



## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: LSD, Mules and Men: Hypermediation in Hunter S. Thompson and Zora Neale Hurston.

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Hypermediation, as described by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin in their book *Remediation*, is a style of writing, recording, presenting, etc. that “makes us aware of the medium or media and (in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways) reminds us of our desire for immediacy” (34). This mode of production reveals and illustrates the manufactured nature of writing and the processes that go into it, thereby increasing the perceived authenticity and immediacy of the text. In my paper, I investigate a chapter in Hunter S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and several scenes in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Mules and Men*. Ultimately, I determine that while these authors focus on the produced nature of their texts in various ways (editor’s notes that call attention to modes of production, narrative frames that contrast the slightly less mediated areas of their texts, and approximations of oral narratives/recordings that push the limits of the print format), the intentions and effects from each author are entirely different. While Thompson increases his ethos to other white, male dope users by illustrating his own gonzo persona, Hurston’s text portrays her in a way that increases her authority to a middle-class white audience not familiar with black folk tales and songs that had existed primarily as an oral tradition up to this point. The differences that

arise from the two illustrate the versatility of this critical gaze and importance of this manner of engagement with texts that translate from one modality to another.

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LSD, Mules and Men: Hypermediation in Hunter S. Thompson and Zora Neale Hurston

by  
Harold R. Collins III

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Harold R. Collins III, Author

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Introduction: Cell Phone Cameras and Hypermediations.....	1
Gonzo Journalism: A Camera in the Action Before Cameras in the Action.....	5
Mediation, Mules and Men: Hypermediation in Zora Neale Hurston.....	6
A History of Hypermediation.....	7
Chapter 1: Do it <i>now</i> : Pure Hypermediated Gonzo Journalism.....	9
Pacing the Narrative: The Tapes and the Text.....	12
Thompson’s Storymaking: Leaving out the Boring Stuff (Like the Story).....	16
Instilled Immediacy Through Hyper/Remediation.....	21
Thompson’s Gonzo Journalism: An Inherently Hypermediated Form.....	23
New Journalism and Other Voices on Thompson.....	27
Thompson’s Fiction Frames, Hayden White’s Encodation, and the Tapes.....	32
Hypermediated Anthropology.....	34
Chapter 2: “Them Big Old Lies”: Hypermediated Anthropology in <i>Mules and Men</i> .....	36
“Negro Magic and Voodoo”: A Franz Boas Introduction.....	42
Boas’ Introduction: A Critical Response.....	47
Hurston’s Narrative Frame: Mediating Mediations.....	51
“Don’t be so astorperious”: Hurston’s Use of Dialect.....	55
The Tapes Beyond the Text: Hurston’s Work for the WPA.....	60
Conclusion: Another Hypermediated Node in the Network.....	61
Bibliography.....	64

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Chart of Thompson's Edits Between the Tape and the Text.....	11
2. Ralph Steadmanesque inkblots blur across the page in <i>Fear and Loathing</i> .....	17
3. News report block quote breaks the narrative in <i>Fear and Loathing</i> .....	22
4. The main stages of mediation in <i>Mules and Men</i> .....	46

This thesis is dedicated to Carolyn Collins.

## Introduction

### Cell Phone Cameras and Hypermediations

*We cannot think of information as just a pattern imprinted indifferently in one or another physical medium. For information is also an event. It isn't just the content of a given message but all the things that happen when the message gets transmitted. ... In other words, meaning is not intrinsic, but always contingent and performative.*

Steven Shaviro  
*Connected* (16)

Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, discuss digital technologies and the multiple ways they mimic older forms. Through investigating these reproductions, Bolter and Grusin establish their theory of hypermediacy, which they define as “[a] method of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium” (272). Hypermediacy emphasizes the medium in which it is produced, constantly reminding the viewer of the mediated experience they receive through representation. We have all had the experience of losing ourselves in the narrative when reading a captivating story. We interact with the novel, short story, or play and forget the writing and editing processes that went into it. We forget that we are reading words on a printed page within a bound book as we experience the narrative unfolding. The language of hypermediacy disrupts this effect and jars the reader from the reading process, focusing attention on the produced nature of the text and the medium in which it exists. Furthermore, hypermediacy makes the production of the story a part of the narrative as the reader consumes the story, the medium in which it is published, and the processes that went into it simultaneously.

In this definition of hypermediacy, Bolter and Grusin focus mainly on digital formats and technologies such as digital newspapers, web browsers, and individual windows within

the operating system. In each of these manifestations, Bolter and Grusin argue that the medium instills a sense of immediacy through focusing on the multiple mediations:

In digital technology, as often in the earlier history of Western representation, hypermediacy expresses itself as multiplicity. If the logic of immediacy leads one either to erase or to render automatic the act of representation, the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible. [. . .] The logic of hypermediacy multiplies the signs of mediation and in this way tries to reproduce the rich sensorium of human experience. [. . .] In every manifestation, hypermediacy makes us aware of the medium or media and (in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways) reminds us of our desire for immediacy. (33-34)

Hypermediacy, through calling attention to the produced nature of the text, multiplies the perceived layers of mediation between the original story and the final text that the reader consumes. By increasing the number of mediations that the text undergoes and calling attention to the medium in which it exists, the narrative appears more immediate to the reader. This logic may at first appear paradoxical (the more layers the text undergoes the more immediate it appears), but such transparency has a huge effect on the reader. By illustrating the multiple stages and edits that went into producing the final text, the author suggests that there was no time to instill the kind of polish and editing that other texts undergo. Instead, hypermediacy suggests that it was necessary to produce and publish the story as quickly as possible with minimal revision (which they illustrate to the reader) in order to get the story out quickly. By increasing the perceived and illustrated layers of mediation, the author diminishes the implied layers and suggests that what we get is as direct and transparent (and therefore immediate and unaltered) as possible.

When considering digital technologies, we can see this kind of production in the rise of cell phone cameras recording and reporting a variety of situations. Videos of these events

often stream immediately to websites that spring up during the action. Photos post quickly to news websites in order to alert the world to the action as it unfolds. Texts, tweets, and blog posts publish from within the action and give voices to the faces we see. Cell phone videos, images, and texts are credited with helping the world see the protests in the Middle East during the Arab Spring (Preston); William Murphy Jr., a Baltimore lawyer representing the Freddie Gray family, “[thanked] God for cell phone video cameras” as they ensure that “the truth is finally coming out” about civil rights issues in America (Meyer); and cell phones were deemed enough of a threat in Ukraine that the government—in Orwellian fashion—sent out a mass text message stating, “Dear subscriber, you are registered as a participant in a mass disturbance” during protest there in 2014 (Merchant). Each of these politically charged situations led to various conversations surrounding the use of new technologies, institutions of power, and social movements. While these conversations are vital to how we view these movements in the digital era, it is equally important to consider the multiple ways these technologies inform our interactions with these narratives. These new technologies revolutionize the way we perceive and engage with civil rights protests, political uprisings, and everyday abuses of power, but we should also remain conscious of the ways we consider and engage with these mediated mediums.

These representations call attention to their mediated nature, illustrating the produced nature of the text as it hypermediates the experience to the consumer. Public reactions to these narrative and the authority placed in these recordings as representations of an authentic experience then effects the ways they are perceived and controlled. States have attempted hodgepodge laws and regulations to limit or regulate the use of cell phone video cameras due to the severe effects they have on the public consuming these narratives and

holding individuals accountable for their actions in a way not possible even just a few years ago.<sup>1</sup> We often think of these videos and images as a sort of unprocessed reality coming to us directly from the action with little to no intervention from outside sources and thereby invest more authority in them than we might otherwise. These technologies are vitally important when recording civil rights infractions, abuses of authority, or even revolutions, but it is crucial to consider the multiple mediations these videos undergo as they are published. In these representations we get the view of one individual within the action, and this view must first go through cell phone providers, web site hosts, internet service providers, network administrators, etc. As Steven Shaviro argues, “A message is not just passively conveyed from the sender to the receiver through a pre-existing medium. We should rather say, inverting McLuhan’s dictum, that the message is itself the medium” (24). Countless individuals and elements actively participate in the construction of the finished product of these recordings, mediating the messages we receive in a multitude of ways.

These mediations of narratives recorded in the event are provided for consumption by a mass audience afterward (even if only very shortly afterward), and by considering the history in which this type of reporting/recording operates we can think more critically about the multiple effects of (hyper)mediation. It is important to have conversations surrounding these technologies and mediums and the ways that we engage with them, but many of these events are politically charged and difficult to objectively analyze with in the current moment in a way that focuses on the mediations rather than the effects of these narratives. By establishing a history of mediated narratives recorded in the moment and reported to the public for mass consumption immediately afterward, I hope to reconsider our evaluation of

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<sup>1</sup> The ACLU calls attention to varying states’ laws regarding video recording as separate from photographing. Some states have attempted to prosecute individuals using wire-tapping laws due to the audio component of these recordings, though these cases rarely succeed.

these technologies. By considering authors who have been recording events and individuals that we might not otherwise see and mediating those narrative to a large public for mass consumption, we can historicize this type of reporting as it existed before the digital era.

