr would later acknowledge, some elements never change:

> Young men are expected to go, to fight, to kill, to die. And with young men, it's always fascinating, I mean it's one of great clichés of war literature - the young man full of piss and vinegar and ready to get into combat to prove his gallantry and his courage, make his family proud and his community proud. And they go and they see what it is, and it's too late.[172]

The fantasies of young American males envelope and permeate *Dispatches*, from the overwhelming presence of war and guns to the almost total absence of women and cars. In place of the latter, the 'chopper' serves as the metaphorical chariot of fire, its flight paths - both horizontal and vertical, from one end of the chaotic war zone to the other - providing the illusion of freedom of movement, while delivering death and collecting the dead. Herr is not immune to their techno-seduction, and travels about the war zone in choppers as one might use taxis in a city, with no attachment to any particular machine but seeing them collectively as a 'meta-chopper', melded into his daily experience of the war:

> …in my mind it was the sexiest thing going; saver-destroyer, provider-water, right hand-left hand, nimble, fluent, canny and human; hot steel, grease, jungle-saturated canvas webbing, sweat cooling and warming up again, cassette rock and roll in one ear and door-gun fire in the other, fuel, heat, vitality and death, death itself, hardly an intruder.[173]

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[171] *Ibid*., p. 15.
[172] Herr, Michael, q.v. *First Kill*, Dir: Coco Schrijber, Lemming Productions/Ikon Television, United States, 2001, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldzld4myS6w, accessed 2 May 2012.
[173] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. 16.

Herr sets up these New Journalism cadences (which are not always successful, at times sounding, as Gordon Taylor has observed, like 'atmospherics, narrative means without ends, into which the ostensible subject is diffused and trivialized'[174]) in order to destroy them: a few pages later Herr boards a chopper loaded with dead GIs, not zipped up in body bags but wrapped in military ponchos, and, 'When we went up, the wind blew through the ship and made the ponchos shake and tremble until the one next to me blew back in a fast brutal flap, uncovering the face.' The gunner yells at Herr to fix it up:

> My hand went there a couple of times and I couldn't, and then I did. I pulled the poncho tight, lifted his head carefully and tucked the poncho under it, and then I couldn't believe that I'd done it.[175]

This is the first representation of death in the book, and Herr places himself at the very centre of it, inside a chopper, covering up the face of a dead American soldier, signaling he will be no conventional narrator, no everyday war correspondent. 'Talk about impersonating an identity,' he says, 'about locking into a role, about irony: I went to cover the war and the war covered me…'[176] This occurs primarily because, unlike most correspondents, Herr does not seek to gather and report factual information but is seeking, as Tobey Herzog notes,

> …a totally different kind of knowledge, knowledge about courage, fear, death, and the self (a 'heavy heart-of-darkness trip'). At times, his style and language are lyric, tortuous, cryptic, frenzied, ornate, or funky. Herr emphasizes seeing, feeling, and hearing - especially the latter: rocky lyrics; the dopers' spaced-out language; the mission's euphemisms; and the vulgarity, compassion, fear, and despair of the soldiers.[177]

The war thus offered an extraordinary range of intense emotional states to explore, and a specific focus, that of soldiers confronted with a new kind of war, fought not with the tactics made familiar to them by a plethora of World War Two movies, but a strange, ethereal war without margins or accepted codes of behavior: a rich vein of material for any author with literary aspirations and with the courage to join in. Before long, as Herzog observes,

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[174] Taylor, Gordon, 'American Personal Narrative of the War in Vietnam', *American Literature*, Vol. 52, No. 2, May 1980, p. 298.
[175] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. 22.
[176] *Ibid*., p. 24.
[177] Herzog, Tobey, 'Writing About Vietnam: A Heavy Heart-of-Darkness Trip', *College English*, Vol. 41, No. 6, February 1980, pp. 687-688.

> Herr's coverage of Vietnam appears to become self-serving, a fix he just can't give up. He uses Vietnam to experience the visceral thrill of war, to find his courage, and to gamble with his life when he doesn't have to.[178]

As Herr himself later explained,

> It's not useful to pretend to anyone that [war] isn't exciting, that it doesn't turn people on. Always has done and always will. […] What's difficult to deal with is the upside of the war, I mean the parts of the war that are very beautiful. You don't ever have to worry about where your next adrenalin rush is coming from, you don't have to live out some phony life and death fantasy. When you're in a real life and death situation, there's a clarity to your life.[179]

Herr has no illusions about the men he is mixing with, and whom he admires. For all their brutal honesty, they were also victims of Vietnam, of what the war was doing to them. 'They were killers. Of course they were; what would anyone expect them to be?'[180] The narrative is shadowed by an almost constant intertwining spiral of twin anxieties: the soldiers' quest for vaguely rational explanations of their mission, which never come, and Herr's fascination with his equal failure to fully understand why he is there. (At one point he offers a somewhat trite explanation: 'I think that Vietnam was what we had instead of happy childhoods.'[181]) In his preferred domain, living with these lost souls amid 'the madness, the bitterness, the horror and doom of it'[182], Herr's immersion technique as a writer is bolstered by the use of their vernacular dialogue - its colloquial rhythms, inventiveness and not infrequent humour is used to offset the horrors of the war and often the savagery of its speakers. (His rendition of their 'small language' sits in contrast to the 'fact-figure crossfire' churned out by the U.S. military mission.) While the use of direct speech is limited, its impact is powerful and adds greatly to a sense of authenticity, as these examples testify:

> 'Say, how'd you get to be a co-respondent an' come ovah to this raggedy-ass motherfucker?'[183]

> 'What I gonna do with you, poor fucker? Why… why you jus' don' go runnin' out over th' wire there? Let 'em gun you down an' get it over with. Here, man, here's a grenade. Why you jus' don' go up backa the shithouse an' pull the pin an' lie down on it?'[184]

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[178] *Ibid*., p. 688.
[179] Herr, Michael, q.v. *First Kill*, *Op. cit*.
[180] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. 87.
[181] *Ibid*.
[182] *Ibid*.
[183] *Ibid*., p. 146.

> 'Shit, last three patrols I was on we had fucking *orders* not to return fire going through the villages, that's what a fucked-up war it's gettin' to be anymore. My *last* tour we'd go through and that was it, we'd rip out the hedges and burn the hootches and blow all the wells and kill every chicken, pig and cow in the whole fucking ville. I mean, if we can't shot these people, what the fuck are we doing here?'[185]

> 'You were pissing up everything but your fucking toenails, Scudo, don't you tell *me* you weren't scared man, don't you fucking *dare*, 'cause I was right fucking *there* man, and I was scared *shit*! I was scared every fucking minute, and I'm no different from anybody else!'[186]

> 'A dead buddy is some tough shit, but bringing your own ass out alive can sure help you to get over it.'[187]

Dispatches descends and ascends through many layers of experience, as Herr creates a personal anthropology of the war. His vision of the war he encounters is underlined by self-deprecation and risk-taking; far from recording events impersonally, as a detached narrator, Herr throws himself into each situation (as per Wolfe's New Journalism edict) to create a 'scene'. His engagement with the conflict is driven initially by the desire to gather material for articles, but the war quickly engulfs his sensibility; sucked into its seemingly inescapable vortex, he becomes both a participant (engaged with the grunts and their fate well beyond the conventional role of correspondent) and an observer not only of the war but of his own observations, and of the nature of war stories and his reaction to them. Yet there had never been war stories like these before, because those enlisted to fight in Vietnam had brought with them a library of truths only to discover an alien experience, beyond the known canon of battlefield stories. Vietnam thus becomes a giant story-making machine, producing not the same old war stories but entirely new ones, with Herr as anthologist and recordist:

> The mix was so amazing; incipient saints and realized homIcidals, unconscious lyric poets and mean dumb motherfuckers with their brains all down in their necks; and even though by the time I left I knew where all the stories came from and where they were going, I was never bored, never even surprised. Obviously, what they really wanted to tell you was how tired they were and how sick of it, how moved they'd been and how afraid. But maybe that was me, by then my posture was shot: 'reporter'. After a year I felt so plugged in to all the stories and the images and the fear that even the dead started telling me stories... […]

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[184] *Ibid*., p. 108.
[185] *Ibid*., p. 31.
[186] *Ibid*., p. 29.
[187] *Ibid*.

> …their story was always there and it was always the same: it went, 'Put yourself in my place.'[188]

The novelist Robert Stone, himself a veteran of the Vietnam War, sees Herr's narrative in *Dispatches* as 'an unrelenting tale like the Ancient Mariner's':

> He speaks with the Mariner's stricken urgency and, like that figure, once he engages our attention he holds us fast so that we cannot choose but to hear. It is as though the writer moves like a magician over the unlucky country of Vietnam and in one blinding shell-burst after another reveals some new field of sorrow, disfigurement, or death.[189]

Nowhere in *Dispatches* does he do this more blatantly, at greater risk, than in the siege at Khe Sanh, where North Vietnamese artillery fire is pounding the trapped American force and airstrip, with 'the debris of one kind of aircraft or another piled up on or near the strip', and 'if you were coming in on the plane, there was nothing you could do, nothing at all.'[190] When a barrage came, he writes, the faces of soldiers waiting to leave would distort in panic, 'the eyes going wider than the eyes of horses caught in a fire':

> …and you'd move around the flight crews working the heavy cargo strapping, over scout dogs, over the casually arranged body bags that always lay not far from the strip, cover with flies. […] If you were on board, that first movement was an ecstasy. You'd all sit there with empty, exhausted grins, covered with the impossible red dust that laterite breaks down to, dust like scales, feeling the delicious afterchill of the fear, that one quick convulsion of safety. There was no feeling in the world as good as being airborne out of Khe Sanh.[191]

Later, in a filmed interview, Herr expanded on his own motivations for going to war, for getting so close to danger, and played down the potential for heroism; nor did he inflate his motivations to the level of seeking truth, or saving lives, or bearing witness. What he sought was far less clear; what he ended up with was the understanding that 'you were responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did.'[192] He also brought back first-hand material for a stunningly original book:

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[188] *Ibid*., p. 32.
[189] Stone, Robert, introduction to Herr, *Dispatches*, Everyman's Library, Alfred Knopf, New York, 2009, p. xiii.
[190] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. 76.
[191] *Ibid*., pp. 76-77.
[192] Herr, Michael, *q.v.* Schultz, Connie, 'What It Was Like', *Columbia Journalism Review*, September/October 2010, at http://www.cjr.org/second_read/what_it_was_like.php?page=all&print=true, accessed 23 August 2012.

> I'm not a blood-and-guts guy. I just had a very strong attraction to the war. […] I saw it for a year and that was enough, probably too much. If I'd been at all smart, I probably would have left after the first operation. But I was into it. I was all cut up on the trip. […] I didn't believe in the war but I believed in my being there to see this war. And it was interesting. You know, it was not boring. One is never bored. I had the same dumb fantasy that most of those kids going over had, you know. I passionately wanted to see a war, for complicated reasons of my own. I was drawn to it by very violent and adolescent emotions. People tell themselves all kinds of things to, you know, explain to themselves why they do what they do. My story was I went to write a book. So virtually this whole phenomena that I saw there in my mind was just material. And that was my way of making it less real.[193]

In his attempt to make it 'less real', Herr ironically imbued the Vietnam conflict with a degree of authenticity that other media representatives could not, or would not, replicate. This leads to a major consideration: was Herr *ever* a war correspondent, in the mould of his contemporary John Laurence? Questioning his role as a war correspondent is a sub-theme throughout *Dispatches*, and Herr's ambivalence in this regards adds to the constant sense of instability in the narrative: is he even a real journalist, or a phony one? ('It took me a month to lose that feeling of being a spectator to something that was past game, part show.'[194]) A sergeant asks him if he's a reporter; Herr replies, 'No, a writer.'[195] When a new American correspondent arrives in Saigon, Herr ridicules his outfit: 'He was in his late thirties and he was dressed in one of those jungle-hell leisure suits that the tailors on Tu Do were getting rich cranking out, with enough flaps and slots and cargo pockets to carry supply for a squad.'[196] Yet, indicating possibly some inner conflicts about his role in Vietnam, Herr devotes an entire section of his book, 'Colleagues', to this very ambivalence:

> I never knew a member of the Vietnam press corps who was insensible to what happened when the words 'war' and 'correspondent' got joined. The glamour of it was possibly empty and lunatic, but there were times when it was all you had, a benign infection that ravaged all but your worst fears and deepest depressions. […] There were correspondents all around who could break you up with their bad style and self-consciousness, but those aberrations were hardly ever beyond your understanding. Over there, all styles grew in their way out of the same haunted, haunting romance. Those Crazy Guys Who Cover The War.'[197]

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[193] Herr, Michael, at http://docsonline.tv/?search=First%20Kill&type=title&docinfo=90, accessed 5 July 2011.
[194] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. 138.
[195] Ibid.
[196] *Ibid*., p. 37.
[197] *Ibid*., pp. 152-153.

In one of the book's most cited lines, he declares, 'Conventional journalism could no more reveal this war than conventional firepower could win it…'[198] yet he also acknowledges the difficulties faced by correspondents reporting the war for daily outlets (and 'the incredible demands put on them from offices thousands of miles away'[199]) and by journalists for news magazines like *Time*, whose reportage is worked up into 'uni-prose'[200]; against this, Herr acknowledges his comparative freedom to write and file at a more leisurely pace (a piece he's written for *Esquire* appears 'like some lost dispatch from the Crimea.'[201]). Among those whose work Herr admires, 'the ones who were most in touch with what they were doing'[202], is John Laurence of CBS News; he draws the line at 'hacks who wrote down every word that the generals and officials told them to write'[203], and those who set up stories and images by 'producing reality':

> There's no way around it, if you photographed a dead Marine with a poncho over his face and got something for it, you were some kind of parasite. But what were you if you pulled the poncho back first to make a better shot, and did that in front of his friends? Some other kind of parasite, I suppose.[204]

As Philip Kuberski notes, 'Truth is the question here, and how truth is gotten.'[205] Yet, as Herr observed, mainstream journalists knew that no matter how honestly they reported the war, 'their best work would somehow be lost in the wash of news, all the facts, all the Vietnam stories.'[206] Herr positions himself as a part of this power struggle, at times siting himself in the media pack even as he leans away from it, but ultimately places himself outside its circle, adopting in *Dispatches* the role of a lone operator, the existential journalist who approaches his material with a sense of moral engagement. As he explained after his book appeared:

> A lot of people think, 'I'm a war correspondent and I'm here on this side of the line, and that's going over there on that side of the line, and I'm an observer, I'm not even a part of this, I'm just watching.' It doesn't work that way. You know, that line is the complete

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[198] *Ibid*., p. 175.
[199] *Ibid*., p. 172.
[200] *Ibid*., p. 171.
[201] *Ibid*.
[202] *Ibid*., p. 182.
[203] *Ibid*., p. 178.
[204] *Ibid*., p. 183.
[205] Kuberski, Philip, 'Genres of Vietnam', *Cultural Critique*, No. 3: 'American Representations of Vietnam', University of Minnesota Press, Spring 1986, p. 168.
[206] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. 175.

> concept that people draw to protect themselves. But in fact they're as much involved in what's going on as the killer and the killed.[207]

Herr's personal quest can be viewed in terms of Existentialist thinking, in particular the writing of French writer Albert Camus on approaches to the absurd. The conflict in Vietnam appeared to many, including Herr, the embodiment of battlefield and bureaucratic absurdity as exemplified by Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22*, which was published in 1961 and achieved cult status in the 1960s counterculture. Herr attempts, in *Dispatches*, to come to terms with the war's absurdity by exploring its endless ironies and contradictions through his persona; faced with the war's apparent 'unknowability', he does not give up, but turns his reporting of the war into an act of moral engagement. Ronald Srigley, in *Albert Camus' Critique of Modernity,* offered a useful guide to the process that occurs in the Absurd state of mind, which grows ever darker yet does not lead to contemplation of suicide, or the human 'aspiration towards nothingness', as Camus called it:

> …regardless of how compelling this conclusion may be, the absurd man himself is apparently not satisfied with it. The clearest evidence of his dissatisfaction is this: rather than concluding the analysis at this point and turning immediately to the question of suicide, he instead undertakes what he calls a 'reconnaissance in the origins of the absurd.'[208]

In Srigley's view, the character 'sets aside his bold claim that the world is bereft of all meaning in favour of a further analysis aimed at understanding more clearly the true source and meaning of the experience of the absurd.' [209] He finds the sensations of meaninglessness and disorder provoked by the absurd (as exemplified, for example, by the war in Vietnam) are caused by the collapse of the 'stage-sets' (*décors*) and routines, images and habits by which he commonly orders his life, and which give his life its meaning. In Vietnam, for Herr and for the grunts around him, these guides were absent, thus triggering his quest.

As his narrative draws to a close, Herr is back in 'the World', reflecting on his Vietnam experience and the value of not having stayed there too long: 'We came to fear something more complicated than death, an annihilation less final but more complete, and we got

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[207] Herr, Michael, *q.v. First Kill*, *Op. cit*.
[208] Srigley, Ronald, *Albert Camus' Critique of Modernity*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, MO, USA, 2011, p. 31.
[209] *Ibid*., p. 26.

out'[210], though not without scars, including dreams of dead Marines in his living room. In reflecting on what he has done, on what happened to him in Vietnam, there are no grand pronouncements to be made, no summing up that might translate such an extraordinary encounter into knowledge or deep wisdom; quite the opposite. As Philip Kuberski notes,

> Herr consequently refuses any role as knower in this book, disdaining the conventional 'reflection' of a 'seasoned' reporter who after ten years of thought provides the wisdom of his reifications and nostalgia in the discourse of objectivity. Instead, the unsettled experience of Vietnam is left in its most challenging personal confusion, and no historical perspective is attempted…[211]

What is important about assembling this persona is that Herr is writing (and rewriting) almost a decade *after* the events he describes with such immediacy. Articles he wrote for magazines in 1968-1969 are being recycled, broken down, reconstructed and supplemented in order to construct that persona as it appears in book. After returning from Vietnam, he - like many others - suffered trauma-induced depression, as he revealed in 2000 to *The Observer* newspaper:

> I did go crazy. The problem with Vietnam is that if your body came back, your mind came back too. Within 18 months of coming back, I was on the edge of a major breakdown. It hit in 1971 and it was very serious. Real despair for three or four years; deep paralysis. I split up with my wife for a year. I didn't see anybody because I didn't want anybody to see me. It's part of the attachment. You get attached to good things; you get attached to bad things. Then I decided to look the other way. Suddenly I had a child. I went back to my book.[212]

This passage of time is not apparent in the work. *Dispatches* runs to over 200 pages, yet its tone is far from studied: although Herr claims it took 'about six years' to write the book[213], it reads as if penned in the heat of battle, with an often-frenetic sense of urgency carried to the page. That *Dispatches* reads so vividly 'of the moment' further emphasises his technical skills as a writer, and also, as with Laurence's memoir *The Cat from Hue*, highlights the value of having a considerable period of reflection about the events witnessed in Vietnam, and on his personal experience of being caught up in the war, and bringing the two strands almost seamlessly together. As John Jakaitis notes,

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[210] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. 195.
[211] Kuberski, Philip, 'Genres of Vietnam', *Cultural Critique*, No. 3: 'American Representations of Vietnam', University of Minnesota Press, Spring 1986, p. 185-186.
[212] Herr, Michael, *q.v.* Vulliamy, Ed, 'It Ain't Over Till It's Over', *Op. cit*.
[213] Herr, Michael, *q.v.* Schultz, Connie, 'What It Was Like', *Op. cit*.

> Through his writing, Herr recalls his Vietnam experience, thereby allowing him to retain the experience - the emotion, the fear, the pain - while simultaneously allowing him to distance himself from it, to dispatch it, to disperse it.[214]

Herr confirms this in *The Observer* interview. Publishers asked him to write more about Vietnam, about war. 'I say: "Haven't you read my fucking book? What the fuck would I want to go and do that for?" […] I'm not interested in Vietnam. It has passed clean through me.' In 1978, he worked on the script for Francis Ford Coppola's epic Vietnam film *Apocalypse Now*, 'But after that, that was it. No more Vietnam.'[215] That may be largely so in terms of his work (yet he is also credited with co-writing the script of Stanley Kubrick's 1987 Vietnam War film, *Full Metal Jacket*), but re-reading *Dispatches* offers no real sense of the release that Jakaitis describes; indeed, the book's final and much cited final words, 'Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, we've all been there' read - in the context of 2012, with America bogged down in its longest-ever (and almost certainly unwinnable) war, in Afghanistan - less like a full stop, a point of closure, than a story that never ends.

Dispatches can thus be seen and read as a time capsule, holding Herr's 'secret history' of Vietnam, a fulcrum between our current, confused world order and the Cold War mentality he grew up with, which stumbled to a stalemate in the Korean War and failed spectacularly in Vietnam. As Kuberski points out, 'attempts to moralise the war by both the Left and the Right demonstrated that Vietnam primarily thwarted American representations.' The war had begun as a low-level attempt to stop the expansion of Communism; by mid-point, when, despite the efforts of half-a-million American soldiers, those ambitions were seen to be failing, continuing the war made no apparent sense. 'A chaotic, visual, abrupt collage,' as Kuberski calls the conflict, 'it failed expectations generated by World War II, which could be read like one of Hemingway's sentences: a goods sentence that moved inexorably to a full stop.' Instead, the Vietnam War staggered aimlessly into the 1970s. When it collapsed in 1975, Herr sees the coverage on television news:

> I watched the choppers I'd loved dropping into the South China Sea as their Vietnamese pilots jumped clear, and one last chopper revved it up, lifted off and flew out of my chest.[216]

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[214] Jakaitis, John, 'Two Versions of an Unfinished War: *Dispatches* and *Going after Cacciato*', *Cultural Critique*, No. 3: 'American Representations of Vietnam', University of Minnesota Press, Spring 1986, p. 201.
[215] Herr, Michael, *q.v.* Vulliamy, Ed, 'It Ain't Over Till It's Over', *Op. cit*.
[216] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. 207.

With this nod to the genre of magical realism then in vogue (Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* had appeared in English in 1970), Herr lays open the question of whether *Dispatches* is in fact a work of non-fiction or something else: a novel, a fictionalised memoir, an amalgam of genres beyond any one? 'Even if we read it as fiction', asks Connie Schultz in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, '*Dispatches* is a work of enormous power, but would its sense of urgency and loss be diminished?' She partly answers her own question: 'Thirty years after reading the book for the first time, I still have the same gut response: at least I understand why I will never understand what happened to our boys in Vietnam.'[217]

Herr remains evasive on the subject of whether his work is fiction or non-fiction. Parts of it are, he admits, what I have called, in another context (television news) and by other means, 'produced reality'. In 1978, one year after its publication, *Dispatches* was recommended for the U.S. National Book Award in the non-fiction category; yet in a 1992 interview with Eric Schroeder, Herr referred to the book as a novel, adding, 'I don't think it's any secret that there is talk in the book that's invented.'

> But it is invented out of that voice that I heard so often and that made such penetration into my head… I don't really want to go into that no-man's-land about what really happened and what didn't happen and where you draw the line. Everything in *Dispatches* happened *for* me, even if it didn't necessarily happen *to* me.[218]

A decade later, in a filmed interview, he was again asked if *Dispatches* was fiction or non-fiction, and was again elusive in his response:

> I have no idea, I don't know the difference. I've never known the difference. I have to tell you that I have no idea what that difference really consists of, between fact and fiction. […] I'm confused, I'm really confused. Like, you read a memoir, you read an autobiography, I have no idea what's real and what's invented and what's wish fulfillment and what's confession.[219]

If *Dispatches* is in some way a product of the author's imagination, rather than an accurate mirror of what happened, if its text is novelistic not only in construction but equally or even

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[217] Schultz, Connie, 'What It Was Like', *Op. cit*.
[218] Herr, Michael, *q.v.* Schroeder, Eric, *Vietnam: We've All Been There*, *q.v.* Schultz, Connie, 'What It Was Like', *Ibid*.
[219] Herr, Michael, q.v. *First Kill*, *Op. cit*.

partly in content, to what degree can it be called a war reporting memoir? Where does the notion of creativity end and invention begin? In contemplating what he had created, Herr's response in 1992 offers an insight: 'I would say that the secret subject of *Dispatches* was not Vietnam, but that it was a book about writing a book. I think that all good books are about writing.'[220] Herr's writing or its rationale does not slot easily into categories, which is likely as he intended it to be, and his comments to date suggest an unwillingness to be linked to any particular literary frame, any more than he had wished in Vietnam to be labelled a particular species of war observer. Yet his features filed from the war in 1968-69 were received by his editors and published as journalism, in magazines which clearly delineated to their readers whether they were reading fiction or non-fiction. Thus the question of authenticity is again thrown into doubt, or at least opened to redefinition.

In the 1992 interview, Herr confessed 'there are errors of fact in the book', explaining:

> When the Khe Sanh piece was published [as an essay before the book], I had a really beautiful letter from a colonel who had been stationed there; he corrected me on various points of fact. I lost the letter, and it didn't turn up again until after the book was in print… I couldn't bear to go in and make the revisions myself. I was tapped out. I was exhausted from the project. Including the year in the war, I had spent eight years working on it, and I just couldn't do any more.[221]

What is revealing in these comments is not the factual error described by the colonel, whether large or small; most books contain some. What is curious is that Herr, who admits to reshaping dialogue in the book for literary impact, and has called the book a novel on one occasion, should be concerned about factual errors in his book; this might well suggest that *Dispatches* is closer to non-fiction than fiction. However, if factual accuracy was essential to Herr's journalistic ethos, it seems unlikely that being 'exhausted' would prevent him from correcting an error which troubles him. Since *Dispatches* remains in print, the capacity to correct such errors in future editions remains; yet Herr's remarks indicate he has no intention of doing so.

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[220] Herr, Michael, *q.v.* Schroeder, Eric, *Vietnam: We've All Been There*, *q.v.* Schultz, Connie, 'What It Was Like', *Op. cit*.
[221] Ibid.

Rather, Herr seems increasingly to suggest that the fiction/non-fiction debate is not his problem, but rather a conundrum which has grown out of historical precedent. In this he essentially correct. In *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession*, Peter Novick notes how, in the traditional model of objectivity,

> Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation: the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accounts for the facts; if contradicted by the facts, it must be abandoned. Truth is one, not perspectival, whatever patterns exist in history are 'found', not 'made'.[222]

Yet history moves on, as do the facts: as Novick observes, the publication of Einstein's *General Theory of Relativity* in 1916 shook science to its foundations by showing 'the facts' as previously 'known' to be wrong, to be replaced by hitherto 'unknown' facts. Moving forward half a century, the New Journalism would argue equally that traditional 'fact-based' journalism denied the possibility of alternative versions of 'the truth'. In 1968, at the height of the Vietnam War - the year in which Herr was immersing himself in the conflict - Norman Mailer published *The Armies of the Night*, his account of the mass demonstration held in Washington against the war. Mailer called the first half of the book 'History as the Novel', and the second half 'The Novel as History', arguing that any rational explanation of the war could not rely on traditional forms of history, while the novelistic approach offered more chance of clarity and reason.[223] History, he argued, should be replaced

> …at precisely that point where experience is sufficiently emotional, spiritual, psychical, moral, existential or supernatural to expose the fact that the historian in pursuing the experience would be obliged to quit the clearly demarcated limits of historical enquiry.[224]

This would appear to align with Herr's position, and with the wider claims of the New Journalism movement. Mailer had, like Herr, thrown himself into the ring of experience, a literary pugilist pumped up and ready for a fight, with no hope of, or desire for, objectivity, to write his journalism as much from the heart as the head, a heart which he wore defiantly on his sleeve. His factual writing became stylized, adrenalin-filled, subjective, yet as honest in intention as any straight newspaper report - although, again like Herr, less about the

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[222] Novick, Peter, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 1-2.
[223] Mailer, Norman, *The Armies of the Night*, Penguin, London, 1968, pp. 267-268, *q.v.* Taylor, Mark, *The Vietnam War in History, Literature and Film*, *Op. cit*., pp. 18-19.
[224] *Ibid*., p. 268.

news agency version ('what actually happened') than his own distilled interpretation ('what I saw with my own eyes and wrote in my own way.') As Mark Taylor notes in his broad study, *The Vietnam War in History, Literature and Film*, the war itself had fuelled the debate and supported such claims:

> The notion that the nature of the war in Vietnam made it especially difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction, and the widening 'credibility gap' between official pronouncements and the perceptions of participants and observers of the war in Vietnam, seemed to render the styles of New Journalism particularly appropriate.[225]

Half a century after its inception, the New Journalism has itself acquired the patina of an artifact of history, supplanted by a movement called, rather unimaginatively, The New New Journalism.[226] Robert Stone, in his introduction to the 2009 Everyman's Library edition of *Dispatches*, reflects that the New Journalism (to which *Dispatches* belonged) was, for all its literary innovations, an 'unwieldy vehicle… dependent on the honour and perception of the reporter', yet Herr transcended its more attention-grabbing aspects to produce arguably the finest book-length account in any genre to emerge from the Vietnam War. *Dispatches* offers the mesmerizing qualities of being emphatically rooted in the experience of young men at war while also being, as a literary object, enigmatic and original. In Stone's view, Herr created 'one of the greatest nonfiction works of its time':

> Fellow reporters, officers, ordinary soldiers, and Marines come within the span of Herr's illumination the way the Russian soldiers at Borodino fall under Tolstoy's in *War and Peace*, characters made memorable by a line, an exchange, or a gesture. No New Journalist that I'm familiar with left a book for us that succeeds in being so utterly of its time and so timeless.[227]

Herr redefined the war reporting memoir: its indefinability in terms of genre matters far less, he suggests, than its power and its mystique, and does not lessen its impact or the terrible lessons it imparts. The notion of authenticity is transferred from the concept of 'text' *per se* to the concept of 'text as received'; from measuring authenticity in terms of 'the truth' to considering authenticity as a measure of 'value', of what it delivers to the reader in recreating events or situations with a *sense* of realism. For Herr, judging from his

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[225] *Ibid*., p. 19.
[226] See Boynton, Robert, *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft*, *Op. cit*.
[227] Stone, Robert, introduction to Herr, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. xiii.

reported comments, what matters is less about the accuracy of the quote or of the description, and more about how that quote or description is received *by the reader*, and is *by the reader* perceived as authentic or not. To achieve that objective, resulting in a better understanding of the conflict situation described, Herr would seem to argue that the dominant features of what is reported/written might have to be novelistic rather than journalistic, and that the difference matters less than the outcome. While the issue is left unresolved, or at least unanswered in conventional literary terms, Herr's work in *Dispatches*, marked by its freewheeling style and self-referential perspective, opened the way for more interpretative and personalized forms of war reporting, and war reporting memoirs. Its value in that regard alone is considerable. As a literary artifact, it remains unique. As Wendy Smith has noted,

> Somehow, a young journalist whose previous experience consisted mostly of travel pieces and film criticism managed to transform himself into a wild new kind of war correspondent capable of comprehending a disturbing new kind of war.[228]

[228] Smith, Wendy, 'War Weary', *The American Scholar*, Spring 2007, at http://theamericanscholar.org/war-weary/, accessed 4 October 2012.

5. THE KAPUSCINSKI ENIGMA: A POST-MORTEM

While the world's attention focused on Vietnam in 1975 and the pending victory of Communist forces, another post-colonial saga was being fought out on the opposite side of the world, and another correspondent with renegade tendencies was covering it. Ryszard Kapuscinski, like Michael Herr in Vietnam, was both reporting conflict as it unfolded (in his case, the struggle for control of Angola as Portuguese rule in the colony collapsed) and also gathering material for a striking war reporting memoir, Another Day of Life*, whose literary strengths would, in their own unique way, match those of Herr's. Yet at his death in 2007, after his literary reputation had reached stellar heights, his reputation as a journalist was damaged by allegations, including that he had invented much of what he reported.*

Ryszard Kapuscinski's background was markedly different from Michael Herr's: born in Poland in 1932, he survived the East European bloodbath of World War Two, joined Poland's official Communist youth organization in 1948, and in 1950 began writing articles for its national newspaper *Sztandar Mlodych*.[229] He gained Communist Party membership in 1953, and, in 1956, was sent as a roving reporter to India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and Japan. In 1962, Kapuscinski joined the Polish press agency, PAP, as its sole foreign correspondent: his 'beat' was the Third World, especially those countries emerging from colonialism in Africa. In his long reporting career, Kapuscinski claimed to have been 'jailed 40 times, witnessed 27 coups and revolutions, survived four death sentences and contracted tuberculosis, cerebral malaria and blood poisoning.'[230]

Like many other aspects of his life story, such claims would be difficult to prove. His biographer, Artur Domoslawski, observes that Kapuscinski had a penchant for turning 'small incidents to unimaginable proportions'.[231] This was a consistent charge, as Domoslawski notes:

> For many years Kapuscinski created his own legend: the macho reporter who is unafraid of war, starvation, wild animals, tropical insects and diseases, even of death staring him in the

[229] Biographical details drawn from Domoslawski, Artur, *Ryszard Kapuscinski: A Life*, trans. from Polish by Antonia Lloyd-Jones, Verso, New York, 2012.
[230] Morrison, Donald, 'Fellow Travellers', *Time*, 7 June 2007, at http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1630235,00.html, accessed 14 February 2011.
[231] Domoslawski, Artur, *Ryszard Kapuscinski: A Life*, *Op. cit*., p. 117.

> eye. […] He seduced the public, his readers, with his heroism and the image of the macho reporter. He understood superbly that one of the ingredients of good literature is the aura that surrounds it – the legend of the writer. So he devised an ideal life story for the reporter who goes to war zones, covers revolutions and *coups d'etat* in the Third World, of which only a small part needed to be 'embellished', because most of the elements in the legend were true.[232]

Initially, in the 1960s and early 1970s, Kapuscinski juggled his day job as a news agency reporter with his literary writing. In 1978, publication of his first book *The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat*, a study of the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie's regime in Ethiopia, propelled him to international awareness. Much of that recognition rested on Kapuscinski's unique narrative style, telling his story not by using himself as the narrator but through the inner thoughts of courtiers to the Emperor. Kapuscinski claimed to have interviewed the courtiers in Addis Ababa to gain these insights. In the opening passage of the book, a courtier called simply 'F' relates, in his own voice, his job in the palace:

> It was a small dog, a Japanese breed. His name was Lulu. He was allowed to sleep in the Emperor's great bed. During various ceremonies, he would run away from the Emperor's lap and pee on dignitaries' shoes. The august gentlemen were not allowed to flinch or make the slightest gesture when they felt their feet getting wet. I had to walk among the dignitaries and wipe the urine from their shoes with a satin cloth. This was my job for ten years.[233]

Barbara Goshu, who lived in Ethiopia for over 40 years and knew Kapuscinski when he was there, describes *The Emperor* as being like a tale from *The Thousand and One Nights*. 'Some of it sticks to reality, but less rather than more. […] It's all fairy-tales, fantasy, nonsense.'[234] Mark Danner, who also met Kapuscinski, argued that 'factual accuracy' was not the central issue in Kapuscinski's work; a book like *The Emperor*, he claimed, was 'a piece of literature, of literary reporting, an account that came as much from the traditions of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma* as from the practices of daily reporting.'[235]

From the outset Kapuscinski's approach to reporting would polarize critics, even as his general reading audience continued to grow rapidly. His other important work in this early

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[232] *Ibid*.
[233] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *The Emperor*, trans. By William Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand, Picador, London, 1994, p. 9.
[234] Goshu, Barbara, q.v. Domoslawski, Artur, *Ryszard Kapuscinski: A Life*, *Op. cit*., p. 303.
[235] Danner, Mark, *q.v. Ibid*, p. 308.

period was *Shah of Shahs*, a study of the Shah of Iran's fall from power; his writing in both works displayed impressive literary craftsmanship marked by strong narrative elements, deeply psychological characterisation, powerful imagery and the abundant use of metaphor. By 1981, Kapuscinski had resigned from the PAP news agency and was working solely as an author. By then, too, he had published in Polish his third book, *Another Day of Life* (1976), translated into English in 1987.

In 1975, the year the Vietnam War ended in a communist victory, Kapuscinski was in the Angola, reporting the collapse of centuries-old Portuguese rule and - as elsewhere in the Portuguese colonial diaspora, in places as far afield as East Timor and Mozambique - the bloody conflict that would emerge between left-wing and right-wing rebel forces. Unlike the massive press corps that had assembled in Saigon to cover the Vietnam conflict, the number of foreign journalists spread across the vastness of Africa was relatively tiny. Kapuscinski, in an interview recorded in 1998, gave an intriguing insight into their *modus operandi*:

> ...we all cooperated, all of us, East and West, regardless of country, because the working conditions were really terrible. We had to. We always moved in groups from one coup d'état to another, from one war to another… So if there was a coup d'état of leftist orientation in some country I took my Western colleagues with me and said 'Look, let them come in,' and if there was one of rightist orientation they took me, saying 'No, he's okay, give him a visa please, he's going with us, he's our friend,' and so on. I didn't compete with *The New York Times*, for example, because the Polish Press Agency is a small piece of cake, not important. And because conditions were so hard. For example, to send the news out, there was no e-mail, nothing: telex was the only means, but telex was very rare in Africa. So if somebody was flying to Europe, we gave him correspondence, to send after he arrived.[236]

While covering the fighting for daily news, Kapuscinski also had the literary territory to himself. In *Another Day of Life*, Kapuscinski describes events he was caught up in, yet for the purpose of writing the book did not revisit his daily stories on the conflict (as, for example, John Laurence had to write his memoir, *The Cat from Hue*) but rather wanted to explore his own presence in a collapsing world of European power and resulting chaos, and its impact on him, while describing post-colonial mayhem among the majority African population. In that sense, it more than qualifies as a war reporting memoir, yet is often overlooked not

[236] Wolfe, Thomas, 'An Interview with Ryszard Kapuscinski: Writing About Suffering', *Journal of International Institute, Vol. 6, Issue 1, Fall 1998, at* http://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jii/4750978.0006.107?rgn=main;view=fulltext, accessed 3 June 2012.

only within Kapuscinski's oeuvre - in favour of his more experimental works such as *The Emperor* and *Shah of Shahs* - but also within the war reporting genre.

Even in its English translation by William Brand and Katarzyna Mroczkowska-Brand, Kapuscinski's writing is a model of how such 'news' stories might be told as literature: at once journalistic, with unadorned descriptions of events as they unfolded and observations of the world he was witnessing, but novelistic both in structure and especially in emphasis on human character and foibles. A current of irony runs through every passage, not least those in which Kapuscinski views his own weaknesses as an outsider caught up in the very madness he is describing, keeping one eye out for telling images and quotes while also plotting constantly about his own survival, and means of escape.

The escape being described is not only physical, but for Kapuscinski, clearly an escape also from the binds of daily journalism, of having to file endless updates by telex machine to his agency in Warsaw. In *Another Day of Life*, the reader experiences not only an unfolding and often compelling narrative, but also Kapuscinski's pleasure in writing the text: playing with words on the page, not in the service of fiction but in writing non-fiction in a fictional style; recreating dialogue; shaping story characters with novelistic observations; creating dramatic tension by withholding vital information, investing his chapters with obstacles and turning points, and dipping into the well of surprises as the text unfolds; all the while ensuring that, while literary and even fictional in feel, his writing portrays events as he recalls them, and as close as possible to the truth of the experience, if not the facts, of what happened. Jerome-Boyd Maunsell, in an examination of Kapuscinski's writing, gives a concise explanation of the benefits, and difficulties, of this process:

> The medium of writing, as opposed to photography and film, is ideally suited to such a task, being able to get underneath surfaces in a way that is difficult, if not impossible, with visual means. But the problems are intertwined with this very advantage: beyond the bare facts and chronicles it is hard, if not impossible, to be objective. The invisible line between fact and fiction is sometimes thin, and the reader doesn't always know when it's being crossed.[237]

Living in the Tivoli Hotel in Luanda, Kapuscinski waits for the Angolan slaughter to begin, while a next door neighbour is dying of cancer and her husband, a gemstone merchant, has 'strings of diamonds sewn into the pleats of his suit.' The old man's heart is torn: he wants

[237] Maunsell, Jerome-Boyd, 'After the Fact: The Vices and Virtues of Literary Reportage', *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 83, May 2004, at http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/after_the_fact/, accessed 15 July 2011.

to flee, but his wife's infirmity ties him down. 'He never went out onto the street. He even wanted to install extra locks, but all the locksmiths had left and there wasn't a soul in Luanda who could do the job'.[238] Observations such as these set the stage for tragedy, as the enemy forces battle towards the increasingly anxious, half-deserted capital. 'The war these parties raged among themselves was sloppy, dogged, and cruel. Everyone was everyone's enemy, and no one was sure who would meet death. At whose hands, when, and where. And why.'[239] Lacking an expenses account and forced to eat cheaply and stay in cheap lodgings, Kapuscinski turns hardship into a virtue as he moves at street level, just one of the mob, living 'another day of life'. At one stage he encounters a nightclub owner, 'a fat, ruined playboy with swollen lids veiling his bloodshot eyes', who brandishes two pistols. "I'm going to kill ten communists with these," he says, "and then I'll be happy".'[240] Was he aware, wonders Kapuscinski, that he - Kapuscinski - hailed from a communist country?