### **Gonzo Journalism: A Camera in the Action Before Cameras in the Action**

Hunter S. Thompson's gonzo journalism attempted the kind of reporting that we now find commonplace due to the advent of cell phone cameras shooting within the action. When describing his vision of gonzo journalism, Thompson argues that "the ideal would be a film director/producer who writes his own scripts, does his own camera work, and somehow manages to film himself in action, as the protagonist or at least a main character" ("Jacket Copy" 120). When recording these narratives in his own writing, however, Thompson manipulates, edits, and mediates the original event in favor of producing his final text. Through investigating the multiple ways that he alters his source text when producing a final narrative, we can begin to understand (or at least interrogate) the differences and alterations that occur between reality, recordings of that reality, and the final text that arises from the two.

Central to an investigation of this form of writing is a consideration of the ways Thompson presents his final hypermediated text. Throughout *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, ink blots blur across the page (Figure 2), obfuscating words and standing in stark contrast with other forms of writing. These blots work alongside Ralph Steadman's illustrations within the text and jar the reader from the narrative as we engage with these paratextual artworks. All of these illustrations remind the reader of the printed format of the text itself, but the inkblots are especially significant since we must engage with them directly in the process of reading the text they obscure. These palimpsestual signifiers also bring

Thompson's process into focus as we imagine a jar of ink spilling across the page in his Woody Creek studio without time to clean up or retype the page before sending it to press. Thompson's writing process is further brought into relief through the inclusion of the editor's note that states that his writing completely fell apart and the editor had to intervene in order to get the thing finished (161). Each of these examples call attention to the process of production in a clear and obvious way that hypermediates the story.

### **Mediation, Mules and Men: Hypermediation in Zora Neale Hurston**

Thompson was not the first author to illustrate the process of production in a (hyper)mediated representation of reality presented to audiences for mass consumption. Zora Neale Hurston's collection *Mules and Men*, for example, presents her anthropological research after she journeyed throughout the South collecting African American folksongs, folktales, and everyday narratives. Upon its publication, many critics praised the book's accurate portrayal of a world that white people reading the book would normally not encounter. Furthermore, in the introduction to the text, Hurston's friend and professor Franz Boas claims that it presents the reader with the "true inner life" of those people on whom Hurston reports (xiii). In a way similar to that of Thompson's editor's note, Boas' introduction lends legitimacy to the narrative that follows and illustrates the process of production and editing that goes into the final text. In addition to this note, Hurston's narrative frame—that discusses her journey into these communities, interactions with these individuals, and experience collecting these narratives—hypermediates the text by showing the reader the normally hidden process of production. Lastly, Hurston's use of dialect jars the reader and forces us to engage with the limits of the textual format approximating an oral tradition in this hypermediated transition from verbal to print modes.

Hurston's focus on process and Boas' claims of authenticity present this collection as being as close to the events as possible, but (much like Thompson's work) the reality of the situation is much more complicated. In the introduction to the text, Arnold Rampersad reveals "that not all the stories and anecdotes in the book originated in the course of [Hurston's] research [as] [s]ome of them, picked up elsewhere, may have been substantially ornamented by Hurston, and perhaps she invented a few" (xxiii). Even in this instance of anthropological research, the mediations that occur from the event to the representations of that event have a huge impact on the final narrative we receive. By tracing these shifts between source and text—or at least considering the multiple elements that go into these mediations—we can investigate the manipulations within the work and consider how they catalyze a reader's desire for immediacy.

### **A History of Hypermediation**

In two chapters, I will investigate instances of hypermediation as both Hunter S. Thompson and Zora Neale Hurston transition from an oral format to a textual one. Chapter 1 focuses on an instance in the second half of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* that presents itself as a transcription of an original audio cassette. By revisiting that recording and comparing it to the transcription within the text, I will destabilize this representation and focus on the multiple manipulations within this hypermediation in order to discuss Thompson's process, consider journalistic representations in general, and think critically about hypermediated texts. In Chapter 2, I will investigate the situation of the author—this time Zora Neale Hurston—and what effects that position has on the manipulations between the tape and the text. While Thompson writes as a relatively privileged white male to other white men, Hurston stands between the white readership of her audience and the black

communities on which she reports. While she similarly details her writing and recording process (and in a way much less obviously manipulated than Thompson's), Hurston ultimately exists between two worlds in her mediations and representations.

Through this conversation, I hope to reconsider the ways we engage with hypermediated texts, especially in a pre-digital era. By using tools and perspectives designed for a digital age and applying them to analog formats, I will destabilize hypermediated narratives in general while also historicizing this kind of reporting. Nothing we receive is completely unmediated, and those technologies and pieces of literature that focus on their modes of production as a way of increasing their perceived authenticity require careful consideration. When considering the multiple mediations and networks that these narratives go through, we should remember Shaviro's statement that "[t]he network is never neutral and never merely technical. Rather, it is political to the core. Its development is largely driven by economic and ideological forces. It is both a weapon and a stake in ongoing political struggles" (21). Nothing comes to us completely unaffected and objective. By investigating these mediations in texts somewhat distanced (though not by much) from more contemporary discussions, I hope to establish a history and mode of engagement with pre-digital hypermediated texts.

## Chapter 1

### Do it now: Pure Hypermediated Gonzo Journalism

#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

*At this point in the chronology, Dr. Duke appears to have broken down completely; the original manuscript is so splintered that we were forced to seek out the original tape recording and transcribe it verbatim. We made no attempt to edit this section, and Dr. Duke refused even to read it. There was no way to reach him. The only address/contact we had, during this period, was a mobile phone unit somewhere on Highway 61—and all efforts to reach Duke at that number proved futile.*

*In the interests of journalistic purity, we are publishing the following section just as it came off the tape—one of many that Dr. Duke submitted for purposes of verification—along with this manuscript. According to the tape, this section follows an episode involving Duke, his attorney and a waitress at an all-night diner in North Vegas. The rationale for the following transaction appears to be based on a feeling—shared by both Duke and his attorney—that the American Dream would have to be sought out somewhere far beyond the dreary confines of the District Attorney's Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs.*

*The transcription begins somewhere on the Northeast outskirts of Las Vegas—zooming along Paradise Road in the White Whale. . .*

Hunter S. Thompson  
*Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas* (161)

Hunter S. Thompson shifted journalistic norms, combining fact and fiction, telling stories from a first person perspective, and using the tools of novel writing to report on events through gonzo journalism. In this writing, he remained skeptical of authority and narratives that perpetuated dominant hegemonic discourse (such as those from mainstream media, government agencies, or anyone with a vested interest in the status quo), often operated outside of the mainstream, and became popular through underground networks. In what is arguably his most successful piece of gonzo journalism, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971), Thompson (Raoul Duke) reports on a race in the desert and a drug convention with his Hispanic attorney Oscar Zeta Acosta (the Samoan Dr. Gonzo) in Las Vegas. The gonzo nature of the narrative starts from the first paragraph as Duke and Gonzo speed through the

desert at a hundred-miles-an-hour in a big red convertible towards Vegas screaming and hallucinating bats that are “swooping and screeching and diving around the car” (3).

Hegemonic narratives reporting on events—especially those operating under the guise of objective journalism—rarely offer such detailed views of the author and even less frequently detail such subjective drug-induced hallucinations, but this type of detail fills Thompson’s narrative as he spends more time discussing Duke and Gonzo’s journey and challenges in reporting on the event rather than detailing the event itself. The entire narrative—whether reporting on the events he was sent to cover or his own personal experience—is based on Thompson’s notes, sketches, and memories as he transcribes his lived experience into print.

The epigraph to Chapter 9 in the second half of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, titled “Breakdown on Paradise Blvd.,” calls attention to this aspect of Thompson’s process as verbatim tape transcription replaces the otherwise fictional framework during an afternoon with Thompson and Acosta (Duke and Gonzo) at Terry’s Taco Stand.<sup>2</sup> Although the rest of the novel is carefully crafted, this section appears as recorded with Thompson (the Editor) transcribing the tapes into text.<sup>3</sup> Thompson even makes an appeal to the “journalistic purity” of the tapes as a way of conveying the narrative as it occurred (161). However, these tapes—which were released in a CD box set in 2005—reveal some discrepancies between the textual narrative that unfolds in this scene and the audio recording of the event. While transcribing