For a foreign reporter he blended in well, engaging easily at all social levels. At the same time, as George Packer observes, Kapuscinski was biting in his assessment of many foreign correspondents. 'I read many of the dispatches sent from Luanda in those days,' he wrote. 'I admired the opulence of human fantasy.'[241] Even in this era, before live crosses and TV news 'packages', Kapuscinski could see, and foretold, how reporters were generating volumes of information about such conflicts yet failing to get beneath the surface of events, to help audiences understand the complexities of what was happening. As with Herr in Vietnam, trying to understand the tragedy of such events appears to be his principal aim.

Kapuscinski captures the hopelessness of Luanda and its faded glory with just a few strokes. 'There were no cemeteries in the streets and squares. I don't remember a single fire. The city was dying the way an oasis dies when the well runs dry: it became empty, fell into inanition, passed into oblivion. […] Everybody was trying to catch the next plane to Europe, to America, to anywhere. […] Salazar was dead, Caetano had escaped to Brazil, and the government in Lisbon kept changing. The revolution was to blame for everything, they said, because before that it had been peaceful. Now the government had promised the blacks freedom and the blacks had come to blows among themselves, burning and murdering. They aren't capable of governing. Let me tell you what a black is like, they would say: he

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[238] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *Another Day of Life*, Picador, London, 1987, pp. 4-5.
[239] *Ibid*., p. viii.
[240] *Ibid*., pp. 7-8.
[241] Packer, George, 'The Shadow of the Sun', *American Scholar*, Vol. 70 No.3, Summer 2001, p.140, at http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA77702837&v=2.1&u=uts&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w, accessed 7 September 2011.

gets drunk and sleeps all day.'[242] The ruling colonial power may have fled, yet the picture he paints of Angola is one of even deeper desperation and loss.

While most of Kapuscinski's books were written well after the events they describe, *Another Day of Life* appeared only one year after Kapuscinski reported them, and, as Andrew Rice observes, 'the prose bristles with the specificity of fresh recollection.'[243] The sensation of actual reportage, of 'being there', is palpable:

> We pull off to the side of the road. Ahead of us, on the same side, lies the wreck of a burned-out truck - the remains of a convoy that made it this far. Scattered cans, barrels, sacks, tires. In one place, scorched earth and charred bones. Whoever caught them must have killed them and burned them, or even tied them up and burned them alive.[244]

Kapuscinski advances his narrative through an enervated landscape which seems devoid of any sense of time: the sensation he creates is one of moving forward and getting nowhere, of a world of facades, of endless and empty repetition:

> We drove through town - in those days every town in Angola looked like a ghastly, corroding movie set built on the outskirts of Hollywood and already abandoned by the film crew - and the green suddenly ended, the flowers disappeared, and we entered a hot, dry tropical flatland…[245]

As he ventures deeper into a wilderness without signposts, the sense of ennui becomes overwhelming. 'Time is passing, but we seem to be stuck in place. Constantly the same shimmering seam of asphalt laid on the loose red earth. Constantly the same faded, cracked wall of bush. The same blinding white sky. The same emptiness of a deserted world, an emptiness that betrays life neither by movement nor by voice.'[246]

Before his death in 2007, Kapuscinski was often mentioned as a possible Nobel Prize laureate; meanwhile, his work was increasingly compared to that of another Pole who ventured deep into Africa. As Ian Bamforth observes, 'Authenticity was the thing: the flat mirage of heat and hardship were his Alps, arduous ascension of which had first marked out those Romantic poets who were truly in thrall to their visions and unhampered by reason.

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[242] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *Another Day of Life*, *Op. cit*., p. 10-11.
[243] Rice, Andrew, 'The Passenger', *The Nation*, 13 September 2007, at http://www.thenation.com/print/article/passenger, accessed 5 October 2012.
[244] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *Another Day of Life*, *Op. cit*., p. 71.
[245] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *Ibid*., p. 68.
[246] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *Ibid*., p. 70.

"Being there" afforded him a singular perspective: a white man in Africa in the years of decolonisation, a master of *Neue Sachlichkeit*[247] whose base was in the Soviet bloc, and last - but by no means least - a Pole treading self-consciously in the footprints of Jozef Korzeniowski, known to us as Joseph Conrad.' Bamforth cites a passage from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which he says 'could have been vintage Kapuscinski.':

> I seemed at one bound to have been transported into some lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist - obviously - in the sunshine.[248]

In place of the narrator Marlow's journey up the river in central Africa to find Kurtz - in which his illusions are swept away by the evil he sees within colonial mismanagement, by Africa's raw brutality and by the emptiness of his quest ('Mr. Kurtz, he dead') - Kapuscinski's journey is through the blood-soaked villages of Angola; yet like Conrad, he seems unable to resist their seduction, taking him further from the securities of the 'known' European world. His persona becomes that of the man adrift, dangerously yet willingly so. As Conrad would write,

> The sinister voice of the Congo with its murmuring undertone of human fatuity, baseness and greed had swept away the generous illusions of his youth, and left him gazing into the heart of an immense darkness.[249]

This transition from illusion to understanding, from fantasy to stark reality, is willed upon Marlow as it was willed upon Kapuscinski, the poverty-stricken Polish youth whose principal desire was to escape the conventions of a dead Europe, to travel to exotic lands, to see for himself the raw, untrammelled world beyond the rigid Soviet Bloc. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow (read Conrad) recalls his childhood in similar terms:

> Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time

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[247] Founded in Germany after World War One, *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* ('The New Objectivity') was an art movement with a socially critical philosophical stance and characterized in its style by a harsh realism. See http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/neuesachlichkeit/arthistory_neuesachlichkeit.html, accessed 22 July 2012.

[248] Bamforth, Iain, 'Polish Projections', *Quadrant*, Volume 53.1-2, January-February 2009, p.120, at http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA200844280&v=2.1&u=uts&it=r&p=LitRC&sw , accessed 9 June 2012.

[249] Conrad, Joseph, *Heart of Darkness,* Norton, New York, 1988, p. 195; first published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, London, 1899.

> there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all looked like that) I would put my finger on it and say, 'When I grow up I will go there'.[250]

Kapuscinski, in 1974 a man of 43, finds himself moving through villages unchanged for hundreds of years under Portuguese rule and possibly for thousands before that. Like the character Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, he is moving not only away from European Africa but also back through time, not measurable time so much as time *without* clocks; into dark spaces where the threat is not only to his physical safety and survival but to his psyche, to measured and well-rehearsed responses to fear and danger. At a checkpoint, facing men with guns, he needs to talk his way out of trouble, and tells them about Poland:

> We have sea and mountains of our own. We have forests, but the trees are different: There isn't a single baobab in Poland. Coffee doesn't grow there, either. It is a smaller country than Angola, yet we have more people. We speak Polish. The Ovimbundi speak their own language, the Chokwe speak theirs, and we speak ours. We don't eat manioc; people in Poland don't know what manioc is.[251]

Isolation produces in Kapuscinski a contradictory state: both an immediate anxiety, and a freedom from worldly anxiety, a sense of being adrift, a state of surreality familiar to readers of *Heart of Darkness*. In this moment of intense crisis, facing the possibility of death, he starts chatting to his would-be tormentors, and to his readers, about the geography of Poland. To create this same sense of disjuncture, as Sandya Shetty notes, Conrad peppered *Heart of Darkness* with 'contradictions, ambiguities, and discontinuities', which attempt to discourage readers from believing they can understand an enigmatic world while at the same time encouraging them to explore it more deeply.[252] Kapuscinski does likewise; this is his seduction, layered as carefully in *Another Day of Life* as in Conrad's masterpiece.

Much has been written about Kapuscinski's ability to capture with great authenticity the subject of power, particularly in those countries where the departure of European colonial powers left a power vacuum. Far less has been said of a perhaps more compelling aspect of his writing, one he shares with Conrad: his handling of the subject of fear. It could be argued that the principal subject of Kapuscinski's books is not power *per se*, but fear. As shocking as

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[250] Conrad, Joseph, *Ibid*., p. 142.
[251] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *Another Day of Life*, *Op. cit*., p. 50.
[252] Shetty, Sandya, '*Heart of Darkness*: Out of Africa Some New Thing Never Comes', *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 15, No. 4, Spring 1989, p, 461.

his portraits of Emperor Haile Selassie and the Shah or Iran are, filled with madness and the trappings of absolute power, what gives these books their humanity and strength is the way in which Kapuscinski describes the fear of populations under such power, how they handle those fears, how he perceives their behaviour when faced with such fear, and what happens when they lose their fear and revolt.

Retaining power requires the imposition of fear; for populations to reclaim power, their fears must be conquered first. Kafka writes about fear like steel, hard and relentless; Conrad describes fear as a permeation, at once everywhere and nowhere to be seen; Kapuscinski, constructivist by his nature and politics, treats fear more like putty, to be moulded according to circumstances and opportunity. In the warzone beyond Luanda's fringes, for example, Kapuscinski encounters the rebel commander Ndozi and his untested, frightened troops. 'A green soldier fears everything,' Kapuscinski observes. 'He doesn't know how to judge the range or direction of fire, so he shoots anywhere, as long as he can shoot a lot without stopping. He is not hurting the enemy, he is killing his own terror.'[253]

As George Packer observes, Kapuscinski's writing was as much informed by his own life and background as by the events he covered. Packer makes an important distinction between Kapuscinski's perspective as a foreign journalist, and his deeper literary quest: not to cover the main event so much as being highly alert to the forces, including colonialism and fear but also fatalism, that will explain, in more human ways, why an event occurs:

> Coming from a European country that has itself been colonized for most of its modern history, Kapuscinski writes about Africa as a white man but not as a representative of Western power. Like his countryman Conrad and his contemporary Naipaul, he identifies with those on the historical margins. He seems almost indifferent to geopolitics, or any kind of politics; his eye tends to wander away from the main action, toward a solitary man walking south from Eritrea into Ethiopia, looking for his brother.[254]

Anthony Sampson cites Kapuscinski's view that 'colonialism [in Africa] was a brutal unification, brought about by fire and sword', in which 'ten thousand entities were reduced to 50.'[255] He was all too aware that postcolonial Africa was a battlefield not only between

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[253] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *Another Day of Life*, *Op. cit.*, p. 32.
[254] Packer, George, 'The Shadow of the Sun', *Op. cit*.
[255] Sampson, Anthony, 'Grace Under Pressure', *The New Statesman*, Volume 130/4541, 11 June 2001, p. 67, at http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA76445131&v=2.1&u=uts&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w, accessed 14 July 2012.

competing tribal interests but between East and West, where foreign interests regarded the continent 'in terms of their own agents and expatriates.' Kapuscinski, Sampson recalled, had told him: 'Whenever I returned from Africa, I was asked not "How are the Tanzanians?" but rather "How are the Russians in Tanzania?"' The charge that he was himself an imperialist, a white man in Africa, was one that Kapuscinski's critics would return to regularly. He was a white man, and could not escape that, but his perspective, like his persona, was far more complex.

To be an observer, one must not be the observed, nor too engaged. Artur Domoslawski's impressive 2010 biographical portrait[256] of Kapuscinski suggests a likeable person and a helpful colleague, but one who rarely showed deep feelings; above all, at heart he was a loner, a man preferring his own company to that of others; there is a sense that his amiable generosity was superficial. Yet this is precisely the persona which he conveys across his war reporting memoirs, which adds to their strong sense of personal authenticity, whatever their factual accuracy. Kapuscinski is forever the man distanced, apart. Reviewing Domoslawski's biography for *The London Review of Books*, Neal Ascherson - who reported Eastern Europe for *The Observer* in the 1960s and met Kapuscinski on several occasions - noted that he gave little away:

> I can't remember much of what he said. This is because he never said much. He was one of those rare journalists whose way of listening makes other people open up and talk. That's what this elusive man used his smile for. That, and to take attention and curiosity away from himself. Kapuscinski was evasive, and it turns out he had plenty to evade.[257]

Publication of Domoslawski's biography revealed a deeper secret of Kapuscinski's time in Angola, revealing among other transgressions (adultery, lying) that he had worked - there and elsewhere in his early career - for the Polish secret service, gathering information on Western companies, organisations and individuals. At one level, this was not surprising, given that Angola and other failed colonies were the proxy battlefields of the Cold War; Kapuscinski was a full member of the Communist Party and may well have seen it as his patriotic duty to serve the Polish state. (The accusations, backed by substantial evidence including archival files, appeared after Kapuscinski's death; thus he was never confronted publicly with the allegations.) While such claims damaged his posthumous reputation as a

[256] Domoslawski, Artur, *Ryszard Kapuściński: A Life*, *Op. cit*.
[257] Acherson, Neal, 'How It Felt To Be There', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 34 No. 15, 2 August 2012, at http://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n15/neal-ascherson/how-it-felt-to-be-there, accessed 3 September 2012.

journalist, a reputation already harmed by allegations that he had 'invented' much of his material, they also open a fascinating doorway into Kapuscinski's psyche, his motivations and his literary talent. Ironically it was his impressive powers of observation, the very skill required of a spy, that also converted his daily reporting into literature.

While revelations of Kapuscinski's spying for Polish intelligence rankled in his home country, as Ascherson notes, for foreign readers the real issue remained the large question mark over his writing: veracity. 'Did he make things up? Did he manufacture quotes, say he had been to places when he hadn't, describe scenes that never happened?' And if so, did his 'embroidery and even manipulation of the facts' also achieve a reality 'truer than the truth'? Ascherson answers his own questions with an intriguing cultural observation:

> Literature or journalism? Or 'literary reportage'? The 'English-language' tradition holds that selling readers fiction dressed up as fact is always wrong. But the old Central European tradition, where Kapuscinski had many predecessors, including the mighty 'globe-trotting reporter' Egon Erwin Kisch, assumes that what readers want is entertainment and enchantment as much as information. To play around with the reality in order to convey more vividly 'what it was like to be there' was just fine for readers in Prague or Vienna.[258]

In *Another Day of Life*, as in his two earlier works, Kapuscinski's prose takes reality and reshapes it to literally fantastic levels of inventiveness, in which traces of Gabriel Marcia Marquez's 'magical realism' can be found - yet his writing purports to be fact, not fiction, and sounds entirely plausible. When the Europeans of Luanda prepare to flee the fighting, for example, they start assembling wooden crates in which to convey their possessions across the seas:

> Crates were the main topic of conversation - how to build them, what was the best thing to reinforce them with. Self-proclaimed experts, crate specialists, homegrown architects of cratery, masters of crate styles, crate schools, and crate fashions appeared. Inside the Luanda of concrete and bricks a new wooden city began to rise. […] The building of the wooden city, the city of crates, goes on day after day, from dawn to twilight, Everyone works, soaked with rain, burned by the sun; even the millionaires, if they are physically fit, turn to the task. The enthusiasm of the adults infects the children. They too build crates, for their dolls and toys.[259]

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[258] *Ibid*.
[259] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *Another Day of Life*, *Op. cit*., pp. 13-14.

The crates are loaded onto waiting cargo ships, and 'the wooden city sailed away on the ocean', disappearing below the horizon. 'This happened suddenly, as if a pirate fleet had sailed into the port, seized a priceless treasure, and escaped to sea with it.'[260] By this point we are a long way from news agency reporting from Angola; complete accuracy of fact may have given way, we suspect, to the seductions of literature, even perhaps of fiction; yet the absurdities do not stop there. Left behind are the dogs of the fleeing Europeans, 'the most expensive breeds, without masters - boxers, bulldogs, greyhounds, Dobermans, dachshunds, Airedales, Spaniels, even Scotch terriers and Great Danes, pugs and poodles.' One day the dogs too, like the city of wooden crates, are gone. 'Perhaps they're still roaming,' muses Kapuscinski, 'but I don't know in what direction or in what country.'[261] As Ian Bamforth concludes,

> What Kapuscinski was engaged on was dream work, not documentary; why he always had to trick it out with so many extraneous supports, chief among them his press card, is something he fails to explain, and perhaps never fully explained to himself either. […] His dream work resembles the classic, slightly old-fashioned, European projection - one inflected by self-censure, self-doubt and negativity, but certainly not unwilling to enter the maze of ambiguities.[262]

When he heads into enemy territory with a fatalism ('As the Lord will have it') that is both the antithesis of communist ideology and also the mindset of his fellow Polish citizens, Kapuscinski triggers a surreal response even in himself:

> Everything from that moment on happened as in an incomprehensible, incoherent dream in which unknown persons and unseen powers entangle us in a succession of situations from which there is no way out, and from which we awaken every now and then drenched in sweat, more and more exhausted and devoid of will.[263]

These 'internal' observations are matched by his 'external' observations of a society in free fall, denoted by the almost constant use of the Portuguese word *confusao*. As Kapuscinski explains, '*Confusao* is a situation created by people, but in the course of creating it they lose control and direction, becoming victims of *confusao* themselves. […] *Confusao* is a state of absolute disorientation. People who have found themselves on the inside of *confusao* can't comprehend what is going on around them or in themselves. […] By *confusao* we also

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[260] *Ibid*., p. 17.
[261] *Ibid*., pp. 26-27.
[262] Bamforth, Iain, 'Polish Projections', *Op. cit*.
[263] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *Another Day of Life*, *Op. cit*., p. 67.

understand our own states of perplexity and helplessness.'[264] By implanting so much chaos, so many moments of surreality across the text of *Another Day of Life*, Kapuscinski cleverly recreates the very state he describes - *confusao* - to illustrate, at the same time, the historical mess he finds himself in, and his mastery of it as literature.

Above all, it is Kapuscinski's reference to time, or time adrift, that permeates the text, the need to escape the possible bloodbath to come matched by the sense of being trapped in a time warp, immobilized and unable to go anywhere:

> I looked at the calendar, because I no longer had a feeling for time, which means that time had lost all sense of division for me, all measurability, it had fallen apart, it had oozed out like a dense tropical exhalation. […] Life had propelled me from event to event in an undefined process directed toward an unseen goal. I knew only that I wanted to be here until the end, regardless of when it came, or how.[265]

He seems to be writing his death warrant: 'Using the calendar, I calculated that it was October 18, 1975.'[266] So convincing is this transportation into the world he creates that the reader could be forgiven for wondering if in fact he will survive; Kapuscinski has ceased to become the author of his text and has become, in fact, its principal character - and, often, seemingly its only character. In *Another Day of Life*, an almost perpetual sense of loneliness surrounds the reader, as does paradoxically the air of certainty; what Kapuscinski, the sole witness, describes without hesitation sounds to the reader like truth, not because it is laden with factual information but because the narrator's voice seems so sure of itself. Yet by this stage Kapuscinski's critics were already asking blunt questions: not only 'Was it true?' but also 'Did it actually happen?' and, at the extreme, 'Were you even there?'

Of course in most cases he, being Kapuscinski, was alone; others could neither verify nor deny, merely question. These were entirely rational questions, about a form of writing that may not have been what it initially seemed to be: not exactly the New Journalism that had swept the West but a new manner of journalising the world, of reporting the real world. Or perhaps it was allegorical? Yet it did not seem to fit with previous models of that: nothing in Kapuscinski's text suggested these pieces were meant to be taken for anything other than what they described, i.e. reportage from foreign lands. (Some critics, trying to establish a

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[264] *Ibid*., pp. 125-126.
[265] *Ibid*., p. 94.
[266] *Ibid*.

rationale for the writing's illusory qualities, suggested those lands might collectively be Poland, all the people within them Poles; Africa standing in for Poland.)

So much of what Kapuscinski was doing with the literary form seemed new, not least because he seemed - a news agency reporter from a grey Communist state - the least likely person to be doing it. Of course his basic reporting for the Polish News Agency was just that: news unadorned and written in simplest form and replicated in a dozen Polish newspapers. But his books went the other way - blurring genres, twisting time, evading categories - and were quickly hailed as a completely new form of writing. Yet as Jerome-Boyd Maunsell has noted, not only had the New Journalism done much the same, but journalistic writing in this mode stretched back to Greek historian Herodotus in the 5th century BC; in the 19th century, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain and Anton Chekhov had similarly captured their worlds, while in the 20st century, George Orwell produced deep insights from the Spanish civil war using these techniques.[267] In a 1998 interview, Kapuscinski saw his writing as similar to the New Journalism, although he admitted the genre he was working in was 'very difficult to describe':

> In the American tradition you would call it New Journalism. This implies writing about the facts, the real facts of life, but using the techniques of fiction writing. There is a certain difference in my case, because I'm trying to put more elements of the essay into my writing. My writing is a combination of three elements. The first is travel: not travel like a tourist, but travel as exploration, as concentration, as a purpose. The second is reading literature on the subject: books, articles, scholarship. The third is reflection, which comes from travel and reading. My books are created from a combination of these three elements.[268]

As Kapuscinski's reputation grew, so too did the view that he had possibly created a new form of reportage: here there was none of the flashy inventiveness of the New Journalism, at once thrilling yet often distracting readers from the core story; if anything, Kapuscinski, in a work like *Another Day of Life*, employed a return to basics, using often mordantly simple language to describe what was immensely complex - yet within that, displaying a devious ability to play with the reader's emotions and assumptions. 'Lapidary' was a word used often to describe his prose, implying that he had taken the rough material of conflict and

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[267] Maunsell, Jerome-Boyd, 'After the Fact: The Vices and Virtues of Literary Reportage', *Frieze Magazine*, Issue 83, May 2004, at http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/after_the_fact/, accessed 15 July 2011.
[268] Kapuscinski, Ryszard Kapuscinski, 'An Interview with Ryszard Kapuscinski: Writing about Suffering', The *Journal of International Institute*, Volume 6, Issue 1, Fall 1998, at http://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jii/4750978.0006.107?rgn=main;view=fulltext, accessed 2 February 2012.

polished it into glowing prose as a kind of journalistic alchemy - because it appeared so and was not easily dissected.

In an interview published in the British magazine *Granta* in 1987, Kapuscinski agreed that 'New Journalism was the beginning, in liquidating the border between fact and fiction,' but added, '[My genre] is not a New Journalism, but a New Literature. […] I feel sometimes that I am working in a completely new field of literature, in an area that is both unoccupied and unexplored. I sometimes call it literature by foot."'[269] By 1994, Kapuscinski's blending of the real and the surreal had acquired a name. Writing in *The New York Review of Books*, Adam Hochschild labeled it 'Magic Journalism'[270], although the name, not surprisingly, failed to gain currency and soon disappeared. If anything, the seeming contradiction between the concepts of 'magic' and 'journalism' only highlighted the very debate that would come to plague all practitioners of New Journalism and its allied forms, and subsequently the entire field of journalism: the division between the 'subjective' and the 'objective'. For Kapuscinski, the notion of journalism as a neutral entity, with no purpose other than to inform readers, was remote; nothing in his published books suggests otherwise, and, from his earliest days at the Polish communist newspaper *Sztandar Mlodych*, he had taken sides in his reporting and promoted the interests of what he regarded as right over wrong. In a 1988 interview with a Mexican newspaper, Kapuscinski rejected not only the charge that his journalism was not 'objective' but also the very concept of 'objective journalism':

> I do not believe in impartial journalism, I do not believe in formal objectivity. A journalist cannot be an indifferent witness, he should have the capacity for what in psychology is called empathy… So-called objective journalism is impossible in conflict situations. Attempts at objectivity in such situations lead to disinformation.[271]

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[269] Buford, Bill, 'An Interview with Ryszard Kapuscinski', *Granta*, No. 21: The Storyteller, Spring 1987. Although Kapuscinski might not have seen himself as writing New Journalism, readers of the following passage from *The Soccer War* could be forgiven for thinking he was: 'Pack the suitcase. Unpack it, pack it, unpack it, pack it: typewriter (Hermes Baby), passport (SA 323273), ticket, airport, stairs, airplane, fasten seat-belt, take off, unfasten seat-belt, flight, rocking, sun, stars, space, hips of strolling stewardesses, sleep, clouds, falling engine speed, fasten seat-belt, descent, circling, landing, earth, unfasten seat-belts, stairs, airport, immunization book, visa, customs, taxi, streets, houses, people, hotel, key, room, stuffiness, thirst, otherness, foreignness, loneliness, waiting, fatigue, life.' (Kapuscinski, Ryszard, The Soccer War, q.v. Rice, Andrew, 'The Passenger', *The Nation*, 13 September 2007, at http://www.thenation.com/print/article/passenger, accessed 5 October 2012.)

[270] Hochschild, Adam, 'Magic Journalism', *The New York Review of Books*, 3 November 1994, at http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1994/nov/03/magic-journalism/, accessed 3 October 2012.

[271] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *q.v. La Jornada*, Mexico, reprinted in *El Espectator*, 3 January 1988, q.v. Domoslawski, Artur, *Ryszard Kapuscinski: A Life*, *Op. cit*., pp. 216-217.

In an earlier discussion with Polish reporter Wojciech Gielzynski, cited in Domoslawski's biography, Kapuscinski was asked whether it was permissible to distort the sequence of facts or adjust chronology 'to achieve a better cognitive or artistic effect?' His somewhat cautious and conditional reply is telling:

> Yes, you can do that: you can rebuild reality, but taking authentic elements from that reality. That sometimes helps to convey a deeper meaning. It all depends how it is done, and whether it sits within the particular realities, within the climate, or whether it is artificial, invented, deceptive. You can sense that at once. The reader can sense it. […] What matters is to convey the essence of the incident.[272]

Kapuscinski's 'attitude' to the issue, since he appeared to avoid articulating any clear 'view', can be summed up in a single-sentence comment he wrote in 1997: 'Reportage as a genre is going through an evolution from journalism to literature.'[273]

The issue of whether Kapuscinski told 'the truth' from an objective or subjective viewpoint was answered by his background, by the opinions he expressed within his narratives, and by his own reported comments. Whether or not he got his facts correct is another matter. The debate over Kapuscinski's latitude with 'facts' began late in his career, and followed him into death and beyond. Domoslawski's biography investigates numerous claims of inaccuracies, historical improbabilities and what appear to be blatant lies; in virtually every case he finds convincing evidence that Kapuscinski played 'fast and loose' with what actually happened. The many cases cited include one in which Kapuscinski claims (in *The Soccer War*[274] and in two subsequent interviews) that he and other reporters were imprisoned by Belgian United Nations forces at Usumbura in the Congo, were 'sentenced to be shot', feared 'they would be murdered and their bodies would disappear without trace', and that he 'escaped by a miracle'. Another journalist in the group, Jarda Boucek, alleged in his written account that the situation was not threatening, and that in no instance did he feel 'the Belgians were about to kill them'.[275]

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[272] 'Czeterokrotnie Rozstrzelany' ('Executed by Firing Squad Four Times'), *Ekspres Reporterow*, 6, 1978, *q.v. Ibid*., p. 310.
[273] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *Lapadarium III*, Czytelnik, Warsaw, 1997, *q.v. Ibid*., p. 310.
[274] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *The Soccer War*, Vintage, New York, 1992.
[275] *Ibid*., pp. 112-118.

While exposing such exaggerations and distortions of the facts, Domoslawski argues that they do not of themselves undermine 'the literary excellence of his books or his perspicacity in decoding the mechanisms of power, revolution, human attitudes and behavior.' But in other ways, doubts are raised:

> Instead it poses the question of whether some of his works can stand as a model or reference point for journalists and journalism, even if for its least rigorous form, literary reportage. Also a more fundamental question: How much licence does a reporter have? Because in journalism, increasing the 'capacity', 'enriching' literary reportage, 'adjusting reality', crossing the borders between genres and entering the terrain of fiction have a high price, an unfortunate flip side - they weaken credibility.[276]

As Domoslawski notes, the trouble with Kapuscinski is that his output varies greatly in this regard: '…some of his works can stand as indisputable models for journalists, and some - often the greatest in literary terms - not necessarily.' Domoslawski argues that these works perhaps '…should not be presented to the public as works of reportage, even if a major part of the material was gathered through reporting methods and the author makes use of reportorial narrative tools as well.'[277]

In critical and mainstream media reaction to Domoslawski's biography, Kapuscinski was widely damned, a curious response in a world flooded daily with mistruths and carelessness about 'the facts', and bravura opinion posing as journalism. Did adherence to 'the facts' still mean something, or was the response based on guilt: attack the alleged fictionaliser lest we be attacked ourselves? In any event, Kapuscinski's reputation plummeted; the criticism was harsh. 'Kapuscinski would not have lasted in today's digital world,' asserted Ian Birrell in *The Observer*[278]. 'He would have been just another journalist felled as a fantasist by snapping packs of online critics. As a reporter, his actions were indefensible.'

Criticism had long hovered over Kapuscinski. In *The Times Literary Supplement* in 2001, in a highly critical article, John Ryle had extended the debate about factual errors to encompass what he called 'a startling number of generalizations about "Africa" and "Africans" in *The*

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[276] *Ibid*., p. 318.
[277] *Ibid*., p. 319.
[278] Birrell, Ian, 'Ryszard Kapuscinski: A Life', *The Observer*, 19 August 2012, at http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/aug/19/ryszard-kapuscinski-the-biography-review, accessed 16 September 2012.

Shadow of the Sun[279], Kapuscinski's collection of essays of his years spent reporting Africa. Ryle cited examples where Kapuscinski made sweeping generalisations: 'The European and the African have an entirely different concept of time', 'Africans believe that a mysterious energy circulates through the world', 'Africans eat only once a day, in the evening', 'Half the people in African towns don't have defined occupations.' Ryle took exception, and noted:

> Such generalizations are dubious by definition: Africa is just too big and various a continent, with too many cultures and histories and too many contrasting natural environments for any but the vaguest commonplace to apply to all of them. The physical and cultural distance between Chad and Cape Town, or Kinshasa and the Ogaden, is as great as that between Manhattan and the Andes, or Osaka and the Hindu Kush.[280]

Ryle also argued, with some justification, that Kapuscinski's 'insistence on a collective otherness' through such generalisations in *The Shadow of the Sun* also had the perhaps unintended result of evoking an earlier era of European writing about the continent. (Ryle, at the time of writing his review, was Anthropology and Ecology Editor of *The Times Literary Supplement*.) 'In this post-Conradian version of Africa,' notes Ryle, '[Kapuscinski] travels to a distant, dangerous location, falls ill and confronts death. And he is witness to dreadful events, from which he emerges with a deeper understanding of the further reaches of human nature.' The narrative pattern, Ryle argued, was familiar from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*:

> In this mode of writing - the tropical baroque style - nothing can be ordinary or familiar. Everything is stretched and exaggerated, the opposite of home. As Kapuscinski has himself written elsewhere of South American baroque, "If there is a jungle it has to be enormous… if there are mountains they have to be gigantic... if there is a plain it has to be endless… Fact is mixed with fantasy… truth with myth, realism with rhetoric." […] Thus Europeans can never really understand them; they can only marvel at them.[281]

Not all critics were so unsympathetic. Geoff Dyer came to *The Shadows of the Sun* with a reputation for his unique perspectives on popular culture, and for his courage in challenging accepted wisdoms. His general embrace of Kapuscinski's perspective on the world was apparent from the opening paragraph of his review:

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[279] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, *The Shadow of the Sun,* Vintage, New York, 2002.
[280] Ryle, John, 'At Play in the Bush of Ghosts: Tropical Baroque, African Reality and the Works of Ryszard Kapuscinski', *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 July 2001, at http://www.richardwebster.net/print/xjohnryle.htm, accessed 11 May 2012.
[281] *Ibid*.

> Suppose we were to launch a spacecraft with the intention of establishing literary contact with the residents of some remote part of the galaxy. If we had room for only one contemporary writer, whom would we send? I'd vote for Ryszard Kapuscinski, because he has given the truest, least partial, most comprehensive and vivid account of what life is like on our planet.[282]

To Dyer, Kapuscinscki was 'a kind of narcotics-free gonzo journalist, suddenly breaking contact with Warsaw and disappearing without trace to throw himself "into the jungle, float down the Niger in a dugout, wander through the Sahara with nomads"'.

Yet neither Ryle nor Dyer, nor many of the critics who descended on his work, focused on the critical reason why Kapuscinski mattered so much as a writer: his ability to bring to life a world that could never be adequately explained by conventional European perspectives and sensibilities. In Kapuscinski's view, reportage carried 'a significant responsibility': to probe odd, unexamined corners of the human condition, to find clues to explain life, above the daily news accounts that told so much of 'what happened' but explained very little, if anything, of 'why':

> Plying our trade, we are not just men of writing pursuits but also missionaries, translators and messengers. We do not translate from one text into another, but from one culture into another, to make them mutually better understood and thereby closer, even friendlier to each other. […] So with this in mind, the reporter plunges into activity: travels, investigates, takes notes, and explains why others behave differently from us, and shows that those other modes of existence and understanding the world have their own logic and should be accepted, rather than generate war and aggression.[283]

Kapuscinscki says, in effect, that we learn nothing of war by watching television reports of war, because the real stuff of war cannot be communicated by pictures, or even by words in newspaper or magazine reports. Objectivity tells nothing of what we really need to know about war. Kapuscinski is doubting his own usefulness as an agency journalist; perhaps only by turning war into a meditation can we begin to get inside it, understand whatever about it is incommunicable. Meditation implies a heightened use of imagination, elements of fiction, different ways of seeing; indeed, a leap of faith, beyond the realm of news reporting and

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[282] Dyer, Geoff, 'Journeys into the Interior', *The Guardian*, 2 June 2001, at http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/jun/02/politics, accessed 10 May 2012.
[283] Kapuscinski, Ryszard, '*Herodotus and the Art of Noticing',* Lettre *Ulysses Award for the Art of Reportage, 4 October 2003, Berlin, at* http://www.lettre-ulysses-award.org/index03/index03.html*, accessed 18 April 2010.*

objectivity. In his 2003 acceptance speech for the Lettre Ulysses Award for the Art of Reportage in Berlin, Kapuscinski explored these intriguing notions further:

> Working in Third World countries as a correspondent for a press agency for quite a long time, I often felt dissatisfied. This arose from the paucity of the language of conventional journalism when confronting the rich, varied, colourful, ineffable reality of those cultures, customs and beliefs. The everyday language of information that we use in the media is very poor, stereotypical and formulaic. For this reason, huge areas of reality are then rendered beyond the sphere of description. So what was the way out of this cul-de-sac?[284]

The answer, as amorphous as it was, he found in a 'blurring of genres', in the writings of Truman Capote, Norman Mailer and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, whose work, he said, straddled the border of fiction and press chronicle to produce the so-called New Journalism:

> By this, they meant the kind of writing in which descriptions of real events, true stories and accidents are supplemented with the writer's personal opinions and reactions, and often with fictional asides to add colour; with the techniques and manners of fiction. Literary reportage is the creative result of a combination of two different manners and techniques of communicating and describing. […] This is absolutely impossible without borrowing from the treasury of belles-lettres, for its rich variety of expression. And on the other hand, literature avails itself continuously of reportage production.[285]

By the time *Another Day of Life* appeared in English, in 1987, Kapuscinski had become an international literary star. His previous works had been translated into more than a dozen languages, and his writing compared to that of Joseph Conrad, Graham Greene, George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway. Author Salman Rushdie, reviewing *Another Day of Life*, praised his unique style:

> …his descriptions - no, his responses - do what only art can manage; that is, they fire our own imagination. One Kapuscinski is worth a thousand grizzled journofantasists; and through his astonishing blend of reportage and artistry we get close to what he calls the incommunicable image of war as we're ever likely to by reading.[286]

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[284] *Ibid*.
[285] *Ibid*.
[286] Rushdie, Salman, 'Reporting a Nightmare', *The Guardian*, 13 February, 1987, p. 15, *q.v.* Domoslawski, Artur, *Ryszard Kapuscinski: A Life*, *Op. cit*., pp. 216-217.

Ultimately, Ryszard Kapuscinski was a journalist/observer who became an invention of his own making: adopting the persona both on and off the page of a news reporter who became dissatisfied with, and frustrated by, the narrow perspectives of daily media, and who saw in such reporting not only a lack of imagination but an extension of ignorance. To understand the world, a reporter must therefore recreate that world on his own terms; the possibility of sharing that world as a writer then became real, since it was a world of insights and novelty, and the world was driven by newness; that 'the news' was more often than not a recycling of 'the old' clearly did not escape Kapuscinski's ironic eye. This was the pact he created with his readers; not one based on factual accuracy, the stuff of most 'objective reporting', but one based on a heightened awareness of situations generated by the sense of newness that is achieved not least through the originality and luminance of his observations.

In works like *Another Day of Life*, the war-torn, poverty-stricken postcolonial continent of Africa is encountered in ways that are disturbing, unconventional and unsettling, and even puzzling, yet somehow entirely believable. Journalists often joke, 'Never let the facts get in the way of a good story', but in Kapuscinski's case - despite all the criticism that flowed from it - the joke offered a starting point for a lifelong narrative journey. His reportage contained factual inaccuracies, but also, and more importantly, it offered deep human emotions and understandings linked to a strong sense of place, of being there, of experience beyond the page. For readers, the resulting narrative is never entirely history nor strictly personal memoir, but - as Ryszard Kapuscinski himself had sought - a series of encounters.

6. EVOLUTION AND INNOVATION

i. A CHANGING NEWS BATTLEFIELD

In the years after the Vietnam War to the close of the 20th century, the genre of the war reporting memoir expanded greatly in volume, yet failed in general to build on the literary possibilities suggested by landmark works such as Michael Herr's *Dispatches* and Ryszard Kapuscinski's *Another Day of Life*. Like the global media itself, the genre became increasingly homogenized, a publishing construct based largely on celebrity figures and on recognizable formulas; in the early 21st century, the genre became more fragmented, again reflecting the media around it and dramatic changes in both journalism and the conduct of warfare. A number of published titles exemplify these changes, and are analysed here.

Post-Vietnam, television became the dominant news medium globally. An international industry emerged based on rapid deployment of news journalists to trouble spots, backed by television camera crews and ready diffusion of stories through satellites and other digital technologies. Massive capital investment, 24/7 rolling news formats and syndication of news material to worldwide audiences demanded that news 'product' be increasingly regularized, homogenized in content and standardized in format. The chaotic, freewheeling journalism practiced by television journalists in Vietnam had no place in the corporatized world of media organisations like CNN, BBC World, and major American networks such as CBS, NBC and ABC. In the area of war coverage, collusion between media organisations and military forces saw a retraction of independent reportage and the emergence of a media-military complex with complimentary - rather than, as in the past, conflicting - interests. To a large degree, these developments were reflected in resulting war reporting memoirs.

In his seminal 1975 history of war reporting, *The First Casualty*, Phillip Knightley had questioned whether journalists in the future would even want to cover wars, arguing they would serve either as 'propagandists or myth-makers'.[287] By the time of the first Gulf War, in 1990-1991 (also known as Operation Desert Storm), Knightley's fears were largely realized. Compared to Vietnam - where the press corps had complete access to the frontline

[287] Knightley, Phillip, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq*, Andre Deutsch, London, 2003, p. 411.

with freedom from censorship, offering scope for such innovative literary results as *Dispatches* and *The Cat from Hue* - being contained in luxury hotels in neighboring Middle East nations while being fed official communiqués and edited military footage became, as designed by the Pentagon, a recipe for conformity and uncontroversial, sanitized coverage. With the media freedoms established in Vietnam revoked, journalists had little scope to experience the war at first-hand or without close military supervision; further, the demands of rolling-format, live news kept reporters tied to the television satellite dish - providing constant updates on the conflict yet unable to witness the war they were supposedly covering, an outcome described by BBC correspondent Michael Buerk as 'the tyranny of *now'*[288].