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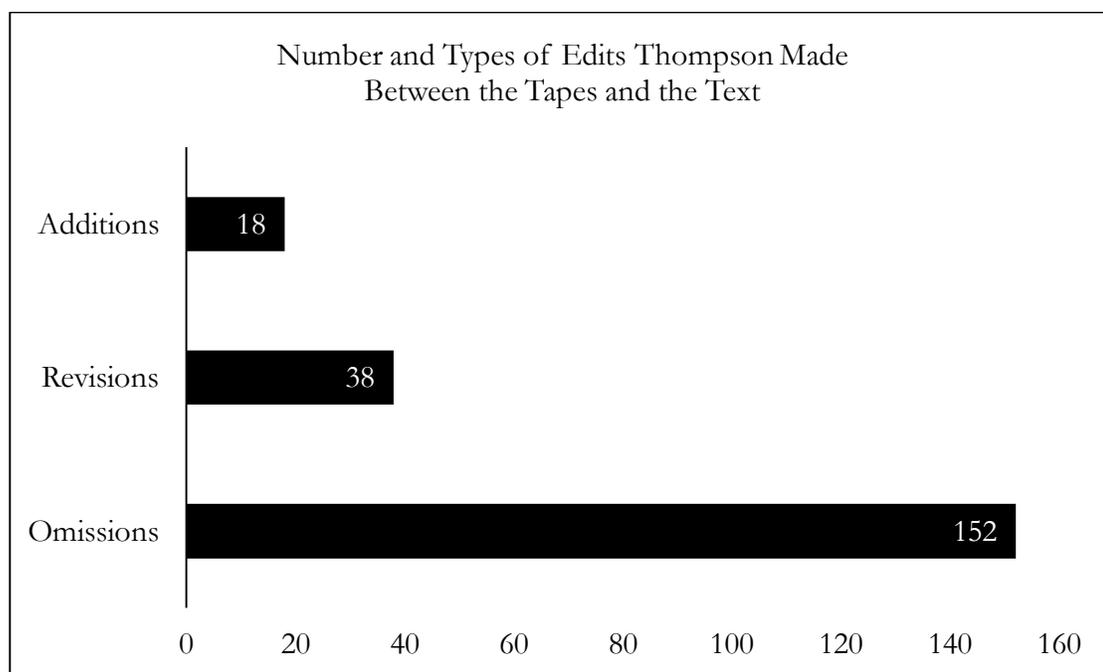
<sup>2</sup> The line between Thompson and the figure he created is a fine one, and I will attempt to parse out the multiple instances of his character throughout this essay. To this end it will be helpful to distinguish between his different specific figures. When I refer to Thompson I am referring to the author who has written these texts; when I refer to Hunter, I am referencing the actual person who was recorded in the tape transcription that I rely on for my arguments; and when I mention Duke, I am indicating Thompson’s gonzo persona protagonist in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Similarly, Gonzo will refer to Duke’s Hispanic attorney while Acosta will refer to Thompson’s real life friend and colleague.

<sup>3</sup> From this point on, I will refer to the original tape recordings as “tape” and the published book *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* as “text.” While I realize that both of these are “texts” of a sort, this differentiation will help to clarify and simplify my discussion between the two.

the narrative of the chapter, Thompson adjusts the language, cuts out asides and non-sequiturs, removes some sections, embellishes the details in others, and generally tightens everything up. Most of these edits seem superficial, but they result in a significant shift in the tone between the two sources. In total, there are just over 200 omissions, revisions, and additions from the fifteen-minute tape recording to the eight-page section in the book.

(Figure 1)

**(Figure 1) Changes from Tape to Text**



In addition to the alterations that he makes between the tapes and the text, Thompson also fabricates the editor's note that introduces this chapter, meaning that he uses the figure and authority of Editor as literary device to suggest that the reader is getting an unprocessed reality closer to the events than a piece of writing more carefully edited and revised. The fact that he fabricates the note, however, undermines this statement and belies his claims of authenticity. By looking closely at the original tapes compared to the transcribed text within *Fear and Loathing*, we can trace the evolution of Thompson's editing

and gain insight into his process. In this search, I would like to keep the following questions in mind: Why would Thompson present this chapter as dialogue, as opposed to the standard narrative of the rest of the book? What effect does this staging have on the reader? How does this crafting of narrative—from tape to text— affect the reader’s perception of this section? What can we glean from the differences between the two texts and, more significantly, why focus on the mode of production in such a clear and obvious way while simultaneously maintaining control over the final highly edited narrative?

### **Pacing the Narrative: The Tapes and the Text**

Although difficult to quantify objectively, the difference in pacing between the tapes and text is striking. The tapes seem tedious and cumbersome after reading the quick staccato ramblings of Duke and Gonzo in *Fear and Loathing* and are filled with long gaps of silence, whole swaths of dialogue that Thompson cuts in the final manuscript. For example, towards the beginning of this section in the book, after Gonzo says they should go to Boulder City, Duke replies, “All right. Let’s get some coffee somewhere . . .” and a few lines later says simply, “. . . I need some coffee” (161-162). The tapes are a bit less structured as Hunter rambles, “All right. Let’s get some coffee somewhere on the way...ah...oh...plenty of pl...tacos!” and a few lines later, in response to Acosta, cries, “I don’t give a fuck for tacos, I need some coffee.” The tape is filled with these small asides, but Thompson cuts them almost completely out in the text. A couple of well-placed “uhs” and “ums” are left, but these are reserved for the Waitress and Lou. Duke and Gonzo, on the other hand, come off slightly more coherent in the text, even as they drunkenly ramble about the American Dream.

In addition to editing out small asides, Thompson also combines voices and edits dialogue, condensing the tapes into more concise snippets for the final text. There's a moment in the tape, for example, where Thompson remembers exactly what a taco is:

*Hunter:* Oh, I see! The taco has meat on it.  
*Oscar:* Yeah.  
*Hunter:* I'd forgotten about that. Yeah, I'll try that.  
*Waitress:* Taco burger?  
*Hunter:* Could I have some coffee now, too?  
*Waitress:* Coffee for two?  
*Hunter:* Like right now. So I can drink it while I'm waiting?

The back and forth is truncated into just Duke's voice in the text:

*Duke:* . . . the taco has meat in it. I'll try that one. And some coffee now. Right now. So I can drink it while I'm waiting. (163)

These edits between the tape and the text make Duke appear more in control and put together than Hunter, thereby establishing a believable and trustworthy narrator in the middle of the story. Thompson cuts out the part where he forgets that tacos have meat, eliminates Oscar's input on the subject, and leaves out a somewhat comical misunderstanding between him and the cashier. Although these elements would provide a slightly more accurate representation of reality, they would not operate on the same narrative level that establishes a strong protagonist at the core of the text. Duke, as opposed to Hunter, is sure of himself, demands what he wants, and clearly explains his reasoning. He doesn't need his Hispanic attorney telling him about Mexican food and he leaves no room for error when talking to the waitress.

Although Gonzo and Duke appear more direct and coherent in the text, this editing undermines the perceived immediacy established by bringing in the tape transcriptions. By introducing this section as a direct copy of the original tapes, Thompson suggests that this

chapter was recorded as quickly as possible without editing and then immediately presented to the reader. The transcriptions that we get in *Fear and Loathing*, however, are only slightly less edited than the rest of the novel. Furthermore, the fact that Thompson passes this section off as verbatim transcriptions of the original tapes with the editor's note further undermines his already tenuous ethos, for this section went through as much editing as the fictional narrative frame that surrounds it. Rather than revealing the process of gonzo journalism in this instance by literally transcribing the tapes, Thompson curates and edits the source text in order to further the fictional narrative frame surrounding this section and make himself appear more articulate and in control of the events unfolding.

So what are we to make of these changes? The significant editing of the chapter might make it similar to the rest of the novel, but there are stylistic differences between this chapter and the straight narrative that surrounds it. The pacing, for example, is particularly fast when compared to the rest of the novel. Thompson's staccato prose ensures that the entire book reads pretty quickly—lines such as “the sky was full of what looked like huge bats” (3) are filled with monosyllable words, for example—and that standard continues in this section. By my count, this section contains only 37 words that are more than three syllables, and 28 of those instances are “American Dream” (mentioned 10 times), Psychiatrist's Club (mentioned 9 times), and Tropicana (a road name that appears 9 times). Additionally, this chapter is written in script dialogue without the need of dialogue tags slowing down the narrative as the reader's eyes glance over character names before reading the dialogue.<sup>4</sup> The increased white space from putting the chapter in this format also means less text to the page. All of these elements combine to create a chapter that reads much more quickly than those surrounding it, increasing the sense of immediacy the reader feels when

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<sup>4</sup> Such as “he says,” “she says,” etc.

speeding through the prose. Finally, due to Thompson's edits that remove silences and verbal wanderings, this chapter reads much more quickly than listening to the source tapes. Anecdotally, reading through the text at a leisurely pace takes me about five minutes, but the recording of this section is fifteen minutes long. Speeding through the silences, removing the misunderstandings and ramblings, and reading internally rather than speaking aloud all quicken the pace of this section in the text and the urgency with the reader moves through.

In addition to quickening the pace of this chapter through editing and style choices, Thompson also increases urgency through the placement of this chapter within the novel. In the tapes, this section comes after eight minutes of mind numbing back and forth between Hunter and Oscar discussing the expensive houses in the desert, a big wall that they drive beside, and how much money Thompson does or does not owe his attorney. In the text, however, Thompson puts the scene after one of the tenser chapters in the novel. The chapter immediately prior describes Duke and his attorney in an all-night diner at 3:00 a.m. where a drunk and drug-crazed Dr. Gonzo sexually harasses a harried waitress by propositioning her with a napkin asking, "Back Door Beauty?" (159). When she responds by calling the attorney a "*spic pimp*," he pulls out a Gerber Mini-Magnum hunting knife and, in a bizarre turn of events, demands to buy a whole pie sitting on the counter for five dollars (159-160). They leave the waitress paralyzed with fear and the narrative breaks chapters and moves into this scene. In a book filled with bizarre and disturbing scenes, this one is particularly odd (not to mention incredibly misogynistic) due to how quickly the violence escalates and the unpredictable nature of Dr. Gonzo's actions. Being familiar with him as a loose cannon immediately before this scene at Terry's Taco Stand thereby leaves the reader quickly flipping through this dialogue waiting for things to go awry. They never really do, but

the tension built from the scene before works alongside Thompson's editorial choices to quicken the pace of this chapter and speed the narrative along.