As a result, few memoirs of any substance emerged from the Gulf War. Several works anthologised the author's reportage, but offered little personal context; one of notable quality was *Martyr's Day: Chronicles of a Small War*[289] by American reporter Michael Kelly, who managed to cover the conflict outside of military restrictions. Kelly, a contributor to journals such as *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*, wrote little of the technological war that obsessed others, focusing more on its surreal and more absurd manifestations. In Kuwait, for example, he visits the Emir's home and observes two giant water towers:

> They were the architectural equivalent of escort-service girls, tarty and glitzy and over-endowed, tall and skinny-legged up to a couple of giant globes, a design that made them seem tipsily top-heavy, as if they had been drinking pink champagne and were a little unsteady on their high heels. […] At the front gate, a particularly young hero of the resistance slouched in a broken desk chair, his back against a tree, his feet up on a cinder block, a picture of solemn insolence. He waved me through with a sharp little wave of his weapon, a gesture that would have been more impressive had he been armed with something better than the broken wooden stock of a shotgun.[290]

While numerous critics linked Kelly's book to the qualities found in Herr's *Dispatches*, the references were to his stylistic skills, not to any personal insights into the nature of war; for, in *Martyr's Day*, there are virtually none. It is not a war reporting *memoir* as such; Kelly gives almost no indication of his emotions, or thoughts on what he is doing or why he is there. His persona is that of the astute observer, but deeper. By contrast, a memoir from the Gulf War which focuses heavily on the work of journalists in a war zone is *Live from Baghdad: Making*

[288] Buerk, Michael, *The Road Taken*, Arrow Books, London, 2004, p. 419.
[289] Kelly, Michael, *Martyr's Day: Chronicle of a Small War*, Vintage Books, New York, 1994.
[290] *Ibid*., p. 246.

Journalism History Behind the Lines[291] by Robert Wiener; it provides a first-hand account of how CNN orchestrated its TV coverage of the conflict from inside the Iraqi capital. Wiener was the executive producer of the CNN team which provided the first-ever live television coverage of war, as American missiles rained on the city. Unfortunately, the quality of Wiener's writing does not remotely rise to the literary potential of the subject:

> I walked into the shelter and tried to relax. I thought about Elaine and wondered what she must be going through. I was also worried about my parents. My father had not been well. God knew this was bound to be an additional strain. Every few minutes I stepped into the hall to grab a smoke. Occasionally, even in the basement, I could hear the dull thud of falling bombs. In the shelter, many people were napping, including some of my colleagues. But I was too keyed up to rest. I felt guilty and somewhat foolish not being upstairs…[292]

The following decade saw widespread conflict in the Balkan region, following the break-up of the former Yugoslav state, and the events of 11 September, 2001, which in turn led to the conflicts in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Increasingly, television news dominated the coverage of such events, with its associated restrictions on freedom of movement in war zones and limitations in terms of journalistic narrative innovation. Nevertheless, a number of professional developments in journalism began to impact on the possibilities of the genre.

ii. OF DEMONS AND BAD DREAMS

Arguably the most important of these was a growing industry acceptance of the trauma associated with war reporting as an occupation. While the cowboy mentality referred to by Harold Evans earlier in this dissertation continued to exist, with its emphasis on masculine bravado and substance abuse, the study of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), limited previously to examination of its impact on the military and emergency workers, had by the early 21th century found its way into the field of conflict journalism. PTSD is a condition in which sufferers recall a traumatic event involuntarily in the form of vivid memories, nightmares, and flashbacks. Fixation on the trauma can become intense, to the point where it dominates the lives of sufferers; not having assimilated the experience, they experience it repeatedly. This not only results in intense anxiety at being always on guard against the

[291] Wiener, Robert, *Live from Baghdad: Making Journalism History Behind the Lines*, St. Martin's Griffin, New York, 1992.
[292] *Ibid*., p. 262.

trauma's effect, but can also produce an emotional numbness to other events. In war correspondents, as discovered by the work of Professor Anthony Feinstein of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto[293] and others, PTSD leads to restlessness, to finding their 'normal' life uninspiring, to bouts of depression. As psychotherapist Mark Brayne observed, war reporters in this regard are like anyone else:

> Just because they have the professional mask, or the professional function of being a journalist, it doesn't mean to say that we as journalists are armoured against the emotional experience of observing and then witnessing and reporting on trauma.[294]

The upsurge of interest in the nature of PTSD, and increased publicity surrounding the condition, had an important side-effect; it allowed war correspondents 'permission' to talk, and write, about their experiences. A subject formerly off-limits in the war reporting memoir was suddenly not only permissible, but of far wider public interest. In 2003, a former *New York Times* war correspondent Chris Hedges published his seminal work, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, the first book to significantly broach the negative personal aspects of war reporting and the myths that had surrounded it since its modern inception. A former seminary student, Hedges writes of war and its complications from a philosophical stance; the mythic nature of war, he claimed, imbued events 'with meanings they do not have.'[295] Just as the military saw defeats as signposts on the road to ultimate victory, and demonised the enemy to make its opponents no longer human, journalists too could reduce conflicts from being human tragedies to being forms of theatre or sport. Thus, to beat the opposition was all part of the day's work; in the myth of war, Hedges observed, journalists believed they were accumulating career points, or status, when in fact they were often losing the battle to retain their humanity, and integrity.

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[293] Feinstein's work in the 1990s and beyond opened up what had been a closed world; the focus had always been on those correspondents killed, not on the survivors. But as Feinstein noted, battlefield mortality rates told only part of the story. Many war reporters had been wounded and maltreated, with beatings, intimidation, mock executions and robbery. Feinstein and a colleague sent questionnaires to 170 war reporters, photographers, producers and cameramen, and also conducted face-to-face interviews with many. The results showed this 'war' group had far more symptoms of PTSD, major depression and psychological distress than a similar 'non-war' control group. Average weekly alcohol intake was high; their lifetime prevalence of PTSD approached that of combat veterans, while rates for major depression were two to three times higher than in the general population. The figures were well above those reported in police exposed to violence. (See Feinstein, Anthony, 'War, Journalists and Psychological Health,' *South African Psychiatry Review*, August 2004.)

[294] Brayne, Mark, 'Stressing Out: How Do Journalists Deal With Trauma?', *The Media Report*, ABC Radio National, 24 October 2002, at http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/mediareport-1999/stressing-out-how-do-journalists-deal-with-trauma/3526396#transcript, accessed 15 January 2011.

[295] Hedges, Chris, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

In considering the very nature of war and war reporting, *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* approached the landscape of war reporting not only at ground level (based on Hedges' vivid experiences in conflicts from the Balkans to the Middle East to Latin America) but, through the eyes of a former divinity student, at a metaphysical level, at which war and mythology were inseparable. Reading Hedges' reflections gives a sense of reading about warfare for the first time, of seeing war through a unique prism:

> The enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage, it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. Only when we are in the midst of conflict does the shallowness and vapidness of much of our lives become apparent. Trivia dominates our conversations and increasingly our airwaves. And war is an enticing elixir. It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble.[296]

This is the push and pull of war: that, to young men especially, and thus to young male reporters, it presents a highly seductive activity, a blatant test of manhood and courage and a stage on which one might recreate imagery absorbed into the mind by books, television, films. Hedges offered an acute view of this process:

> It takes the experience of fear and the chaos of battle, the deafening and disturbing noise, to wake us up, to make us realize that we are not who we imagined we were, that war as displayed by the entertainment industry might, in most cases, as well be ballet.[297]

Surveying these and other personal reflections on war suggests that any motivations, behaviours and responses regarding what happens at the frontline are not 'abnormal', if only because - despite the efforts of many in the media and entertainment industries to create stereotypes - there is no 'normal'. As Hedges notes, imagined heroism usually wilts. 'One of the most difficult realizations of war is how deeply we betray ourselves, how far we are from the image of gallantry and courage we desire, how instinctual and primordial fear is.'[298] Hedges' writing remains central to the issue of war journalism, in that few works by journalists had ever touched on the subject of mental health. One that had, published in 2002, remains arguably the most compelling portrait in that regard to date.

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[296] *Ibid*., p. 3.
[297] *Ibid*., p. 84.
[298] *Ibid*., p. 39.

iii. MONSTER WITH A CAMERA

American news cameraman Jon Steele worked for Britain's ITN television network. A workaholic, Steele was seemingly addicted to capturing on film the worst that humanity could produce, in whatever war zone he could find. By 2001, as he recalled, he had been 'working the Intifada' for eight months straight: 'I'd already seen hundreds of people shot dead or blown apart. I'd already been hit once and nearly killed twice. I'd been targeted by both Israeli and Palestinian snipers. One shot nearly tore off my leg; another shot almost took off my head. A centimetre either way, I'd be dead.' The horrors piled up. There was the night a suicide bomber walked into a bar with a bomb strapped to his chest, under his coat. 'I was at the bar drinking a beer. He looked around, saw there weren't enough people to kill.' The only customers were Steele and six Japanese businessmen. 'I know he was a bomber because two days later, I saw his head in the aftermath of a bomb blast in downtown Jerusalem. It was sitting in the middle of the road. The rest of him was somewhere else.'[299]

Filming such traumatic episodes had a profound effect on Steele's life:

> It screwed up my life incredibly. I've gone through a few marriages, bouts of drinking, drug abuse, madness. I mean it just screwed up my life. And what happened to me is not unusual in the business. There are journalists out there who are on their third and fourth marriages, there are journalists out there who are alcoholics, drug addicts, there are journalists out there who have taken their own lives, because they just couldn't take it any more.[300]

Steele was ordered by his London employer to take a break. He began to write about what had happened to him, to his body and mind, covering wars for television news. The following year he published his memoir, *War Junkie*[301], in which he gives a compelling account of how filming war reduced him to an incoherent mess. In the frontispiece, Steele sets the tone with an incisive quote from Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*: 'By our own act we were drained of morality, of volition, of responsibility, like dead leaves in the wind.'[302] Like many in his profession, Steele had approached war stories not as a human

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[299] Steele, Jon, at http://www.powells.com/blog/guests/hello-i-must-be-going-by-jon-steele/, accessed 23 August 2011.
[300] Steele, Jon, *On the Frontline*, documentary, *Op. cit*.
[301] Steele, Jon, *War Junkie: One Man's Addiction to the Worst Places on Earth*, Bantam, London, 2002.
[302] *Ibid*., frontispiece, no page number.

being bearing goodwill towards those needing help but as a TV reporter, enforcing a professional code of distance which allowed him to absolve himself from responsibility for whatever suffering might be caused by the events he was filming: a moral issue which, as a news cameraman, he had studiously evaded.

Steele's narrative path, through a trail of wars across the 1980s and 1990s, matches his moral decline; by the time he films the scene of machete massacres in Rwanda, he observes with shocking frankness: 'Maybe I didn't give a shit about these people. Maybe they were just pictures and nothing more.'[303] The careless yet highly confessional tone is seductive, and compelling, as is the uncertainty of the persona it generates: does he continue to hold these distasteful attitudes, do they reflect his current mental state, or is he returning to thoughts that he has since been relieved of through the very act of writing about them? The reader is left guessing, but with the strong suspicion that Steele is equally unsure. 'The smell twisting my guts into tiny corkscrew circles like I was stoned on bad acid. Down in the truck, a jumble of dead faces watched me choke. *You see, Mr. Cameraman. This is what it is like to die in Goma.* I spat bits of vomit from my mouth and forced the striking air in and out of my lungs, till my body settled into a steady rhythm. *Yeah, well, right now, dickhead, I'm alive and you're not. So fuck off.'*[304]

Here, tone becomes everything: Steele has turned himself into a monster, flaying a dead body with his own guilt. As the war reporting genre developed in this period, increasingly a line was being drawn between the externalized and the internalized view: reporters either gave up their souls like criminals in the confessional, or smothered readers with a blitz of frontline information. A few authors - such as Thomas Goltz (*Chechnya Diary*[305]), Jeremy Bowen (*War Stories*[306]) or Richard Lloyd Parry (*In the Time of Madness*[307]) - managed to successfully combine both approaches in a single work, but the majority ran emotionally either hot or cold. Two contrasting examples: first, a passage from *Madness Visible* by Janine di Giovanni, at the time a senior foreign correspondent for *The Times* of London:

> I didn't like what I saw in post-war Bosnia. In a nostalgic and certainly selfish way, I preferred the spirit of the people during the siege. It would be too much to say that I missed the war,

[303] *Ibid*., p. 371.
[304] *Ibid*., p. 375.
[305] Goltz, Thomas, *Chechnya Diary: A War Correspondent's Story of Surviving the War in Chechnya*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2003.
[306] Bowen, Jeremy, *War Stories*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 2006.
[307] Parry, Richard Lloyd, *In the Time of Madness*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2005.

> but perhaps it was the idealism of that time, that place, that I missed. […] Instead, I went to other places: Chechnya, where packs of wild dogs were eating the flesh of the dead and where a houseful of blind old people sat waiting during a bombardment for someone to rescue them; Sierra Leone, where nine-year-olds high on drugs carried AK-47s that were nearly bigger than they were and learned how to amputate hands and feet; East Timor, where the dead were stuffed down wells; Liberia; Zimbabwe; Rwanda; Israel; Kosovo; Afghanistan; Iraq; Somalia. [308]

Di Gionvani's attempt at narrative internalisation produces a war zone litany, one place running into the other; a blur of names. Even the chopping off of hands and feet is delivered as a clinical statement, not as an event she has experienced or been emotionally affected by. At the opposite end of the scale, Jon Steele takes a grubby, bacterial microscope to the killing fields of Rwanda:

> I reached over the bodies and pulled one of the filthy bits of rag from a dead soldier's face. I watched flies crawl over his mouth and nose and eyes. I wanted to see him dead. I wanted to memorize the look on his face. And I felt revenge race through my blood like high-octane drugs. It wasn't the picture I was feeling, it was hate. And it felt good. I leaned close to the dead soldier. The flies buzzing in my face. And I whispered my prayer of revenge.
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> 'Rot in hell, you motherfucker.'[309]

In war reporting, in whatever medium, there are essentially two options: to tell it like it really is, or to tell it as you think your audience and your editors want to hear and see it. Like many of his colleagues, Steele filmed the former and filed the latter, removing the worst of shots to produce audience-acceptable stories, yet causing within himself an enormous build-up of self-loathing, resentment, and confusion, which would spill out in a cascade of bile in *War Junkie*. The sense of authenticity he generates is powerful; while he may have amplified the strength of his anger for literary effect, the impression created is rather that emotions locked in the depths of his brain ('Fear and nightmares, every fucking night'[310]) have found their release.

As with soldiers, not all war correspondents suffer PSTD or depression. For some, as gruesome as it may be, covering war is job, to be handled with the outcome in mind, the

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[308] di Giovanni, Janine, *Madness Visible: A Memoir of War*, Bloomsbury, London, 2004, p. 257.
[309] Steele, Jon, *War Junkie*, *Op. cit*., p. 399.
[310] *Ibid*.

ability to do it very well, and to move on without reflection. But some are strongly affected without revealing their thoughts outwardly, reflecting both their professional mask and their personal self-image. The war reporting memoir, in many cases, allows a degree of therapy: enabling journalist to work in the war zone with detachment while later reflecting on the humanity of what happened, and its personal impact. In the absence of 'twelve-step programmes for war junkies', Steele notes how he found a psychiatrist and started talking, and writing his memoir. 'And the more I talked and the more I wrote, the more I came to terms with living my life through the looking-glass.'[311]

iv. YOU FEEL SO HOPELESSLY SOILED

Increasingly, guilt became a powerful motivation in writing the war reporting memoir. A number of works published in 2004-2005, while not confessional in their totality, alluded to the mental strain of a career built on the blood of others. The BBC's Michael Buerk, who had reported from inside a camp with 40,000 refugees - showing the world how Haile Selassie's Ethiopian regime, for all its riches, was incapable of feeding its own people - described the serious moral qualms he felt about his reporting role. 'It is difficult for a decent person to be a journalist in the middle of a human disaster,' he stated. 'It requires the detachment of a doctor, without any of a doctor's justification. You are not there to help. Often you hinder.' He acknowledged that a reporter like himself might be bringing the world's attention to the plight of the suffering, yet that offered little comfort. 'You don't like what you are doing. You don't like yourself. And you don't like the audience of overfed first-world couch potatoes whose taste for sensation you are trying so hard to gratify.' This was at once harsh general criticism of a global audience that was emotionally moved by his reportage, and also harsh self-criticism from a reporter deemed one of the BBC's best, and most sensitive. 'But you feel hopelessly soiled at the time; the man who can exploit ultimate distress.'[312] To make such confessional statements publicly, and in print, indicated how far the war reporting memoir had travelled from its emotionally-bereft beginnings.

Invariably the war reporting memoir asks: how much horror can one person take? Jon Steele's reflections on Rwanda read less like an account of reporting war than a breakdown of monumental proportions. The BBC's Middle East Editor Jeremy Bowen, in his memoir

[311] *Ibid*., p. 438.
[312] Buerk, Michael, *The Road Taken*, *Op. cit*., p. 283.

War Stories, manages to retain some distance from the gruesome reality - at least initially. In his harrowing description of reporting the deaths in 1991 of over 300 civilians - including more than 100 children - who had sought protection from American air attacks inside a Baghdad bomb shelter, Bowen at first assumes a professional tone, as his cameraman sets up for interviews:

> There was so little floor space left that he had to take off the spreader at the bottom of [his tripod] and put its legs to either side of a corpse. I suppose he was working automatically, but it would not have been a professional sin to film with the camera on his shoulder. I set my feet one in front of the other, as if I was walking a plank, between two bodies. As I talked I could feel the weight of one of the corpses pressing into my ankle, getting heavier every minute.[313]

This is Bowen in detached work mode, divorced from humanity and focused on the job. His tone is so neutral here that the reader finds it difficult to know, even to guess, whether he is simply describing his emotional state at the time, or deprecating it. Yet later in the memoir, his emotional response emerges, almost as viscerally as Steele's does, revealing a totally different response to the same scenario:

> For months after I had waded through the water in the basement of the shelter I could not get the smell of human fat out of my boots. The water came up to my thighs. It had been pumped in to put out the fire that was started by the American bombs. A scum of rendered-down human fat floated on the surface. Afterwards I kept getting sick-making whiffs of it. I scrubbed my boots, but the fat-smell would not go away. I was picking it up when nobody else could. After a while I realised that was because it was in my brain, not my nostrils.[314]

Bowen cites this event as pivotal in his long journey through conflict, underlining 'one of the fundamental truths about reporting wars', namely that, 'For us to have a good day, someone else has to have their worst day or their last day.'[315] (Elsewhere, in a television documentary, he questioned his motives further. 'Is this a passion? Or an addiction? Sometimes there's not much between the two of them.' [316]) Another BBC correspondent

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[313] Bowen, Jeremy, *War Stories*, *Op. cit*., p. 89.
[314] *Ibid*., p. 78.
[315] *Ibid*.
[316] *On the Frontline*, documentary, *Op. cit*.