This quickening of the pace and instilled immediacy in the writing works alongside other textual and paratextual elements throughout the novel. Duke and Gonzo speed the narrative along with drug fueled staccato ramblings; ink blots (Figure 2) blur across the page, as if there wasn't time to fix them before going to print; Duke kicks off the story by crying, "Do it *now*: pure Gonzo journalism" (12); and at this key point in the novel Thompson interjects as Editor and the fictional framework of the narrative is replaced with verbatim tape transcriptions, suggesting that this section is more real, more raw, more immediate than the rest of the novel. By staging this section in this way, and in the context of a book filled with urgency, Thompson instills a sense of immediacy through a supposed lack of editing. By allowing the reader to see the original tapes, Thompson reveals the process behind the production of journalism that traditional reporting obscures, thereby suggesting that this section is more accurate to the events than the rest of the novel and certainly more so than other forms of journalism and news reporting. The fact that he does edit this section, however, undermines this reading and suggests that what Thompson actually accomplishes—here and elsewhere—is a form of mediation of the events through a highly produced style of immediacy in his writing.

### **Thompson's Storymaking: Leaving out the Boring Stuff (Like the Story)**

In his essay "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," Hayden White details the importance of selection when adapting history into a narrative form: "The events are *made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative

(Figure 2) Steadmanesque Inkblots blur across the page in *Fear and Loathing*.

188 HUNTER S. THOMPSON

nographic photos, ripped out of pulp magazines like *Whores of Sweden* and *Orgies in the Casbah*, that were plastered on the broken mirror with smears of mustard that had dried to a hard yellow crust. . . . and all these signs of violence, these strange red and blue bulbs and shards of broken glass embedded in the wall plaster . . .

No; these were not the hoofprints of your normal, godfearing junkie. It was far too savage, too aggressive. There was evidence, in this room, of excessive consumption of almost every type of drug known to civilized man since 1544 A.D. It could only be explained as a *montage*, a sort of exaggerated medical exhibit, put together very carefully to show what might happen if twenty-two serious drug felons—each with a *different* addiction—were penned up together in the same room for five days and nights, without relief.

Indeed. But of course that would never happen in Real Life, gentlemen. We just put this thing together for *demonstration* purposes . . .

Suddenly the phone was ringing, jerking me out of my fantasy stupor. I looked at it. Riiiiinnnnnggggggg . . . Jesus, what now? Is this *it*? I could almost hear the shrill voice of the Manager, Mr. Heem, saying the police were on their way up to my room and would I please not shoot through the door when they began kicking it down.

Riiiiinnnggggg . . . No, they wouldn't call first. Once they decided to take me, they would probably set an ambush in the elevator: first Mace, then a gang-swarm. It would come with no warning.

So I picked up the phone. It was my friend Bruce Innes, calling from the Circus-Circus. He had located the man who wanted to sell the ape I'd been inquiring about. The price was \$750.

"What kind of a greedhead are we dealing with?" I said. "Last night it was four hundred."

"He claims he just found out it was housebroken," said Bruce. "He let it sleep in the trailer last night, and the thing actually shit in the shower stall."

descriptive strategies, and the like” (84). Although White specifically discusses historical texts in this essay, the same can easily be said of Thompson’s gonzo journalism, especially as outlined in the transition from tape to text in this chapter. Through his editorial choices, Thompson eliminates those elements which would otherwise slow the pace of the narrative (silences, stammerings, background noises seeping through) and focuses instead on the story at hand: Duke and Gonzo’s search for the American Dream at Terry’s Taco Stand. Additionally, through his selection and focus Thompson portrays Duke and Gonzo as the ones in control of this scene. The waitress and Lou spend a whole page of dialogue along with a map simply trying to determine the location of streets they are familiar with in a city that both of them live in, but Duke and Gonzo are filled with conviction and certainty (165-167).

Besides altering the tapes in this incredibly specific way to shift the shape of the narrative in one chapter, Thompson also downplays those events that are less important than Duke’s search for the American Dream throughout the novel. Even though Duke was sent to the desert to cover the Mint 400 and then a Drug Convention, both of these events become secondary and serve more as literary devices that give him something to work against in his search for the American Dream. By downplaying what would normally be the main events of the story and amplifying his own meandering experiences, Thompson shifts the focus of the narrative from the story he was sent to cover to the story he wants to craft. Rather than detailing the specifics of the events on which he is reporting, Thompson describes his own experiences through the persona of Duke and uses the Mint 400 and the Drug Convention to justify his being in Vegas, explain the rapidly growing expenses, and generally provide an object for Duke to work against as he runs amok in the heart of the

American Dream. Duke does actually attend these events, and we do receive some minimal details about his experiences there, but these points always come back to his own journey and search and are never about the events themselves so much as the ways in which Duke engages with them.

Focusing on his own story and experience instead of (and often in direct opposition to) the events he was sent to report on becomes a defining tenant of gonzo journalism as the author becomes “the protagonist or at least a main character” in the story (“Jacket Copy” 120). However, this positioning of the author and the intrigue that surrounds it work only in reference to other works of journalism and the conventions that go along with those forms.

Hayden White puts it this way:

The primary *meaning* of a narrative would then consist of the destructurement of a set of events (real or imagined) originally encoded in one tropological mode and the progressive restructurement of the set in another tropological mode. As thus envisaged, narrative would be a process of decodation and recodation in which an original perception is clarified by being cast in a figurative mode different from that in which it has come encoded by convention, authority, or custom. And the explanatory force of the narrative would then depend on the contrast between the original encodation and the later one. (96)

It is only in relation to more traditional forms of literature that Thompson’s gonzo journalism makes sense. Since we know that he *should* be reporting on the stories he’s sent to Vegas to cover, and we know the conventions that those narratives normally follow (especially at this time), Thompson’s aberrant behavior of focusing on his own story and own narrative subverts these genre norms and turns the narrative inward. He operates outside of authorities calling for objective reporting, focus on the story, and straightforward news stories. Thompson builds his own ethos and style as an outlaw journalist reporting on

his lived experience rather than fabricating some “objective” piece of reporting that could never exist in order to tell the story that the editors already knew they wanted before he left Los Angeles. Duke’s absolute refusal to report on the story, which Thompson uses as literary device for Duke’s motivations, intrigues us because we know it should be otherwise. The narrative and protagonist that we do get, then, appears all the more significant as it is more important than the original story (what could be more significant than a search for the American Dream?).

The events that Thompson chooses to focus on in the narrative create a gonzo narrator who operates as an authority on underground drug culture, the sixties as a whole, and generally most activities that get the adrenal glands pumping. Raoul Duke consumes more drugs than humanly possible, violates countless city and state traffic laws, and generally runs wild in Vegas on his search for the American Dream. The inclusion of these details is especially significant, for, as White reveals,

Our *explanations* of historical structures and processes are thus determined more by what we leave out of our representations than by what we put in. For it is in this brutal capacity to exclude certain facts in the interest of constituting others as components of comprehensible stories that the historian displays his tact as well as his understanding. (90-91)

Searching for what’s missing in gonzo journalism—beyond the story on which Duke was sent to the desert to report—is a difficult proposition magnified by what Thompson includes. In a text filled with rampant drug use, skipping out on massive hotel bills, driving a car across an airport runway, sex with a minor, and multiple other felonies, what could Thompson possibly leave out? In a story that details a rambling drug raddled narrator, why cut out certain parts of his speech in the transition from tape to text? If Thompson is attempting immediacy in his reporting through style and function, then why craft the

narrative so carefully and cut out non-sequiturs, thereby removing (or at least altering) much of this sense of urgency?

### **Instilled Immediacy Through Hyper/Remediation**

In their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin discuss the multiple ways that new technologies represent reality and the effects of various formats. When investigating the ways that these tools render narratives more immediate, they argue that “[i]f the logic of immediacy leads one either to erase or to render automatic the act of representation, the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible” (33-34). Taking this definition, we could say that Thompson hypermediates reality through gonzo journalism. By adding the ink blots, Thompson calls attention to the mediated piece of fiction that we read and the physical process of writing that went on behind it (Figure 2). By including news clippings (Figure 3) from stories unfolding as he is writing, Thompson illustrates the context in which the events of *Fear and Loathing* unfold. By interjecting as Editor and transcribing tapes into dialogue format for the novel, Thompson makes the process of novel writing visible and forces the reader to acknowledge the multiple changes and adaptations that occurred while producing this narrative. Ultimately, Thompson’s hypermediacy in this section makes evident the multiple technologies and ways of reporting that went into the final document, here and elsewhere in the novel.

The question remains, however, why would Thompson mediate this section in this way? What does this chapter accomplish—through hypermediation—that couldn’t be accomplished in another way? Bolter and Grusin describe the effect that this type of reporting may have on the reader: “In every manifestation, hypermediacy makes us aware of

(Figure 3) News report block quote breaks the narrative in *Fear and Loathing*.