Gaven Hewitt used his war reporting memoir to confess a lack of emotional involvement in covering the troubles in Northern Ireland:

> I saw much, but was learning to feel little - to be there but always detached. We would see the injured lying on the streets or watch the pale tear-worn faces at the funerals but rarely, if at all, did they seem to touch us. It was as if we were emotionally immune, inoculated, a breed apart who saw all the world's pain but never felt it.[317]

v. CELEBRITIES IN FLAK JACKETS

The war reporting memoir changes: becoming more emotional, more personal, and more confessional. In a parallel strand of development, it also becomes more commercial, more saleable, and celebrity driven. For many mid-career journalists, the memoir can be viewed as an affirmation of their productivity and talent, to assist in promotion or enhanced job offers; for some, it can also be strikingly lucrative. Anderson Cooper joined CNN in 2001 and quickly established himself as an innovative and hard-working war correspondent; in 2006, at the age of 39, he signed a contract with publisher HarperCollins reportedly for $1-million dollars to write *Dispatches from the Edge: A Memoir of War, Disasters and Survival*[318], which topped *The New York Times* non-fiction bestseller list.[319] The following year, Cooper re-signed with CNN for reportedly more than $4-million a year.[320] Rageh Omaar, the Somali-born BBC News reporter dubbed the 'Scud stud' for his coverage of the 2003 Iraq War, encountered a more mixed set of outcomes from his memoir *Revolution Day: The Human Story of the Battle for Iraq*[321]; fellow British television journalist Jon Snow declared the book a record of 'rooftop journalism' in which Omaar had been 'ambushed in the springtime of a promising career by 24-hour television news.'[322]

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[317] Hewitt, Gaven, *Soul on Ice*, Pan Macmillan, London, 2005, p. 5.
[318] Cooper, Anderson, *Dispatches from the Edge: A Memoir of War, Disasters and Survival*, HarperCollins, New York, 2006.
[319] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_York_Times_Non-Fiction_Best_Sellers_of_2006
[320] Grossman, Ben, 'Anderson Cooper Signs New Multiyear Deal with CNN', *Broadcast and Cable*, 19 January 2007, at http://www.broadcastingcable.com/article/107383-Exclusive_Anderson_Cooper_Signs_New_Multiyear_Deal_with_CNN.php, accessed 23 September 2011.
[321] Omaar, Rageh, *Revolution Day: The Human Story of the Battle for Iraq*, Penguin Books, London, 2005.
[322] Snow, Jon, 'Get That Man Down from the Roof at Once', *The Observer*, London, 7 March 2004, at http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/mar/07/biography.politics, accessed 30 July 2011. By 'rooftop journalism', Snow was referring to the relentless demands of satellite broadcasting.

Omaar himself later expressed regret, in a documentary *The War You Don't See*, about his Iraq reporting for the BBC, noting that 'I'd hold my hand up and say that one didn't press the most uncomfortable buttons hard enough' and calling coverage of the Iraq War 'a giant echo chamber'.[323] Yet neither criticism of the BBC, his former employer, nor modest self-criticism appeared to do any professional harm; Omaar secured a prominent on-air role as the Middle East correspondent for the Al Jazeera English-language network. It is perhaps notable that his best-selling memoir *Revolution Day* contained none of the confessions or criticisms that he made subsequently. On reflection, readers could only question its authenticity.

Increasingly, the celebrity memoir typifies the genre. Figures such as John Simpson, the BBC's Chief Correspondent, dominate the general market, making less space for alternative voices. His output is prodigious, both on and off-screen: eight autobiographical titles written over 13 years, 120 countries visited and 30 wars covered. To have seen war up close, to have *been there*, is an essential part of being a war reporting celebrity; yet, like General Patton at the front, the celebrity memoirist must transport his production team halfway around the planet like a commando unit, electronically arrayed, to report live from wherever the blood of war is flowing, and build ratings and gain attention. Mark Brayne, a psychotherapist who treats journalists, has interviewed a range of war correspondents; he found in them 'a very strong streak of subversiveness, of stubbornness, people who really don't like being ordered about.'[324] The image, reinforced by coverage of repeated wars, is one of pluck, invincibility, bluntness and self-importance - candid about issues such as fear and discomfort, as Tim Markham notes. The resulting act of demystification

> …does no damage to the older reporter who had nothing to lose and is likely to appear more authentic as a result - unguarded authenticity the central part of the relation of intimacy that may underpin the transition from war zones to book sales and media appearances.[325]

The BBC's John Simpson is a typical example:

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[323] Omaar, Rageh, *q.v.* Pilger, John, 'Why are Wars Not Being Reported Honestly?', *The Guardian*, London, 10 December 2010, at http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/dec/10/war-media-propaganda-iraq-lies, accessed 30 July 2011.
[324] Brayne, Mark, 'Analysing Journalists', *Op. cit*.
[325] Markham, Tim, 'The Uses and Functions of Ageing Celebrity War Reporters', *Celebrity Studies*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 2012, pp. 127-137.

> I've got a belief much honed by experience that there's nothing I can't talk my way out of. It's stupid, of course: you can't charm a bomb or a mortar shell and make them miss you. As with everything in life, it's actually a matter of luck, of chance, however you choose to put it. Sometimes it's the randomness of being caught up in turmoil that sticks with you, but the only thing I thought was, 'I can't believe this is how it's going to end.'[326]

Mark Pedelty, who interviewed reporters in the conflict in El Salvador in the 1980-90s, determined that self-image was as important to most as unearthing the truth:

> …this type of reporter, the *war correspondent,* is like the accountant who rides a Harley. He projects a renegade identity to himself and the world in a desperate attempt to live up to the American myth of the independent man.[327]

Pedelty called this syndrome 'the *Salvador* identity', after Oliver Stone's film about war correspondents. He noted that many war correspondents of that era drew upon 'the lore of Vietnam' to construct their *Salvador* identity, by quoting from Michael Herr's *Dispatches* and the fictional forms it inspired, including the film *Apocalypse Now.* 'They exhibit a keen sense of nostalgia for Vietnam - a war they never experienced - drawing constant comparisons between the two conflicts,' wrote Pedelty, 'only half of which truly apply. […] The *Salvador* reporters had El Salvador, but would have preferred Vietnam. Like most of the reporters in Herr's book, the majority of *Salvador* reporters rarely went near the actual battle sights. If they did, perhaps more would have developed the sense of sadness, moral outrage, and ambivalence presented in Herr's work.' Pedelty cites a passage about reporters from *Dispatches*:

> All you ever talked about anyway was the war, and they could come to seem like two very different wars after a while. Because who but another correspondent could talk the kind of mythical war that you wanted to hear described?[328]

The growth of celebrity culture in war reporting belies the frequent fact that 'star' war correspondents are flown in and out of the battle zone ('parachuting') for short stays, a process known in the industry as 'big footing'; while John Simpson might claim to have

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[326] Simpson, John, *q.v.* 'Life and Death on the Frontline', *Background Briefing*, ABC Radio National, 27 May 2012, at http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/2012-05-27/4027884#transcript, accessed 6 June 2012.
[327] Pedelty, Mark, *War Stories: The Culture of Foreign Correspondents*, *Op. cit*., pp. 22-23.
[328] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*., p. 225.

reported from 30 conflicts, he has not, like John Laurence and others did in Vietnam, lived within the confines of any single war for years on end. To what degree does this syndrome of 'big footing' challenge the 'self versus story' equation in such war reporting memoirs, and how is their authenticity, as reflections of frontline reporting experience, affected? Is John Simpson dispatched by the BBC to wars because he is so experienced, or because he is a BBC star, or a combination of both? Yet Simpson *has* suffered the wounds of war; in 2003, his convoy in northern Iraq was strafed by an American fighter plane, and his translator and 18 others were killed. Simpson, with blood streaming down his face, managed to report to camera with chaos unfolding behind him. Such courage under fire can be one measure of authenticity for readers, as can commitment; in the latter case, foreign reporters who fly into to war zones cannot match local reporters whose lives are integrated into the conflict, although a sense of authenticity may be engendered by their relative detachment from the partisan issues underlying the conflict. Terry Gould, author of *Marked for Death: Dying for the Story in the World's Most Dangerous Places*, investigated the deaths of local journalists on the job in five countries, and found those killed shared 'one remarkable trait' - they had reached a point at which they were willing to accept death as a consequence of their reporting, what he termed 'their psychology of sacrifice':

> While fallible themselves, they went to work each morning with the conviction that the calling of journalism was to defend the defenseless. […] They did not arrive from somewhere else to seek adventure in their corrupt and violent lands. They lived where they died, and they tried to defend the people where they lived.[329]

vi. LESS BRAVADO, MORE EMPATHY

In recent years, the delusionary macho-celebrity image of war reporting had been, if not lowered, then punctured by two forces: the rise of women in war reporting, and the growth of a youth demographic centred on new technologies and social media. In the latter case, a spate of war reporting memoirs has appeared, markedly different from their predecessors, including Kevin Sites' *In the Hot Zone: One Man, One Year, Twenty Wars* and Chris Ayres' *War Reporting for Cowards: Between Iraq and a Hard Place*.[330]

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[329] Gould, Terry, cited in' Journalists Under Threat: The Psychology of Sacrifice', Committee to Protect Journalists, at http://cpj.org/blog/author/terry-gould/, accessed 5 May 2012.
[330] Ayers, Chris, *War Reporting for Cowards: Between Iraq and a Hard Place*, John Murray, London, 2005.

Sites' memoir is notable for its experimental nature, and its reflection of the values of a younger war reporter with skills as a video journalist. After spending a decade covering conflict for major American networks, including NBC, CNN and ABC, Sites set out in 2005 with backing from Yahoo! News to visit every major war zone in the world, and to post his reports and reflections on a website, *Kevin Sites in the Hot Zone*.[331] His brief, as defined by Yahoo! News, was to cover 'every armed conflict in the world within one year, and in doing so to provide a clear idea of the combatants, victims, causes, and costs of each of these struggles - and their global impact.'[332] As a measure of its success, and an indication of both its tone and target audience, *Kevin Sites in the Hot Zone* was named 'one of the 50 coolest websites of 2006' by *Time* magazine.[333] Sites' reflections on his 'backpack' war reporting experience were subsequently published in book form, with a DVD of his documentary 'A World of Conflict' included. In an epilogue, 'What Did I Learn?', Sites lists his output from 21 war zones (Rwanda was not included in the book) in 368 days: 1,320 still photos posted, 153 text stories written, 131 video stories produced. This frenetic schedule and output results in a depressing finding: 'War poses as combat but is really collateral damage.'[334] Having seen such a compression of human suffering in so many conflict zones, Sites' conclusion is, not surprisingly, disheartening in tone and content, yet bland and clichéd:

> I wish I could say I am more optimistic, more hopeful. But I am not. I have seen the good in people and their resilience, but our violent nature is a formidable opponent. It feeds on lies and myths we tell ourselves about war, that it is about the armies and the combatants, when truly, it is about the destruction of civil life; not just innocent people but our ideals and our humanity. The only hope may come from preserving and sharing the truth.[335]

Equally aimed at a younger reader demographic, Chris Ayres' *War Reporting for Cowards: Between Iraq and a Hard Place*, uses humour, uniquely among war reporting memoirs, to tell the author's story. Echoing Evelyn Waugh's classic 1938 war reporting novel *Scoop*[336], in which the nature contributor to a London newspaper is mistakenly sent to cover a civil war in the fictional African state of Ishmaelia, Ayres was, in 2003, the Los Angeles-based West Coast correspondent for *The Times* of London - reporting on, among other topics,

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[331] The site no longer exists *per se*, although Sites' reports can be seen at http://www.kevinsitesreports.com/
[332] Beckerman, Gal, 'Sites Dives Into Israel and Environs - And Comes Back With Fresh Stories and Insight', Columbia Journalism Review, 16 February 2006, at http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/sites_dives_into_israel_and_en.php, accessed 3 November 2012.
[333] See http://forums.geekvillage.com/showthread.php?t=31623, accessed 3 November 2012.
[334] Sites, Kevin, *In the Hot Zone: One Man, One Year, Twenty Wars*, Harper Perennial, New York, 2007, p. 293.
[335] *Ibid*., p. 292.
[336] Waugh, Evelyn, *Scoop*, Penguin Classics, London, 2000.

Hollywood - when he was sent to cover the Iraq War, embedded with Marines on the road to Baghdad. This apparent contradiction, and his professed cowardice (in a chapter titled 'A Long Line of Cowards') establishes the tone of what will become, paradoxically, a thoughtful study of the soldiers he lives with, his reactions to being with such men, and of media attitudes to war coverage. (Earlier, Ayres had covered the 11 September 2011 attack on the Twin Towers in New York, receiving an email from his foreign editor: 'Thousand wds please on "I saw people falling to death," etc.'[337]) Rather than portray himself as the bearer of a British stiff upper lip, Ayres paints himself from the outset as a loser, an innocent abroad, a clumsy amateur amid experts. 'What kind of a nutjob would do *this* for a living?' he asks.[338] He is approached by a Marines captain, who has ordered him - making 'a furious throat-slitting action with his right hand' - to 'KILL THE GODDAM PHONE!' Ayres sees the captain staring at his blue flak jacket:

> 'Why the hell are you wearing a *blue* vest?' he asked. His eyes moved upward with growing disbelief. 'And a *blue* helmet?'
> 'It's, er, Kevlar,' I replied. 'Bullet-proof, you know?' I rapped my knuckles twice on my helmet and gave a weak laugh.
> 'Do you have any idea how many blue things there are in the Iraqi desert?' the captain replied, his eyes damp with anger.
> I shook my head, I didn't want to hear the answer.
> 'Well, I'll tell you,' he said. 'There's one blue thing. And it's *you*.'[339]

Ayers is heading into Basra with his Marine patrol, when they are stopped by 'a tall, robed man gesticulating and shouting in Arabic.' A Marine asks the commander if he should 'take him out.'

> 'Negative,' said Buck. 'Do not take the dude with the robe out.'
> *Shoot him*, said a voice in my head. *Just shoot him*. I felt disgusted with myself. The Iraqi was probably terrified; we'd probably just turned his family into 'arms and legs and pink mist', as the faceless infantry commander had boasted. What I should have been thinking was, *Interview him; get out and interview him*. But I was more interested in staying alive than staying objective. The trouble was, I felt like a Marine. I was about as neutral as Murphy's trigger finger.[340]

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[337] Ayers, Chris, *War Reporting for Cowards: Between Iraq and a Hard Place*, *Op. cit*., p. 72.
[338] *Ibid*., p. 220.
[339] *Ibid*., p. 204.
[340] *Ibid*., p. 226.

Even when confronted with the grim realities of war, Ayers can barely bring himself to imagine the consequences for victims; better, it seems, to try some New Journalism and talk about technology rather than the inflicted terror and suffering:

> …the howitzers were still busy dealing out death, from a distance. I was told by a Marine that a bullet form an M-16 weighs barely more than 0.12 of an ounce. A shell from a howitzer weighs 13.5 lb. The round, known as DPICM, or 'dual purpose, improved conventional munitions', contains eighty-eight grenades, which soar over the heads of the enemy, separate, and then explode - piercing armour, dismantling body parts, and slicing through the pulp and gristle left behind. The howitzers turn the battlefield into a butcher's shop floor. And now, for miles up and down the DMZ, I could see the white flashes of the big guns going off. All four batteries were pumping out rounds at the same time: eighteen guns firing eighteen rounds, each with eighty-eight bomblets, every thirty seconds.
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> Somewhere over the border, death was hard at work.[341]

Ayers attempts a summing up, of sorts. Yet, even here, he cannot bring himself to be entirely serious, or resist the urge to deprecate his frontline experiences:

> War makes you feel special. It makes you feel better than your office-bound colleagues, gossiping over the water cooler, or wiping Pret-a-Manger mayonnaise from their mouths as they lunch in their veal-fattening pens. War gives your life narrative structure. The banal becomes the dramatic. When you're at war, you don't worry about American Express bills. War spares you the washing-up. Life at the brink of death makes all other life seem trivial. You're a *hero* when you're on the frontlines. Here's another thing about war: as much as you hate the fear and the MREs and the mutilated corpses and the incoming mortars and the freezing nights in Humvees, you know you'll be a more popular and interesting person when, or if, you return. Because war is all about death, and everyone wants to know what death is like.[342]

The ability of humour to deliver an alternative perspective on life in war zones has been more traditionally the province of fiction, in satirical novels such as Waugh's *Scoop*, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*[343] or Jaroslav Hasek's *The Good Soldier Svejk*[344]. Ayres' memoir uses droll

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[341] *Ibid*., pp. 218-219.
[342] *Ibid*., p. 234.
[343] Heller, Joseph, *Catch-22*, Simon & Schuster Classics, New York, 1999.

and self-deprecating (rather than black) humour to suggest that contemporary war coverage is, in large part, a fraudulent exercise controlled to an exceptional degree by military forces, in which concepts of independent journalism, freedom of movement, and empathy with the war's victims are mostly hollow claims. His principal objective (signaled in chapter headings such as 'Who Runs Lives' and 'AWOL') is not to risk his life for the story, but simply - and wisely - to stay alive.

The rise in numbers of women becoming war correspondents has also impacted in recent years on the style and substance of the war reporting memoir. In literary terms, foremost of the works published is *Echoes of Violence: Letters from a War Reporter*[345], by the German-born journalist Carolin Emcke, published in German in 2004 and in an English version in 2007. In a attempt to understand her involvement in the numerous wars she covered for the German magazine *Der Spiegel* from 1999 onwards, and the meaning of such difficult work, Emcke set about writing not a conventional book but a series of long letters which she emailed to her friends around the world, in which she discussed 'structural violence rather than immediate physical or military violence'[346]. Her rationale for this unusual form - the epistolary memoir - is to counter, as she explains, the numbing effect and lack of meaningful context in much traditional news coverage of war. The genre of the letter allows her 'to combine different forms of narration: personal passages are followed by essayistic reflections; political commentary is interspersed with travelogues.' As Emcke notes, the letters give testimony 'about what I have seen, but also about me: the witness.'

> Letters from a witness whom one can imagine, who becomes visible, who describes how one responds to violence, who wanders between different worlds and tries to translate between them - someone who also mentions what goes wrong, what embarrasses, what is unbearable - such letters can be credible testimony to the wars and their victims.[347]

Emcke's opening comments suggest, to a male journalist who has covered war and witnessed its impacts, an obvious question: is it possible to say that women journalists perceive the nature of war in a markedly different way from their male colleagues? Do women reporters carry the same sense of bravado into battle zones as many of their male counterparts display, or are they predisposed to consider battle zones less as a theatre

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[344] Hasek, Jaroslav, *The Good Soldier Svejk*, Amereon, North Fork NY, 2010.
[345] Emcke, Carolin, *Echoes of Violence: Letters from a War Reporter*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007.
[346] *Ibid*., p. xii.
[347] *Ibid*., p. xiii.

between conflicting armies and egos and more as a site of human suffering and misery and the need for compassion? It is unwise to generalise about human emotions, yet given the war reflections of an observer as sensitive and empathetic as Emcke, and in the absence of a book as similarly focused on, and revealing of, such sensitivities by any male author, such a conclusion might be drawn. (That said, war reporting memoirs by either sex have come far since 1978, when *Newsweek* correspondent Edward Behr breezily titled his journalism memoir *Anyone Here Been Raped and Speaks English?*[348])

Emcke's first email is from Kosovo, in July 1999. She tells her friends she is unsure where exactly to start, how to broach what she has witnessed: '…everything is clear and yet it is impossible to transform it into an adequate and intelligible narrative of horror.' In the refugee camps, where women were washing 'the only clothes they had'? On the fields 'where the corpses were decaying in the sun'? In the devastated mosques?

> We were all stuck in this world of pain and destruction. Within this context, all these horrifying scenes made 'sense'. Of course, it all seemed unreal, and yet it was simultaneously too real for us to permanently call it into question. Our conversations and gestures were embedded in this context. It was a life with the same radius of violence. […] That is the burden of the witness: to remain with a feeling of failure, of emptiness because even the most accurate account does not grasp the bleakness of war.[349]

Two years later, from Pakistan, she relates seeing an old man in hospital, who 'raises his right hand and draws some lines in the air, and just bursts out crying, and he has the voice of a child when we weeps "aaaaaaa-ah-ah… aaaaa-ah-ah."

> He weeps and weeps, because finally someone pays attention and cares. Mohammed stutters: 'They will kill us,' and his chest moves up and down, this chest which two projectiles destroyed, and from which a flexible tube sticks out that has taken the blood and pus that is running down into the bottle that stands underneath his bed right in front of my feet.[350]

Tracing the tube from the victim to the observer, Emcke links herself to his suffering. Her suffering is that she can write about it but can do nothing to help him or to stop the violence that crippled him; increasingly, in her emails, she questions her motives for reporting war.

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[348] Behr, Edward, *Anyone Here Been Raped and Speaks English?*, New English Library, London, 1978.
[349] Emcke, Carolin, *Echoes of Violence: Letters from a War Reporter*, Op. cit., pp. 3-4.
[350] *Ibid*., pp. 193-194.