200 HUNTER S. THOMPSON

SHIP COMMANDER BUTCHERED  
BY NATIVES AFTER  
"ACCIDENTAL" ASSAULT  
ON GUAM

(AOP)—*Aboard the U.S.S. Crazy Horse: Somewhere in the Pacific* (Sept. 25)—The entire 3465-man crew of this newest American aircraft carrier is in violent mourning today, after five crewmen including the Captain were diced up like pineapple meat in a brawl with the Heroin Police at the neutral port of Hong See. Dr. Bloor, the ship's chaplain, presided over tense funeral services at dawn on the flight deck. The 4th Fleet Service Choir sang "Tom Thumb's Blues" . . . and then, while the ship's bells tolled frantically, the remains of the five were set afire in a gourd and hurled into the Pacific by a hooded officer known only as "The Commander."

Shortly after the services ended, the crewmen fell to fighting among themselves and all communications with the ship were severed for an indefinite period. Official spokesmen at 4th Fleet Headquarters on Guam said the Navy had "no comment" on the situation, pending the results of a top-level investigation by a team of civilian specialists headed by former New Orleans district attorney James Garrison.

. . . Why bother with newspapers, if this is all they offer? Agnew was right. The press is a gang of cruel faggots. Journalism is not a profession or a trade. It is a cheap catch-all for fuckoffs and misfits—a false doorway to the backside of life, a filthy piss-ridden little hole nailed off by the building inspector, but just deep enough for a wino to curl up from the sidewalk and masturbate like a chimp in a zoo-cage.

the medium or media and (in sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious ways) reminds us of our desire for immediacy” (34). By interjecting as Editor and transcribing the tapes without editing, Thompson calls attention to our desire to get the story immediately produced after—or during—the action. Rather than reading a highly edited story that has been through rethinking and revision, we want the raw story as it came from the events. In this way, this hypermediation speaks to our “desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real” as “defined in terms of the viewer’s experience; it is that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response” (Bolter 53). Because there is an editor’s note, because the format suggests these conversations actually happened in this way as recorded on the tapes, because they are presented to us differently than the rest of the novel, we feel that this section is closer to the real events as they unfolded, and this feeling—rather than being objectively correct—is the most important aspect of Thompson’s hypermediation. Thompson doesn’t have to transcribe the tapes verbatim as they came off the reels, merely making us believe he did and instilling a feeling of immediacy into the reader is enough.

### **Thompson’s Gonzo Journalism: An Inherently Hypermediated Form**

Gonzo journalism, unlike traditional ways of reporting, is dogmatic in its subjectivity and gives the reader a story that appears closer to the action, which therefore feels more immediate in its reporting. Thompson, discussing the process that goes into this production, says that in *Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas*

[the] idea was to buy a fat notebook and record the whole thing, *as it happened*, then send in the notebook for publication—without editing. That way, I felt, the eye & mind of the journalist would be functioning as a camera. The writing would be selective & necessarily interpretive—but

once the image was written, the words would be final.  
 (“Jacket Copy” 120)

According to Thompson, the gonzo journalist operates inside the action recording everything as it happens and then publishes it immediately without editing or revision. This way, the story reported stays close to the event without the author having time to reflect, consider, and revise the narrative and the reality, not to mention the editors sticking in narrative frames as they lash it together for publication. It may not be objective—in fact, it is necessarily subjective as it is one person’s point of view—but at least it can be true to the lived experience the author had and therefore closer to reality than other forms of writing that feign objective reporting. Although other pieces of journalism undergo editing and revision in order to adhere to the norms and expectations of the genre, gonzo journalism purposefully avoids these tropological trappings in its process and presentation. It may not be as clean as other forms of journalism, but what it loses in editing and polish it gains in an appearance of immediacy and accuracy to the author’s experience.

Thompson’s statement that the journalist should function as a camera is particularly revealing and suggests that this form of writing, more so than other forms, is immediate and unedited. This type of writing attempts to lessen the distance between the reader and the action by removing layers of mediation. Hayden White, when discussing representations of historical events, explains

that a set of events originally encoded in one way is simply being decoded by being recoded in another. The events themselves are not substantially changed from one account to another. That is to say, the data that are to be analyzed are not significantly different in the different accounts. What is different are the modalities of their relationships. (97)

Video footage from the center of action, at least as we would normally envision it, lessens the levels of codation that the narrative undergoes before we view it. Rather than the complex system of writers and editors that traditional journalism undergoes, video footage of an event—which gonzo journalism attempts to approximate—appears to have fewer levels of recodation and decodation to go through. The participant shoots video and we view that video and accept it as a relatively accurate representation of events, inasmuch as the genre allows. One need only consider the rise in cell phone videos of civil rights protests and police brutality, and the subsequent prosecution and/or condemnation of the aggressors in these situations, to see this concept in practice. By attempting this type of reporting in writing, Thompson appears to get at something closer to the action and less tarnished by outside forces. The fact that he heavily edits the tape transcriptions in *Fear and Loathing*, however, undermines this notion and suggests that the instilled sense of immediacy and authenticity is more important than actually being immediate or authentic, at least in this specific instance.<sup>5</sup>

By editing the original events and telling the story filtered through his own experience and perspective, however, Thompson writes his own phenomenological truth that more accurately reports on his subjective experience of the events as they unfolded. By reveling in his subjectivity, Thompson writes a story nearer to his subjective and personal truth than other types of writing that attempt to separate the reporter from the action. This style of writing is inherently immediate (the further one gets from the experience the less

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<sup>5</sup> One could argue that Thompson's later works more closely fulfill this ideal as they undergo much less editing. When working on *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72*, for example, Thompson produced articles for *Rolling Stone* on a monthly basis as he followed the Presidential campaigns. Because of the tight timelines and quick turnarounds, Thompson notoriously produced these pieces under the wire and there was little to no time for editing between his staying up late to meet a deadline, faxing the story off to the magazine, and it almost immediately going to press afterwards.

they are able to remember it clearly) and hypermediated (being upfront about the writing process and multiple mediations helps close the gap between experience and writing for the reader who then gets to see this process unfold). Although we may initially consider these two elements at opposing ends of the spectrum—multiplying the layers of mediation and focusing on those layers appears to detract from the immediacy of the work—they actually come together in this instance. By focusing on the modes of production and illustrating those to the reader, Thompson suggests that he didn't have time to hide these modes under layers of prose and editing and simply needed to get the story out as quickly as possible, and the reader sees the entire process unfold.

Thompson is quick to point out he was unable to follow through with this approach in *Fear & Loathing*, which he calls “a *failed experiment* in Gonzo Journalism” (Jacket Copy, 120). It is well known that Thompson produced this book after working on two separate stories that he combined into one narrative through the installation of a fictional framework. Thompson recorded many of the events that unfold in *Fear & Loathing* as they happened, but he went back and wrote the story, honed the language, and closely edited the text to produce the final document. According to Thompson, his failure to produce a more raw and immediate text may have been one of grit as “[t]rue Gonzo reporting needs the talents of a master journalist, the eye of an artist/photographer and the heavy balls of an actor. Because the writer *must* be a participant in the scene, while he's writing it—or at least taping it, or even sketching it. Or all three” (106). Thompson was able to hit many of these points individually while working on *Fear & Loathing*, but they didn't all come off seamlessly to produce the perfect piece of gonzo journalism. He wrote in the hotel room, made himself actor in many of the scenes, and recorded much of his and Oscar's trip via a personal

cassette recorder as the “action” was unfolding. According to Thompson it fails as gonzo journalism, however, as he spent months after working on the manuscript to produce the final book. Sections such as the tape transcription arguably come closer to a gonzo ideal as the gap between the events and the narrative is closed, but even this section undergoes heavy editing and tailoring in order to work within the larger frame of the novel. Even here, Thompson shapes and crafts the narrative so that he can report on the events as he felt them rather than how they may have actually occurred.

### **New Journalism and Other Voices on Thompson**

When discussing these narrative techniques in gonzo journalism and Thompson’s writing as a whole, I would be remiss to not also briefly discuss Tom Wolfe’s New Journalism, especially as it relates to Thompson’s work and his instilled sense of immediacy. In Tom Wolfe’s introduction to *The New Journalism*, he details the movement of him and other writers “dethroning the novel as the number one literary genre,” (3) even if “all they were asking was the privilege of dressing up like” one (9). Wolfe and others used the tools of fiction when writing their feature articles, creating the genre of New Journalism along the way. Thompson, however, took this idea further, often spending more time focusing on his own personal narrative and fictional framework than the story on which he was reporting. Additionally, Thompson accuses Wolfe of being “too crusty to *participate* in his stories” and “[t]he people he feels comfortable with [as being] dull as stale dogshit” (“Jacket Copy” 122). Wolfe’s New Journalism situates authors on the sidelines recording the events as they unfold before going back to the office and writing an elegant piece of journalism that utilizes the tools of fiction. The gonzo journalist, on the other hand, writes in the middle of the action, reporting from the inside out while simultaneously becoming the actor, director, writer,

protagonist of the story who immediately publishes his unedited notes. Writing in this unusual manner makes Thompson's work difficult to categorize, and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is categorized as nonfiction and/or journalism on the cover of the book, approximates the form of a novel, and can also be referred to and described as an autobiography. In spite of these difficulties, however, Thompson's writing is generally considered some form of journalism, and this is certainly the critical conversation in which it is placed.