For, irrespective of whether it is witnessed by male or female observers, violence exists. It is the principal focus of the war reporter, and the principal subject of war reporting. At worst, what might be called the 'ghoul factor' produces in some war reporters the active wish that the conflict will get worse, so that the story can get better. Pedelty in his study *War Stories: The Culture of Foreign Correspondents* summed up the rationale behind this desire:

> Violence is the war correspondents' primary commodity. Therefore, journalists often hope for the violence they cover to intensify. The [press] corps constantly deliberated over the potential for further major guerrillas offensives. They wanted them. They needed them.[351]

'War is not an accident,' observed Pedelty. 'Unfortunately, it is reported as if it were.' Social causes and the human meanings of violence, he noted, were rarely explored; audiences were treated instead to 'a balanced, dispassionate, and banal play of quotes culled from leaders whose purpose is anything but the careful explication of events.' The result, he concluded, was 'a kaleidoscope of vague and unsettling images of the world.'[352] More than a decade later, Emcke echoes this view, but from a different and more subtle perspective. She observes how, for war reporters, *fear* of violence can gradually diminish, producing another type of mental distortion:

> Everything exists at the same time in areas of violence: everyday life with its routines, its small ridiculous features, overcomes all shame. When war has become a companion of life, then normal hierarchies of sorrow wear off, the lines between normal and abnormal vanish.[353]

In an email titled 'War Zones: On Death and Normalcy', Emcke attempts to answer the questions, 'Why do we want to visit death and violence? Why do we always return to such places? Why do we carelessly risk our lives?' (Eight of her colleagues, she says, were killed in the first ten days of war in Afghanistan.) Her motivations for reporting war are blurred:

> I go to countries at war for a whole set of complex reasons, motivations, and drives. Some of them I know, some I don't. Some are so intertwined with who I am that it is difficult to disentangle them enough for a brief, clear explanation.[354]

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[351] Pedelty, Mark, *War Stories: The Culture of Foreign Correspondents*, *Op. cit*., p. 142.
[352] *Ibid*., p. 231.
[353] Emcke, Carolin, *Echoes of Violence: Letters from a War Reporter*, *Op. cit*., p. 49.

[354] *Ibid*., pp. 198-199.

There are, as many of her predecessors have found, no easy answers. She returns to the crying old man, Mohammed - who wept so bitterly, she says, 'because a witness, a human being from the unharmed world, listened to him and "made" him human again.'[355] Thus the notion of being not only a professional observer, and a witness to truth, but also of being a listener to a victim's cries, provides Emcke with a humane rationale for her reporting, and a persona that elicits the reader's empathy. This positions her a considerable distance from the stance of detached non-involvement that has, until recently, been widely regarded as the professional norm for conflict reporters, as typified by Australian war correspondent Peter George in his memoir:

> ...we sit there at the bar at the end of a hot, harassing day and share a joke and a precious cold beer while outside, in 40 C degree heat, women struggling with cracked plastic buckets draw putrid water from shell craters to quench the thirst of their loved ones. We do not allow ourselves to suffer constantly with the victims of such horrors. We want to remain sane witnesses.[356]

vii. THE LOOKING-GLASS WAR

The genre of the war reporting memoir continues to evolve, reflecting shifts within society and in the journalism profession, while the number of titles being published expands rapidly. Attitudes within the industry to modes of expression have shifted: as Tim Markham asserts, 'Creativity in journalism has moved from being a matter of guile and ingenuity to being about expressiveness,' a move that reflects 'a broader cultural shift from professional expertise to the authenticity of personal expression as dominant modes of valorization.'[357] In particular, a shift from the concept of 'objectivity' as the basis of factual reporting to a more personalized dimension of reportage that emphasizes the journalist - as Merrill's case for the 'existential journalist' argues - as 'an autonomous moral agent who can choose to

[355] *Ibid*., p. 202.
[356] George, Peter, *Behind the Lines: The Personal Story of an ABC Foreign Correspondent*, ABC Books, Sydney, 1996, p. 133.

[357] Markham, Tim, 'The Politics of Journalistic Creativity', *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2012, p. 187, at http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.lib.uts.edu.au/doi/full/10.1080/17512786.2011.616651, accessed 2 December 2012.

promote the overall welfare and freedom of others'[358], has produced a wider creative space in which not only varying fields of opinion can be expressed, but also where new literary forms can be shaped. In the case of war reporting memoirs, this freedom is underpinned by a new sense of social and professional permission granted to war reporters to discuss openly and without inhibition their views on the nature of war and both its enriching value and negative impact on their lives. By allowing and encouraging war reporters to take greater responsibility for shaping their individual self-identity within the personal memoir, the possibility of authenticity is enhanced.

Increasingly, the debate over 'objectivity' in reporting has swung not towards its necessity but towards its near-impossibility. The psychotherapist and former BBC correspondent Mark Brayne notes that all reporting is coloured by the emotions and experiences that we have as humans. Objectivity, he believes, is 'one of the rather endearing and no longer quite appropriate fantasies that many journalists and many journalistic institutions have… that somehow as journalists all we do is observe events, take them into ourselves and pass them on objectively, that we simply tell the truth'. Life, according to Brayne, is much more complex than that, and reporting war carries its own paradox:

> I need to be both open to the emotional experience of the story that I'm telling and also distanced from the story so that I can tell it with an appropriate distance and context and understanding, because if I'm simply swept up in the emotion of the moment, it's very difficult then to tell the story and to put in all of the aspects. […] We're not neutral, we're not purely dispassionate observers of external facts, we really get engaged and then we have to struggle with this issue of how do we then distance ourselves from the stories that we cover so that we don't contaminate our reporting with our own unprocessed emotion.[359]

This does not necessarily suggest a greater shift towards the so-called 'journalism of attachment'. The degree to which war reporters seek to be engaged at the personal and political level with the stories they cover remains independent of their greater freedom to do so; nor is there any evidence in the works consulted here that such attachment results in war reporting memoirs that produce a higher sense of authenticity. A commitment to 'the story' remains as valid as any commitment to 'the fight', whether expressed through daily news reporting or through a carefully-constructed authorial persona; though in a number of

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[358] Merrill, John, *The Dialectic in Journalism: Towards a Responsible Use of Press Freedom*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1989, q.v. Stoker, Kevin, 'Existential Objectivity: Freeing Journalists to be Ethical', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1995, p.12.
[359] Brayne, Mark, 'Analysing Journalists', *The Media Report*, ABC Radio National, *Op. cit*.

rare cases - such as George Orwell's reportage from the Spanish civil war - a combination of the two, 'the story' and 'the fight', can result in literature that generates a sense of striking immediacy and authenticity. In this regard, what *has* changed - and quite fundamentally - since the Vietnam era is, as Simon Cottle notes, 'that journalists today working both inside and outside mainstream news outlets increasingly demonstrate journalistic self-reflexivity and this often assumes humanistic and emotional forms.' As Cottle observes:

> This may yet prove to be a source of support for those journalists in mainstream news outlets who both recognize and want to move beyond journalism's long-established 'calculus of death' and develop new forms of reporting including those inscribed with an 'injunction to care'.[360]

[360] Cottle, Simon, 'Journalists Witnessing Disaster', *Journalism Studies*, (unpublished to date), received 30 April 2012, accepted 31 July 2012, at http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.lib.uts.edu.au/doi/full/10.1080/1461670X.2012.718556, accessed 12 December 2012.

7. ON WRITING *SHOOTING BALIBO*

i. FINDING A POINT OF ENTRY

In the course of researching and writing my non-fiction work *Shooting Balibo: Blood and Memory in East Timor*, I consulted - as well as numerous historical, political and sociological texts about the long struggle in East Timor - a considerable array of war reporting memoirs: a personal library alone constituting over 100 specific works. The diverse array of styles and themes I found within these volumes suggested the central subject of this exegesis - the role of the narrator/persona and the notion of authenticity in the war reporting memoir genre. To conclude, I will now reflect on how those readings influenced the creation of my own war reporting memoir - and also consider the personal history and literary ambitions that helped shape the book, some of the technical aspects of writing it and, finally, how the book was received critically upon publication and what meanings I have drawn, both personal and professional, from the experience.

As I gathered material and pondered what sort of book I wanted to write and what it might become (the two were by no means always in alignment), one issue increasingly crossed my mind: to what degree would writing about 'my' war in East Timor in 1975 serve to promote (or deflate) the mythology that had built up around the conflict, and indeed, around myths of war in general and war reporting in particular, especially as it was derived from television news coverage? In 1975, I had not regarded any side in East Timor's civil war as having a monopoly on truth, integrity or even a decent and workable plan for the future. My five weeks in the territory of reporting in Timor had revealed all political factions in the conflict to be flawed in their approach, while also idealistic and quite naïve about what was achievable in the face of likely invasion from their massive neighbor Indonesia. For me the danger was not in mythologising any one side or one set of circumstances, but in converting my own experience into part of a much wider journalistic and literary myth, by featuring the central character - myself - as the stereotypical correspondent, wise in 2008 to events as they unfolded in 1975 and, with hindsight, able to inflate his own perceptions, and the struggle he reported on, to the status of universal truths.

As my research progressed through a wide range of war reporting literature, including reporters' memoirs, it became clear that the possibility of re-versioning myself into a Hemingway-like figure was very real; many had gone down that path already, painting themselves as heroic figures in a threatening landscape. I also found through my reading (and in a number of cases, viewing of documentary films[361]) that individual responses to notions of courage and bravery, fear and death, commitment and survival varied widely. This diversity - and the widening industry debate around Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression among war correspondents, which I outlined earlier - offered me a sense of 'permission' to write openly about my feelings, assuming that I could release them from within. That would prove more difficult than I anticipated, requiring complex navigation through shoals of guilt, anger and repression that had built up in me, and had remained untreated, over many years. My return to East Timor (by then the independent nation of Timor-Leste) in 2008 with the production of the feature film *Balibo* had been expected to relieve some of these emotions, but had replaced one set of (personal) doubts with another: how to write about my Timor experiences, in 1975 and 2008, in a manner that captured both the spirit of the story and also sense of authenticity that I hoped for.

Could I, for example, be as honest in *Shooting Balibo* as Jon Steele had apparently been in *War Junkie*? Inside my head was not only immense guilt, but also deep anger. There was no shortage of targets. My anger was directed in several directions - at the ABC (not for sending me to East Timor, but for demanding that I stay there in the face of near-certain death); at those in East Timor who had openly lied to me (and thus used my presence as a conduit for their propaganda); and at my five television colleagues - who had paid the ultimate price for their seemingly inexplicable action in staying at Balibo, only to be brutally murdered - for passing on military information for Fretilin's fighters, thus allowing the Indonesians to claim that all Australian journalists in the territory, including me, were legitimate military targets. If I converted these dark, secretive thoughts into words, I knew *Shooting Balibo* would cause controversy that would turn many readers - and even friends - against me, by transgressing professional courtesies about 'things best left unsaid'. On the other hand, if I ignored them, I would write a book that would have, in my eyes at least, no veracity and no authenticity. I needed, above all, to write a book that reflected the person I had become because of the

[361] The most significant of these is *War Photographer*, Dir: Christian Frei, Christian Frei Filmproductions, Schweizer Fernsehen (FS), Suissimage, Switzerland, 2001; another of relevance is *Frontline*, Dir: David Bradbury, Frontline Films, Australia, 1981. Other examples are listed in the thesis bibliography.

experiences I was describing. 'Once you have viewed the world through the prism of war,' observed Chris Hedges, 'your perspective on life invariably alters.'[362]

ii. NECESSARY APPROXIMATIONS

My aim was to write a book, but in what genre would *Shooting Balibo* be? Would I write about history, about journalism, or about myself; or about all three? As I broadened my research I began to feel constrained by genres, and was equally encouraged by the rise of new forms of non-fiction that relied heavily on fictional modes. Yet I was determined, not least because of the guilt I continued to feel about Timor, to ensure that whatever I wrote was based on facts, on a reality recalled as I had experienced it, even if the end product was not 'factual' in the dry sense; what I was aiming for was an absorbing book that would draw the reader into a recreated world based on a range of sources which I deemed to be reliable, including my own memory. Authenticity mattered greatly to me, both at a professional and personal level. That ambition in itself posed complex and fascinating questions about the nature of memory, appropriation and approximation in writing, many of which I have already explored in this exegesis.

Shortly after returning to Australia from Timor in 2008, as I began to research my book, I read Barack Obama's autobiography, *Dreams from my Father*, written in 2004, in which the future U.S. president described his life, weaving together the political and the personal. In an introduction, Obama referred to the processes of life writing, particularly to 'selective lapses of memory', notably of dialogue that occurred when he was a child. 'Although much of this book is based on contemporaneous journals or oral histories of my family,' he wrote, 'the dialogue is necessarily an approximation of what was actually said or relayed to me.' [363]

Obama summed up both the dilemma and solution: one could not remember complex dialogues from three decades ago, yet one could not avoid portraying key moments simply because the dialogue could not be recalled from one's memory. In 2008, I faced the same problem in writing about East Timor in 1975. My answer, derived from Obama's words, was to use 'necessary approximations', which I defined as: doing my utmost to locate every

[362] Hedges, Chris, foreword to Feinstein, Dr. Anthony, *Journalists Under Fire*, *Op. cit*.
[363]Obama, Barack, *Dreams From My Father*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2008, p. xvii.

available source of dialogue - audio tapes, books, articles, transcripts, interviews - but when, after that exhaustive process, any gaps were present, I would resort to such 'necessary approximations' to make the book both readable and meaningful. I would recall as best as I could what had happened and what was said, and weave that into the text. This was not at all how I had been taught as a journalist at the ABC, and what I had practiced..

My journalistic training had been dominated by a single word: objectivity. We were taught that, as journalists, we must be objective, not subjective; that our stories must 'tell the truth' by 'reporting the facts' accurately (the mantra was, 'Get it first, but first get it right'), that quotes must be verbatim and strictly as spoken. Yet what was forbidden in 1975 did not apply in 2008; by then I had left the ABC and daily journalism and was free of organisational strictures. As well, I had long been familiar with the work of New Journalism practitioners and their use of fiction techniques to recreate a sense of reality, supplanting the objectivity model with a narrator/persona fully engaged with the narrative. How far did I want to go, or could I go, down this path? What models existed?

iii. THE MERGING OF FACTS AND FEAR

I had read Michael Herr's account of covering the Vietnam War, *Dispatches*[364], several times, although not for many years. On re-reading it in 2008, I was struck less by its innovations of style (which seemed not dated but unexceptional; narrative non-fiction had largely caught up with Herr's breakthroughs) than by its historical weight. Herr seemed, at this distance, to have captured the real substance of Vietnam, and its meaning to an entire generation, in a literary box: a near-perfect time capsule, its value grown more substantial over the decades. While Herr's masterful work served as an iconic example of what could be achieved in the war reporting memoir, and while I drew heavily on Herr's ability to create film-like 'scenes', his choice of subject - American draftees dreaming of girlfriends back home, fighting a war they barely believed in for a government bent on victory - was not characteristic of what I had experienced in East Timor: a war fought in a post-colonial vacuum, infected by ennui and silent fears that could not be described with Herr's hyperactive prose style. I also felt I could not embrace his self-possession of the narrative, as addictive as that had been in his work. I searched for a model not so cockily assured, but

[364] Herr, Michael, *Dispatches*, *Op. cit*.

more reflective and considered. The quest drew me to a series of works, and one in particular, which became more influential in the shaping and writing of *Shooting Balibo* than any other - the African reportage of Ryszard Kapuscinski. After reading the opening chapters of his memoir *Another Day of Life*, about the 1970s war in Angola, I realised I had found a model for the book I intended to write about my reporting days in East Timor, another Portuguese colony crumbling in 1975.

Like me, Kapuscinski was writing about events he had been intimately involved in, yet was also writing like me at some remove; like me, he had filed his daily stories on the conflict and did not want to revisit them as text material for the book, but rather set out to explore his presence in a collapsing world of European power and resulting chaos, and the impact it was having on him - while simultaneously describing post-colonial mayhem among the majority African population. As a parallel text, *Another Day of Life* reflected in an almost uncanny way my experiences in East Timor not only in a broad sense, but also down to specific details: the Portuguese as colonists had employed the same template across three continents - South America, Africa and Asia - for four centuries, a footprint of oppression and enslavement, and left in their wake the same divisions as they withdrew in a matter of months from colonies as geographically distant as Mozambique, Angola and East Timor.

I have already written of Kapuscinski's skill at handling fear; I had determined that fear would constitute a major element in the unfolding narrative of *Shooting Balibo*, and wished to explore this concept further. Research on these lines took me back to Ernest Hemingway, not as a model for the book's narrator - I was studiously avoiding his influence in that area - but for his own circumstances and their impact on his writing, both fiction and non-fiction. Hemingway's grip on language and ability to capture in a few sentences the essence of any situation were evidence of his literary brilliance; yet, for all his talents, he lived beneath a mantle of constant insecurity, haunted by the prospect of failure - not an uncommon state for writers, and one I knew well. In the view of critic Frederick Busch, Hemingway was less about courage than its old companion, the fear of death: he was America's 'poet, in prose, about fear and the imagined encounter - before we die - with death. Fear was his subject matter, fear was his stock in trade,' said Busch[365] This resonated as I approached writing *Shooting Balibo*: I wanted the book to reflect what I saw as the essence of war, and what I

[365] Busch, F., 'Fear was his Beat', *New York Times*, 25 July 1999, accessed 18 May 2011 at http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/07/25/bookend/bookend.html

had taken from Kapuscinski's *Another Day of Life*: the constancy of fear that reduced all involved to being both less than human and also quintessentially human.

Hemingway had tasted war, seen its consequences close-up as both a boyish ambulance driver in World War One and as a more mature correspondent in World War Two; and what he had not seen he could envisage, so evocatively and poetically in his fiction that questions were invariably raised about what he had actually seen, and how much he had suffered. This led to further considerations of style: if war is such misery, how can descriptions of war be sublime? If Hemingway the fiction writer is 'making it up', how authentic is his non-fiction? (At the time, in 2008, Domoslawski's biography of Kapuscinski had not appeared, although accusations of inventing facts and scenarios were circulating.) If his fiction is evocative, what nagging questions does that raise about his equally evocative war reporting? Is it also, to a degree, fiction, or a mixture of fiction and fact - 'faction' as another celebrated war novelist Norman Mailer called it? These issues became central to my thinking. Because the line between fact and fiction was blurred in the writing of Hemingway and Mailer, that did not mean that the line did not exist, or was not important. Would accuracy of fact giving way to the attractions of fiction? Having already written two novels, it was a possibility which I could not ignore. Ultimately I would employ the devices of fiction as Kapuscinski had, but would also, as he had not, stick as closely as possible to the facts.

My concern to establish a sense of authenticity in *Shooting Balibo* was heightened by what I, and many others in my professional circle, perceived as a growing inauthenticity within the medium of television news, and in journalism generally. Deepening global corporatisation of the medium aligned with the digitisation of images, which allowed the rapid, unchecked spread of content on a plethora of new platforms, had given many of us cause for alarm. These fears were largely dismissed by news organisations (with an eye to quick profits) and by newcomers raised on a 'cut-and-paste' mentality: wasn't everything in life an assemblage of lots of other things, and did it matter where the stuff came from? It was 'here' and 'now'; did what happen back 'there' and 'then' at the creation have any relevance to viewers?

In such an environment, the quest for authenticity seemed more critical than ever. I was aware that in dealing with a story central to Australia's post-war history, there was no room for playing with facts. Every event, person and situation had to be based on reality, and be seen and judged to be authentic. If *Shooting Balibo* was to be in a large part an exploration of what happened in East Timor in 1975, then that exploration - and the scenarios and

propositions it offered - had to be grounded in known facts. Yet the facts, like the memories which accompanied and surrounded them, were often elusive and even contradictory. In assembling my raw material, I gathered - mostly from my archives held in the State Library of New South Wales - cassette recordings I had made in East Timor in 1975, including my impressions and interviews with many of the characters who would appear in the book; my typed and handwritten letters from that pre-email era; the photographs that I and others had taken in East Timor at the time. I did all I could do to honour the truth of what had happened in those dark days.

iv. SHAPING THE NARRATIVE PERSONA

Another major challenge was to ensure that I retained my own distinct voice in the face of seductive other models, including that of Kapuscinski. To create a sense of authenticity, and engagement with the reader, I would need to 'become' the person I was in 1975 once more - on the written page - but only in those parts of the book set in 1975. Yet I had changed, and been changed not least because of those events, so that what I felt in these respects was at considerable odds with my current 'persona', my public role as academic and writer.[366] As well, the inner turmoil caused by what happened in East Timor in 1975 had not been worked through in any substantial way; until the opportunity came to work on the film *Balibo*, the vehicle for that to happen had not appeared, nor had I sought it out. This issue of 'persona' was perplexing - of who I was and which version of 'Tony Maniaty' would narrate - and became a considerable creative challenge.

The problem became not the past, but the present: where to locate this Maniaty 'present' voice within a narrative, disconnected not only from the past it described but also from any significant reality to anchor it to the here-and-now. This conundrum was solved in *Shooting Balibo* by giving the narrator not only a past (in 1975) covering the war but also a present (in 2008) working as a consultant on a film shoot in the same place. This would place the book very firmly in the genre of 'the return', where past sensations and impressions are triggered not only by memories long held (and thus unreliable, being eternally re-moulded) but also by the more reliable input of physically 'being there'. At every step on the *Balibo* film shoot I had experienced rushes of recollection, not so much affirmations of memory but situations relived in their entirety, even in conflict with long-held memories. This 'return' became not

the re-creation of an old experience, but a fresh experience in itself, one that provided an effective narrative bridge between now (2008) and then (1975).

The bulk of what I would write about 1975 would still stem from memory, which over the years had overlaid facts with my imagination, and which I knew could not be trusted. Here, the act of physical return to East Timor was important: little had changed physically in the intervening 33 years: locations triggered fresh memories of events that occurred in those places, and I believed, rightly or wrongly, that I had realigned my memories with reality as best as anyone could. (I was pleased, when the book appeared, that I was challenged on the facts as presented by only one critic, who offered no specific examples; my *interpretation* of the facts was challenged, and emotionally and even vindictively so, by some. I discuss these reactions in a following section.) Thus by late 2008 the Timor experience had become an intersection of history and self inside my head. As I planned it, *Shooting Balibo* would be less a 'book of memories' than a narrative rumination on how the memory of war lingers, and, in so doing, burns at the soul. The proposed subtitle of my book, *Blood and Memory in East Timor*, would reflect that persistence of memory felt by those who have encountered war and its impacts.

v. STRUCTURING THE STORY

While researching diverse sources, shaping ideas and considering themes and styles, I was concurrently playing with the book's structure in my head. With some background in film writing, I was familiar with the classic three-act structure beloved of screenwriters: in the industry parlance, 'set it up, mess it up, fix it up.' For *Shooting Balibo*, I decided to stay with that structure, with the proviso that there would be no 'fixing up' in Act Three: my travails in Timor in 1975 did not accord with a neat Hollywood finale, but were rather more suited to the unresolved endings beloved of European directors. (In this, Kapuscinski was also a role model: his recreated worlds ended with neither a whimper nor a bang, but with an endless series of questions.) Not only would my three acts - titled 'Dili', 'Balibo' and 'Timor' - offer readers a sense of shape and direction, but they would also serve to portray my three 'states of mind' as I, the narrator, moved through the narrative, in both 1975 and 2008.

'Dili' would reflect the anticipation and anxiety of arrival, the rapid ingesting of local information, confronting the lay of the land; 'Balibo' would deliver heightened awareness

and fear, immediacy, and take readers into 'the thick of it', ending with the flight from death in Balibo itself (recreated in the film's case, experienced at first hand and relived in mine); while finally 'Timor' would represent both limbo and escape, and a return to uncertainty (for both me and East Timor). The trajectory of the narrative would be from unknown to unknown, via a series of known, but increasingly unstable, events.

The book's texture would be created cinematically, cutting back and forth between its two timeframes, finding points where the past could bounce more or less seamlessly - *coherently* - off the present and visa versa. I also planned to use scripting techniques to create pressure points in the story - obstacles, tensions - and informational reveals that would sustain reader interest in the unfolding narrative. I would pay strong attention to dialogue, recreating it as faithfully as possible using my 1970s cassette tape transcripts and my digital recordings from 2008, and, where no audio evidence existed, resort to Obama's 'necessary approximations' to recreate that sense of reality, of *being there*. None of these innovations was mine, but I had witnessed their growing use in literary non-fiction and seen their value.

vi. DISSECTING THE FIVE PLUS ONE

As I researched the many facets of what I would write, the deaths of the Balibo Five newsmen stood out as the ultimate 'unknown unknown', and became the core of the story. The issue had haunted me personally for many years, and I was in a position to bring it to readers with passion and a strong sense of engagement, since I had also been in Balibo and had made the decision not to stay, but to leave; and had survived, as they had not, to tell the story. In this sense, *Shooting Balibo* would join that well-established literary genre, the survivor's tale. The mystery of 'why' the Five had stayed in Balibo would run like a current through the second half of the book, where it would be joined, towards the climax, by a second, parallel mystery: the story of journalist Roger East, the questions still hanging over his fate, the puzzle of why he had chosen to go to East Timor in the first place, why he had not fled Dili but remained until the Indonesian invasion, only to die.

The most intriguing, insoluble mystery - which would feature heavily in the book and its public reception - was what had motivated the Balibo Five to risk their lives against almost ludicrous odds. They could be cast as stereotypes: cut-outs of heroic reporters who died in

the quest for truth; indeed that had been largely the image perpetrated in the Australian media over several decades. While I could understand their trying to 'get the story', I had equally found their decision to stay in Balibo to film invading Indonesian commandos - after their Fretilin protectors had pulled out and urged them to do likewise - an incredible act, bordering almost on a pathological suicidal pact with each other. This forced me, as a writer, into an awkward corner, one in which I would be easily accused of breaching professional solidarity, yet one which aligned fully with my research on the behavioural aspects of war correspondents. I also believed that if the lessons of 1975 could be absorbed by younger journalists three decades later and beyond, if *Shooting Balibo* led to even one life saved, then any backlash that might result from writing bluntly about the Balibo Five would be worth it.

vii. INTO THE PUBLIC REALM

I conclude here by examining the resulting impact of the book: its public reception, the outcomes which resulted, and its effect on me as a writer and also personally. *Shooting Balibo* was published in July 2009, several weeks before the cinema release of the film *Balibo*. In addition, the 2001 book on which *Balibo* was loosely based, *Cover-Up: The Inside Story of the Balibo Five* was reissued as *Balibo* in a revised edition. This concentration of works associated with East Timor ensured wide interest in the Australian media. Advance copies of my manuscript had been sent to prominent Australian writers, who responded enthusiastically. Helen Garner called *Shooting Balibo* 'A real coup. Maniaty shows how youthful bravado is fated to smash headlong into the anguish of the world'; David Malouf saw it as 'A brave and complex achievement. Racy and wryly reflective, one man's very moving version of history', while ex-*Four Corners* reporter Chris Masters noted, 'Maniaty tells an important story, that journalism is first of all about living to tell the story.' Historian Paul Ham called the book 'An exquisitely drawn memoir of a time of tragic innocence.'

The reviews which followed were extremely mixed. 'It's a great book on several levels,' wrote Lucy Clark in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*. 'Maniaty, the author of two novels, has a literary sensibility and rebuilds the drama with a clear structure, running the narratives of his two Balibo stories alternately and rhythmically. […] Human frailty, hubris and Maniaty's

own survivor guilt are also thoroughly canvassed.'[367] Peter Rodgers, a former diplomat who had served in the Australian Embassy in Jakarta during the 1975 Timor crisis, criticised the book in *The Weekend Australian*[368] for making the 'damaging suggestion that the Australian government knew what would happen and if "a bunch of news workers had to be sacrificed, so be it.' Otherwise, he wrote, 'Maniaty has written an incisive account of the complexities of Indonesia and East Timor, of the fine line in journalism between reporting events and participating in them and its occasional edge-of-life calls. […] *Shooting Balibo* is the compelling story of the sometimes fateful decisions that young men make.'

This was standard reviewing fare, but, soon after, things grew substantially darker. Jill Jolliffe, who had gone to East Timor in 1975 as a leftist activist and strongly supported the Fretilin revolution, was offered the ethically dubious opportunity to review *Shooting Balibo* in *Australian Book Review* when her own re-issued version of the story was competing with mine in bookstores. She proceeded to suggest that my withdrawing from Balibo under fire constituted weakness. 'The reality is,' she wrote, 'that courage under fire is little more than the ability to control the physical reflexes of fear, such as keeping the sphincter muscle tight and clenching one's jaw to ensure silence (with that wonderful chemical adrenalin usually kicking in to boost performance). It cannot, in my view, be compared to the courage of one who, at a polite dinner party, chooses to break resolutely with her peers by refusing to accept an anti-Semitic remark, for example; that is much more difficult.'[369]

Shirley Shackleton, the estranged wife of Channel Seven reporter Greg Shackleton, one of the murdered Balibo Five, attacked *Shooting Balibo* and me personally in letter to the online site *Crickey*, titled 'Killing Greg Shackleton, again and again and again.'[370] Presumably for fear of being sued for libel, she referred to me as Mr. M. 'In his book, Mr. M D's my husband, Greg Shackleton, in every possible way. Greg Shackleton can be described by a whole raft of D words. Determined, dashing, desirable, delectable, decent, dedicated and Daddy. However the only word that matters, is dead. Because of this book he has to die over and over and over again.' She then asserted that I ('the author') had met Shackleton 'when the author was running away from Balibo in Portuguese Timor.' Perhaps more than

[367] Clark, Lucy, 'Timorous Tangle', *Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, 7 June 2009.

[368] Rodgers, Peter, 'Inside the Dark Tragedy of Balibo', *The Weekend Australian*, 20-21 June, 2009.
[369] Jolliffe, Jill, 'Indon Blitz', *Australian Book Review*, July-August 2009, pp. 42-43. [Jolliffe had earlier written her own account of the East Timor story, titled *Cover-Up: The Inside Story of the Balibo Five*, Scribe, Melbourne, 2001. This was rebadged for the release of the *Balibo* film as *Balibo*.]
[370] Shackleton, Shirley, 'Killing Greg Shackleton, again and again and again', *Crickey*, 5 June 2009.

three decades of anger at Australian government intransigence was spilling in my direction; even worse was to come.

Paul Toohey, then a journalist for *The Australian* based in Darwin, turned on my interpretation of East Timor in 1975 with vitriol.[371] 'Maniaty's is an unpleasant book,' he wrote bluntly. 'It is not only self-indulgent, unresolved and insidious, it is a betrayal of journalism and journalists. […] Maniaty has spent the past 34 years being haunted by the fact he didn't stay and die in Balibo. He writes well, which is the shame of the thing. He would have better served himself, and us, by confronting his demons. […] Maniaty was not cut out for the job. Fair enough. It could happen to anyone. Only the brave and the dead become heroes. But why, in this self-flagellating book, does he attack those who stayed on?' I responded in a letter to *The Australian Literary Review*: 'The complexities of human reaction to war and fear, which I explore deeply in my book, seem reduced in Toohey's eyes to the level of a John Wayne movie: those who can take it and those who can't. Thanks for the advice, Paul, but Tony Maniaty doesn't need to "pack his bags and go find himself a war". I did that back in 1975, and what I decided to do in *Shooting Balibo* was write as honest an account as I could about the traumatic experience that followed. It was lethal for some who covered it and a life-changing event for all of us who survived.'[372]

By contrast, academic Marcus O'Donnell saw *Shooting Balibo* through a more nuanced literary prism, and wrote a measured account of my efforts. It points to, I believe, many of the literary ambitions which I set out to achieve:

> Early on in Tony Maniaty's *Shooting Balibo*, we come across Herman Melville, Michelangelo Antonioni and John dos Passes. We quickly get the message that this is as much a journey of the imagination as it is a travelogue, memoir or investigation. […] In many ways this book seems like the one he was destined to write: a memoir with a journalistic eye, journalism with cinematic vision, history uninhibited by very personal speculations. […] Maniaty's investigation is as much a writerly investigation of his younger self as it is of the events of 1975. […] A series of strange coincidences show the past impinging on the present. There are moments of simple insight and pleasure but this is not a book that culminates in a staggering revelation or a sudden epiphany. A slow emotional accumulation of detail, of memory, which somehow unlocks the events for both Maniaty and his readers. *Shooting Balibo* is a

[371] Toohey, Paul, 'Still Bleeding Over Balibo', *Australian Literary Review*, 2 September 2009, pp. 8-9.
[372] Maniaty, Tony, *Australia Literary Review*, 'Balibo Not Taboo', 7 October 2009, p. 26.

> carefully crafted story despite its meandering form. […] Tony Maniaty's attention to simple detail, his commitment to the imaginary power of the ordinary and his ability to layer history with the force of honest emotion is what makes this narrative an important and original achievement.[373]

viii. SUMMING UP

As with all published books, but more so with books of a controversial nature, *Shooting Balibo* transitioned in weeks from being *my* book to being public property, part of a wider political and cultural debate. What had I achieved by writing *Shooting Balibo*? What, for that matter, had I set out to achieve? Had I been writing a book to describe experiences before I too forgot them as old age approached? Was I trying to expunge all my demons, to quieten the monsters within my head? Was I writing ultimately to friends, as Carolin Emcke might have, a personal letter that might explain why so much of my life had been dominated by events in a small outpost in 1975? Or was I, no lesser goal, trying to achieve coherency?

These remain difficult questions to answer. I had hoped that writing about the process, exploring the process, shaping this exegesis would offer some explanations. I know I am not alone in feeling this way. At the end of his *Chechnya Diary*, reporter Thomas Goltz reflected on writing his 'book of war', both descriptive and interior, and concluded only that it might be 'some sort of testament or at least remind us of human foibles and frailty but also devotion.' To which, he added, 'Myself, I never want to see war again.'[374]

In writing *Shooting Balibo*, I did not set out to understand how I found myself, at 26, in a hostile war zone, ill-prepared and inexperienced, facing death - but rather to explore my reactions to that situation. If I did not entirely achieve what I aimed for, I feel that I covered much of the territory which surrounds, as I noted at a war reporting conference in Auckland in 2010[375], the inescapable conundrum of all war correspondents: where is that clear line

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[373] O'Donnell, Marcus, 'Following the Balibo Massacre's Whale', *Pacific Journalism Review*, Vol. 15, Issue 2, October 2009, pp. 210-213, at http://www.pjreview.info/articles/review-following-balibo-massacre-s-whale-329, accessed 1 February 2010.

[374] Goltz, Thomas, *Chechnya Diary: A War Correspondent's Story of Surviving the War in Chechnya*, *Op. cit*., p. 285.

[375] 'Reporting Wars: The Ongoing Challenges', Auckland University of Technology, 25 April 2010, at http://pacificmediacentre.blogspot.com.au/2010/04/pmc-red-cross-plan-war-reporting.html, accessed 10 June 2012.

that defines our role, our moral and professional obligation, even our humanity? And what of the experience can afterwards be shared, and what remains trapped within us, haunting us?

Reporter Richard Lloyd Parry, who had covered uprisings in Indonesia for *The Times* of London and had witnessed grotesque scenes of 'heads severed from their bodies and men eating human flesh', felt this exposure to the worst of humanity 'would stand me in good stead the next time I found myself in violent or unpredictable circumstances':

> But then I went to East Timor where I discovered that such experience is never externalised, only absorbed, and that it builds up inside one, like a toxin. In East Timor, I became afraid, and couldn't control my fear. I ran away, and afterwards I was ashamed.[376]

Like me, Parry had lost his nerve and flew out of East Timor to save his sanity, and perhaps his life. 'I had become afraid and run away. I had jumped. I had fled because I was afraid of being killed or, more precisely, of dying in fear.'[377] I related strongly to Parry's book, *In a Time of Madness*; he seemed to be among the few war correspondents who had confronted his fears honestly and found deeper layers to his experience: war and its suffering was just one aspect to his inquiry. 'Before me, as I write, are notes from that time - buckled exercise books and fragments of paper. I long to turn them over and to discover that, after all, I stayed.' Of course he cannot, as I could not; instead he confronts the reality of what happened, and, as a result, the truth about the person he has since become.

Carrying equally dark memories, *New Yorker* writer Philip Gourevitch, who reported the genocide in Rwanda and published his harrowing account, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*, has spoken of the negative aspects of memories, wrongly considered a psychological cure-all in Western society:

> Memories can hold you back, they can be a terrible burden, even an illness. Yes, memory - hallowed memory - can be a kind of disease. […] Because you need to get on with life the rest of the time and not feel the past too badly. I'm not talking about letting memory go. The thing is to contain memory, and then, on those days, or in those places, you can turn on the

[376] Parry, Richard Lloyd, *In the Time of Madness*, *Op. cit*., pp. 10-11.
[377] *Ibid*., p. 292.

> tap and really touch and feel it. The idea is not oblivion or even denial of memory. It's about not poisoning ourselves with memory.[378]

In creating *Shooting Balibo*, I discovered within myself the power of memoir, of releasing memories. Much was at stake, emotionally; I had determined not to build a wall of words to protect myself, but rather to open my past, and my thoughts about that past, to exposure. Yet traces of Gourevitch's 'poison' remain: I still harbor fears that what I have written will somehow not be believed, will not be regarded by readers as authentic, will not be 'factual' enough or be seen as merely a clever literary mask for my own failures. These tensions reside with me still, three years after the book's publication. Given the chance to rewrite *Shooting Balibo*, I would not do much differently; some readers suggested that I should have written exclusively of 1975, and abandoned the 2008 elements of the story, yet the structural and narrative opportunities this afforded the memoir were important, and, in any event, returning - 'going back' - was a central theme of the book. I came away from my 2008 experience of East Timor feeling better in myself and with my memories, as though I had shaken off some demons and doubts, and cleared a path for the future.

Yet I also carry the uneasy sensation, which I suspect all memoir writers must carry, that I did not reach the absolute heart of self-exposure, that part of me 'got away' and is still out there, waiting to pounce and reduce all I have written to mere words on a printed page and nothing more - along with those stray elements, which in the text might be little more than an observation, a passing line, but which silently grow over time and threaten to destroy the integrity and coherence I had set out to create. I have also learned that no memoir is ever complete, that all are unfinished works, lives in progress. *Shooting Balibo* created a mental landscape where the troubled times I spent in East Timor can be revisited, and reconsidered. George Orwell's reflections on his time in the Spanish civil war, as portrayed in *Homage to Catalonia*, offer an appropriate conclusion:

> Of course at the time I was hardly conscious of the changes that were occurring in my own mind. Like everyone about me I was chiefly conscious of boredom, heat, cold, dirt, lice, privation, and occasional danger. It is quite different now. This period which then seemed so futile and eventless is now of great importance to me. It is so different from the rest of my life that already it has taken on the magic quality which, as a rule, belongs only to memories

[378]Alduy, Cecile, 'Philip Gourevitch: Memory is a Disease', *Salon*, 27 September 2012, at http://www.salon.com/2012/09/26/philip_gourevitch_memory_is_a_disease/, accessed 30 September 2012.

that are years old. It was beastly while it was happening, but it is a good patch for my mind to browse upon. I wish I could convey to you the atmosphere of that time. […] The whole period stays by me with curious vividness.[379]

[379] Orwell, George, *Homage to Catalonia*, 1938, at http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0201111.txt, accessed 6 June 2012.

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On the Frontline, Exec. Prod: Paul Woolwich, BBC, United Kingdom, 2005.

The Cat with Nine Lives, (production company unknown), Netherlands, 2012.

The World of Charlie Company, Prod: Russ Bensley, CBS News, New York, 1970.

War Photographer, Dir: Christian Frei, Christian Frei Filmproductions, Schweizer Fernsehen (FS), Suissimage, Switzerland, 2001.

FEATURE FILMS:

Apocalypse Now, Dir: Francis Ford Coppola, American Zoetrope Corporation, United States, 1979.

Balibo, Dir: Robert Connolly, Arenafilm, Sydney, 2009. [*Balibo* DVD, Madman Entertainment/Footprint Films, Melbourne, 2009.]

Salvador, Dir: Oliver Stone, Hemdale Film Corporation, United States, 1986.

The Bang Bang Club, Dir: Stephen Silver, Foundry Films; Harold Greenberg Fund, Instinctive Film, Out of Africa Entertainment, Canada/South Africa, 2010.

The Passenger, Dir: Michelangelo Antonioni, Italy/United Kingdom, 1975.

Welcome to Sarajevo, Dir: Michael Winterbottom, Touchstone/Channel 4 Films, United Kingdom, 1997.

Tony Maniaty, 1977

Tony Maniaty, 2013