Many critics and journalists place Thompson and his gonzo journalism in line with Wolfe and New Journalism and discuss the merit of his work (or the lack thereof, depending on their perspective) in this context. Although this description and comparison provides crucial insight, comparing gonzo journalism to straight journalism is problematic for many reasons. Wayne Booth, discussing *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72* shortly after it came out, gets at some of these issues when he reveals that "[t]he only reason Thompson gives us to believe what he says is what we professors of rhetoric call his ethos; he works very hard to establish his character as the main proof of what he has to say. But shit, man, his ethos ain't no fuckin' good" (10). Judging Thompson's writing by veracity of his reporting largely misses the point and certainly gives ample evidence to discredit Thompson as a reporter. If Thompson makes a couple hundred changes when transcribing cassette tapes, then how much editing and fictionalizing does the rest of his writing undergo?

What gonzo journalism does accomplish, however, is to bring the traditional practice of objective journalism and reporting into question. While Thompson languishes in his subjectivity, creating a form of journalism that John Filatreau calls "Point of View Run Wild," he suggests that other forms of journalism also include elements of subjectivity that they fail to acknowledge as they feign objective reporting (*Hunter S. Thompson*, 36). The main

difference between gonzo journalism and traditional journalism, as James Green puts it, is that gonzo journalism looks “at things from the inside out, like an artist, not from the outside in, observing and recording like a photographer. Gonzo is free, not manipulated by time and space, visceral not cerebral” (108). Through gonzo journalism, Thompson can be upfront about his prejudices and perspective from inside the action, rather than attempting to downplay these elements as much as possible. Free from the constraints of straight journalism to just report the facts, Thompson crystallizes his perspective and opinion on the events. Furthermore, while writing in this way, Thompson suggests that this is what we’ve been reading all along. He comes back to this idea in *Campaign Trail ’72*, arguing that you will not find objective journalism “under any byline of [his]; or anyone else [he] can think of. With the possible exception of things like box scores, race results, and stock market tabulations, there is no such thing as Objective Journalism. The phrase itself is a pompous contradiction in terms” (33).

Far from objective, Thompson’s writing is highly subjective, fictionalized, and hypermediated to a degree beyond that of other journalism that obscures the process that went into writing it. Thompson frequently applies a fictional framework onto his writing in order to craft a narrative out of haphazard notes, sketches, recordings, memories, etc. and then details this process in his writing. Robert Love describes his experience of this process—he was Thompson’s editor on a few stories—in “A Technical Guide for Editing Gonzo: Hunter S. Thompson from the other end of the Mojo Wire” and illustrates a slightly more collaborative representation. Thompson would regularly fax his typed copy via a primitive fax system he dubbed the Mojo Wire under pressure from magazine assistants who “often stayed up all night, toe-to-toe with Doc, and were asked to find and deliver

telephones, whiskey, typewriters, tape recorders, batteries, blow-up dolls, and other things” (62). On the other end of the *Mojo Wire*, an editor would wait all night talking with Thompson “for hours on the phone, trying to straighten the plot lines, eliminate falseness, root out clichés and repetition” (63). Gonzo journalism, it appears, is almost always a collaborative effort as Thompson manufactures a crisis against which to work to produce his writing. While “[o]ther writers more or less turned in manuscripts that were more or less finished,” Thompson requires a crisis to work against and manufactures one if it can’t be found otherwise (64).

By creating a crisis and waiting until the last minute, Thompson instills a sense of immediacy in his writing and process. The writing feels raw and immediate because Thompson creates a situation that demands he produce his writing now, no matter how long ago the actual event occurred. As Love reveals, he “came to understand that the word ‘deadline’ was actually Hunter’s code for a two-to three-week red-zone standoff against the exigencies of publishing” (62). If Thompson was largely unable to publish his unedited notes immediately after the event, then he could at least create a sense of immediacy in the story that he does produce. This way he has the time to reflect on the story; write, edit, and revise his notes; and still maintains a sense of urgency in his tone as he writes at the last possible minute and publishes work that feels immediate. Furthermore, by detailing this process of duress (as he often does through editor’s notes, complaining about the writing process, and railing against his publishers) Thompson instills this sense of urgency in his prose and the reader. By claiming to be mostly honest about his own process and style, Thompson suggests that his writing contains the multiple steps of his process transparently presented to

the reader through hypermediated formats that call attention to the form and function of his writing.

Even this hypermediated presentation of the process leaves out some important aspects, however. As Love details, after Thompson's text came through the Mojo Wire more or less complete,

It fell to the editor and his trusty assistant to manage the flow of additions and corrections, impose order on the piece, and perhaps even slide it into a narrative frame. I wrote endless cheerful memos about such things, encouraging the writing of new, connecting material to form a coherent whole. [...] The editor's role was getting those sentences to pile up and then exhibit forward momentum. (Hunter called this process "lashing them together.") (64)

Thompson's process was collaborative to the point that editors or assistants often produced entire sections in order to create a coherent narrative out of his writing. At least in some of Thompson's writing, the narrative frame that binds the story together sometimes came from other writers instilling form on an otherwise disparate piece of gonzo journalism. Although Thompson often details his writing through hypermediated formats that call attention to the process, they still do not encompass all of the steps that go on and bits are lost in the mediation. Even when Thompson makes his process transparent, he still obfuscates certain aspects of his writing and shifts the authorship and meaning of this piece of journalism, especially regarding the fictional framework surrounding these pieces. But why have this fictional framework in the first place? Why do the editors feel it necessary to force these pieces of hypermediated reporting into the confines of more traditional journalism? Why does Thompson, too, feel this need in *Fear and Loathing* in order to craft the story he wants to tell? Why not simply publish the pieces of writing in chunks with very little tying them together?

### Thompson's Fiction Frames, Hayden White's Encodation, and the Tapes

Gonzo journalism, as Thompson envisions it, aspires to this incoherent style of reporting. By taking notes in the middle of the action and reporting them immediately afterwards, the gonzo journalist resists form or genre. The ideal piece of gonzo journalism has no inherent structure and requires an active reader to make sense of the narrative and piece the events together. Rather than constructing a highly tuned narrative like in New Journalism, the ideal piece of gonzo journalism looks like merely notes. Thompson, however, never really reached this ideal. His later work more closely approximates this form as he pieces together letters, stories, snapshots, notes, and sketches in hodgepodge style.<sup>6</sup> Even these pieces still contain an overarching narrative that ties the pieces together, however, and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (arguably the strongest piece of gonzo journalism Thompson wrote) has a highly developed narrative framework. This fictional framework makes sense of the notes and allows Thompson to tell the story he wants, rather than leaving the events up to the reader to interpret. In order to revel in his subjectivity, Thompson carefully crafts the narrative into his own vision and uses the notes as fodder for his more important overarching story.

Hayden White investigates the tensions between historical events and the narratives that arise from them, which hold much in common with Thompson's gonzo journalism:

The original strangeness, mystery, or exoticism of the events is dispelled, and they take on a familiar aspect, not in their details, but in their functions as elements of a familiar kind of configuration. They are rendered comprehensible by being subsumed under the categories of the plot structure in which they are encoded as a story of a particular kind. (86)

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<sup>6</sup> *Better than Sex* and *Kingdom of Fear* are prime examples of this format as they have an assortment of various narratives, photos of Thompson with assorted celebrities, and photocopied faxes, letters, and newspaper clippings throughout the books.

Although immediately publishing his notes without editing might conform with Thompson's original ideal vision for gonzo journalism, it doesn't make for great reading or strong literature. It is only through this instilled fictional framework that the narrative begins to take on meaning and significance. Thompson carefully controlled this process in *Fear and Loathing* when detailing his search for the American Dream, the event which all other pieces center on. In some of his later work, however, it fell to the editors to make these connections and create the meaning making narrative frames that tie the writing together.

Considering this high level of control from Thompson, I would like to revisit the scene in *Fear and Loathing* where he transcribes the tapes into dialogue. We've already established that while this chapter may at first appear to operate outside of this fictional narrative framework, Thompson edited this section and carefully crafted a narrative that could operate within his manifestly destined story. What deserves a bit more attention, however, is the role that the tapes play in regards to the actual events that took place and were recorded, or what White calls "The data that are to be analyzed" (97). There exists, separate from the tapes and the text, a reality which each of these representations are attempting to approximate. Hunter S. Thompson and Oscar Zeta Acosta actually were in Las Vegas on that day in 1970 and they did stop at Terry's Taco Stand and they did record the whole thing on the tape. The data of this reality, however, is gone and the mediation is all that is left. The tapes appear to be closer to the reality than the mediated text (much as the video camera is often closer to the story than a piece of published journalism), but even these are a mere shadow.

It could be argued that between the tapes and reality exists a gap at least as large as that between the tapes and the text. That is to say, no one can fully encapsulate what it was

like to actually be at Terry's Taco stand that day. Thompson and Acosta are both gone and the taco stand employees are lost. Even if they weren't, their personal narratives would be in themselves questionable at best. What kind of gaps exist during this transmediation, and how could we trace the differences? For Thompson's work, this chapter in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is one of the few instances where we can readily investigate this process and difference between the tapes and the text. The narrative framework and multiple voices at play problematize close reading of Thompson, and, as Robert Love suggests, "[f]act-checking Hunter Thompson [is] one of the sketchiest occupations ever created in the publishing world" (65). Thompson's writing is highly honed, especially with *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and the sense of immediacy that is instilled within it is carefully crafted by a master narrator. In the end, the success of this piece as gonzo journalism hinges on the immediacy Thompson instills in the text through his honed and edited tight prose, the gonzo persona of Raoul Duke, and his manipulation of hypermediation.

### **Hypermediated Anthropology**

Although Thompson's writing is heavily edited to manipulate the fictionalized story, there is another author whose work—both written and otherwise—attempts a more authentic and accurate portrayal of the events or narratives she was recording and representing. Zora Neale Hurston's anthropological research presented in *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse* presents African American folk tales, songs, and voodoo practices in print format. Additionally, Hurston worked for the Federal Writers Project during the Great Depression and created audio recording of these narratives from ex-slaves who were still alive at the time as well as singing and telling some songs and stories herself. By examining these resources and the significances they hold for the narratives they represent, I hope to

further problematize the relationship between reality, recordings of that reality, and representations of that reality presented for mass audiences. Furthermore, by using the same theoretical approaches for an African American woman—rather than a straight white male—I hope to investigate additional elements of hypermediation, paratextual elements within the text, and instilled immediacy within the narrative.

## Chapter 2

### “Them Big Old Lies”: Hypermediated Anthropology in *Mules and Men*

*Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you.*

Zora Neale Hurston  
*Their Eyes Were Watching God* (14)

In the previous chapter we looked at instances of hypermediation in Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and how Thompson increases the immediacy and perceived authenticity in his text through presenting the mode of production to the reader. The white male audience of *Rolling Stone* magazine is enamored with Thompson's gonzo character as his privileged position enables a drug-crazed run through Las Vegas that operates as a platform to comment on sixties counter-culture, Manifest Destiny, and the American Dream. What would happen, however, if we apply the view developed in Chapter 1 to a writer with a different power relationship to her audience and culture? How can we investigate instances of hypermediation within a text from an author in a marginalized group? While Thompson uses hypermediation to increase his perceived authenticity and authority as a way of justifying his ability to tell a narrative about freaks and hippies (who make up his readership), I would like to find an author who cannot possibly be a part of her intended audience. What would we discover by applying these theories to someone permanently and inexorably isolated from most of the people reading her book?

When searching for this author we may immediately think of other journalists and forms of reporting as examples, but Thompson suggests through his own writing that these

narratives are deeply subjective and go through many revisions on the part of author, editor, etc. before becoming the final product. If the whole point of gonzo journalism is to destabilize the authority of traditional reporting, then turning to that reporting for truth and a point of comparison would be highly problematic at best. Furthermore, instances of hypermediation exist in multiple texts and genres, and investigating writing that attempts a more distanced, scientific gaze will reveal more departures, differences, and significances for this mode of reading than another piece of journalism, even if it was a more conventional piece. By looking for writing that more easily disguises its mode of production, we can investigate an instance of hypermediation that subtly calls attention to the print format of the text through paratextual information surrounding the core narrative. In journalism, the modes of production are always in mind as they exist in the text itself through editor's notes, letters to the publication, photos of the stories, and more that remind us of the mediated nature of the text we consume. A piece of fiction, poetry, or anthropological research, on the other other hand, may at first hide its process in the final piece, but a second glance brings into relief the limits of the print format and calls attention to the produced and physical nature of the text. Zora Neale Hurston's first collection of anthropological research, *Mules and Men* (1935), provides just such an example.

*Mules and Men* was based on Hurston's anthropological research conducted in the South between 1928 and 1932 that was funded by Charlotte Osgood Mason, a wealthy philanthropist who supported many Harlem Renaissance artists and writers. This book is a collection of folktales, folksongs, and everyday narratives from working-class black people in Florida. It stages these individual pieces as works of art in their own right, and the collection presents them in a form easily consumed by middle-class white audiences. While Langston

Hughes, Richard Wright, and other Harlem Renaissance writers celebrated middle-class black people as a way of raising them and their art in the estimation of white audiences, Hurston makes the same argument for the poorer working-class black people through this piece.<sup>7</sup> As Daniel Hardy reveals, “Hurston saw herself not only as a scholar of black folklore but also as an arranger, an ambassador, and a teacher of that folklore to audiences that had their conceptions of black culture formed by the dominant influence of white culture” (482).

Some of Hurston’s contemporaries identified this trait in Hurston and were less kind in their evaluation. According to the University of Virginia’s website dedicated to Hurston, some “went so far as to catalogue [*Mules and Men*] as a psuedo minstrel show, the performance of a ‘literary climber,’ who hoped to present the white reading audience with happy go-lucky black people in the vein of Uncle Tom.” Criticisms aside, few would doubt that in this collection Hurston gathered, edited, and presented black folktales and working-class black culture for consumption from a middle-class white audience. In this quest, Hurston began in Eatonville, Florida—the all-black town where she was raised and that later served as a primary setting in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)—before venturing into logging camps and saw mills in search of the African American folktales and songs of her youth. Although Hurston had written several short stories, essays, plays, and even her first novel—*Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (1934)—by this point, she was still a novice at anthropological research and this was her first concerted attempt.

In this search for “authentic” black narratives, Hurston got down in the muck—literally in the case of working in the Everglades—and captured these stories and songs directly from the source. Throughout this process, Hurston followed the leadership of her

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<sup>7</sup>It is worth noting that there was no small amount of contention around these portrayals and modes of writing. Hurston and Wright ultimately had a large falling out that is well documented over their respective work and opinions of one another.

professor, friend, and benefactor, Franz Boas. Arnold Rampersand describes Boas in the Introduction to *Mules and Men*, arguing that “although a white man himself, [Boas] was perhaps the outstanding champion of the notion of cultural relativism. He urged that cultures be seen on their own terms and not according to a scale that held European civilization to be the supreme standard” (xviii). Much like Hurston, Boas was interested in finding, recording, and presenting these stories as works of art in their own right. This collection was intended as a way of presenting these folktales to white audiences, and many editorial choices and changes were made to that end. No doubt black writers of the time and after read and interacted with Hurston’s work (if not for the reparative work and research of Alice Walker, for example, Hurston may have very well remained in obscurity).<sup>8</sup> But this collection, like much other Harlem Renaissance literature and art from the time, was intended for middle-class white audiences interested in consuming African American art and culture.

Hurston’s position as a black woman writing for a white audience, then, operates much differently than Thompson writing to other white male freaks, and we see this dynamic enacted in their respective uses of hypermediation. While Thompson uses hypermediacy as a way of increasing his perceived authenticity and authority in order to connect with his audience, Hurston’s project depends upon the inherent differences among her, her subject, and her audience. Hurston, like Thompson, increases the perceived authenticity of her narratives through hypermediation, but not in a way that directly connects her to her audience. Rather, she operates in a middle ground between these two worlds,

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<sup>8</sup> “A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View,” “On Refusing to Be Humbled by Second Place in a Contest You Did Not Design,” and “Looking for Zora” are all incredibly informative in this area and can be found in Harold Bloom’s somewhat dated anthology, *Modern Critical Views: Zora Neale Hurston*.

connected to the white world of her benefactors and editor through her education, clothing, and privileged way of life, and tied to the world of African American folktales and songs through her upbringing and the color of her skin. Throughout the collection, Hurston illustrates her position as part of each of these worlds and uses this authority to increase her ethos when researching, recording, and presenting these narratives.

Hurston describes this position between two worlds in her introduction to *Mules and*

*Men*:

From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. (1)

Hurston, unlike most white people reading this book, grew up hearing these folktales and folksongs. Whereas many people became familiar with Brer Rabbit through Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus narrator, Hurston knew these figures firsthand from adults retelling folktales in the communities of her childhood. Being surrounded by this culture growing up, however, Hurston was unable to see it clearly before moving off to college and developing her anthropological gaze. It wasn't until Hurston moved to the North and was disconnected from the communities of her childhood that she fully realized the unique value that these traditions offer to American culture. *Mules and Men* is intended, in many ways, to bridge that gap between two worlds, and Hurston remains deeply invested in each. To that end, we see many instances of hypermediation similar to Thompson as Hurston increases her perceived authenticity as a way of garnering a large readership for her collection of black folktales, folksongs, and everyday life.

First, *Mules and Men* contains an introduction from an outside source lending authority to the author and her work. While Thompson's editor's note was fabricated by him and placed towards the end of *Fear and Loathing*, however, Hurston's introduction from Franz Boas opens the book and introduces her writing and research. Second, at the insistence of her publisher Bertram Lippincott, Hurston instilled a narrative frame that ties the folk talks together in order to make the collection more readable (Harney 471). This frame is largely autobiographical as she details the process of searching for and recording these stories and details the lives of the people from whom they come. Hurston describes her journey to the lumber mills, the difficulty she has in getting people to accept her and tell their "lies," and her personal experience through all of it. As opposed to Thompson's frame, however, Hurston avoids aggrandizing herself and her own journey, focusing instead on the people she is there to study.

The last point that I would like to discuss in this chapter is Hurston's use of dialect when writing the folktales. While this point bears no direct counterpoint in *Fear and Loathing*, it operates in a similar capacity as the tapes transitioning into text as Hurston translates an oral tradition into the written word. All of these instances beg the question, what are the multiple significances of Hurston's use of hypermediation in *Mules and Men*? How does Boas' introduction affect our reading of *Mules and Men* and (problematically) increase the perceived authenticity of Hurston's book? How does the inclusion of Hurston's narrative frame affect our reading of the folktales, especially as it repeatedly calls attention to the process of producing and collecting the narrative(s) we read? What does Hurston's use of dialect and her specific editorial choices in how to present speech on the page reveal about her process, her goals, and the nature of the folktales she collects in this book?

### “Negro Magic and Voodoo”: A Franz Boas Introduction

*Ever since the time of Uncle Remus, Negro folklore has exerted a strong attraction upon the imagination of the American public. Negro tales, songs and sayings without end, as well as descriptions of Negro magic and voodoo, have appeared; but in all of them the intimate setting in the social life of the Negro has been given very inadequately.*

*It is the great merit of Miss Hurston's work that she entered into the homely life of the southern Negro as one of them and was fully accepted as such by the companions of her childhood. Thus she has been able to penetrate through that affected demeanor by which the Negro excludes the White observer effectively from participating in the true inner life. Miss Hurston has been equally successful in gaining the confidence of the voodoo doctors and she gives us much that throws a new light upon the much discussed voodoo beliefs and practices. Added to all this is the charm of a loveable personality and of a revealing style which makes Miss Hurston's work an unusual contribution to our knowledge of the true inner life of the Negro.*

*To the student of cultural history the material presented is valuable not only by giving the Negro's reaction to everyday events, to his emotional life his humor and passions, but it throws into relief also the peculiar amalgamation of African and European tradition which is so important for understanding historically the character of American Negro life, with its strong African background in the West Indies, the importance of which diminishes with increasing distance from the south.*

Franz Boas

Preface to *Mules and Men* (xiii-xiv)

This editor's note from Boas, even if he was a benevolent mentor and friend, operates within a tradition of white men in positions of power introducing and legitimizing pieces of writing from minorities and disenfranchised peoples. We see this especially in American slave narratives such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* prefaced by abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, Solomon Northrup's *Twelve Years a Slave* that contains a note from his editor/cowriter David Wilson, or the various poetry publications of Phillis Wheatley that feature introductions from white patrons explaining the situation in which the text was produced. All of these letters authenticate writing from black writers who would not be expected to produce eloquent prose by having a white person put his reputation on the line

and verify the text's veracity. While this is somewhat understandable, if highly problematic, in abolitionist slave narratives trying to increase the number of white people who will read and believe a text, it is slightly more troubling in Hurston's work. The Preface to *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* by Phillis Wheatley, for example, is worth citing in its entirety as an example of this trope and point of comparison:

The following poems were written originally for the amusement of the author, as they were the products of her leisure moments. She had no intention ever to have published them; nor would they now have made their appearance, but at the importunity of many of her best, and most generous friends, to whom she considers herself as under the greatest obligations.

As her attempts in poetry are now sent into the world, it is hoped the critic will not severely censure their defects; and we presume they have too much merit to cast aside with contempt, as worthless and trifling effusions.

As to the disadvantages she has laboured under, with regard to learning, nothing needs to be offered, as her Master's letter in the following page will sufficiently show the difficulties in this respect she had to encounter.

With all these imperfections, the poems are now humbly submitted to the perusal of the public. The following is a copy of a letter sent by the author's master to the publisher:

Phillis was brought from *Africa* to *America* in the year 1761, between seven and eight years of age. Without any assistance from school education, and by only what she was taught in the family, she in sixteen months time from her arrival, attained the English language, to which she was an utter stranger before, to such a degree as to read any, the most difficult parts of the sacred writings, to the great astonishment of all who heard her.

As to her *writing*, her own curiosity led her to it, and this she learned in so short a time that in the year 1765, she wrote a letter to the Rev. Mr. Occum, the *Indian* minister, while in *England*.

She has a great inclination to learn the Latin tongue, and has made some progress in it. This relation is given by her master who bought her, and with whom she now lives.

*Boston, Nov. 14, 1772*

John Wheatley

The similarities between this introduction and Boas' note solidify the racist history in which it operates. First, Wheatley got the endorsement of two white men (one of whom was her owner) in order for people to believe that she would be capable of producing such poetry, for certainly few would have thought a female slave able to write this work without these statements. Second, like Hurston's introduction, the editor makes an appeal to the public audience that will consume this text, begging their understanding in this instance as to the "imperfections" contained within the piece. Lastly, John Wheatley tells of Phillis Wheatley's origins as a way of increasing the ethos of the collection as the reader can believe the white man telling them of Phillis' journey and background and approach the collection accordingly. While each of these elements obviously operates differently than Boas' introduction, the overlap and similarities between the two are numerous and troubling considering the racist history in which it operates. Equally troubling is the fact that Boas' note was also added to increase the text's marketability to a white audience. As Susan Meisenhelder reveals, Hurston was "[f]ully aware what his stamp of approval would mean for her work's acceptance" and was very calculating in her requests that he write the introduction (270-271). Beyond merely existing within this racist history, Boas' introduction enacts and continues similar practices as it presents *Mules and Men* as a text for white audiences that has been verified and supported by a notable white male anthropologist.

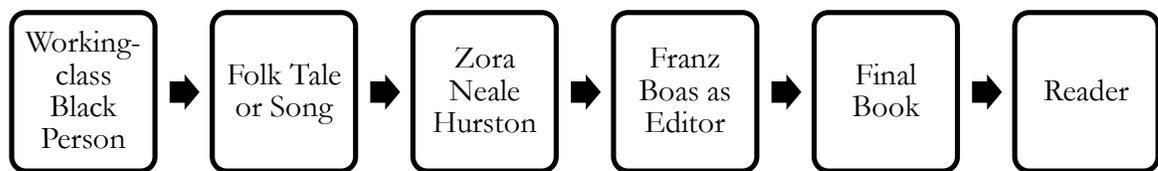
In spite of these issues, however, Boas' preface is still important and intriguing as an instance of hypermediation as it "multiplies the signs of mediation and in this way tries to reproduce the rich sensorium of human experience" (Bolter 34). Through his introduction, Boas calls attention to the produced nature of the narrative and, in this short preface, details Hurston's process of writing behind *Mules and Men*. This increases the perceived authenticity

of the narrative which follows by illustrating the process by which it was produced. Rather than a traditional narrative (such as Hurston's first novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine*), we have a collection of folktales and histories of black communities presented in a way that closely resembles the methods by which they were captured. By illustrating this process early on, Boas ensures that we remember the process behind the writing, thereby increasing our understanding of the text and willingness to believe it as we imagine it going through fewer revisions than a fictional narrative. At least in the case of the folktales collected within the work, we can imagine Hurston journeying to these communities and recording what she sees, as she sees it, and then publishing the results with little to no editing. Boas establishes Hurston's process as anthropological in nature and thereby suggests that what we're reading closely approximates the actual lived experience of those on whom she writes.

In addition to positioning this piece as anthropological research, the Preface also addresses its intended white audience, suggesting that they may gain an inside view into the life of black people through the perspective and writing of Zora Neale Hurston. Boas suggests that because of Hurston's position as a member of those groups on whom she reports, her anthropological gaze, and her willingness and ability to present that to the reader, her work offers an authentic view of a world white audiences normally see just the face of. The logic of gaining a more accurate inside view through multiple mediations operates within hypermediacy that focuses on the multiple mediations as a way of increasing the perceived authenticity of the narrative (Figure 4). Although this logic at first appears paradoxical—we get closer to the event by multiplying the perceived layers through which we see that event—it gains authority when compared to more straight forward narratives. Rather than hiding the process behind well-manicured prose, the logic of hypermediacy

allows the reader to follow the story through each step in the process and thereby authenticate each editorial choice and movement. Furthermore, by presenting Hurston's past and experience in this town through his white male voice, Boas lends authority to Hurston and her position between these two worlds. Through this introduction hypermediating the narrative that follows, Boas suggests that middle-class white audiences can believe the narrative that follows and the inside view it gives.

**(Figure 4) The main stages of mediation in *Mules and Men*.**



Presenting *Mules and Men* as an authentic inside view of working-class black people and their lives is a lofty claim. As Hayden White reveals when discussing historical narratives in general, a text such as this “does not *reproduce* the events it describes; it tells us in what direction to think about the events and charges our thought about the events with different emotional valences” (92). Instead of actually representing the inside view of African American communities at this time, Boas makes the reader feel as though what they read is a reproduction of those events. Even as it is impossible to present reality in an authentic way on the printed page, Boas’ Preface encourages the reader to engage with the writing as if it is as close to reality as possible.

### Boas' Introduction: A Critical Response

Through establishing a need for Hurston to collect these black folktale narratives before they disappear, Brian Carr and Tova Cooper argue that Boas “characterizes *Mules and Men* in the preservationist mode of much ethnography and folklore: *Mules and Men*’s value inheres in the fact that it has captured something that is increasingly ‘diminish[ing]’ because of modernization” (296). This view gives new urgency to Hurston’s quest to capture these folktales for white audiences. Not only do these narratives go through multiple mediations to get to the white world outside the borders of working-class black communities; whiteness is already changing these tales before they are even captured. This perspective adds an additional layer to the need for Hurston—rather than a white person—to capture these narratives. The modern white world already seeps in and alters these communities, so it is absolutely necessary to capture what remains of that world without further altering it with whiteness, or so it would seem. Because of Hurston’s unique position between these two worlds, Boas suggests, she may go in and record/preserve what she finds without altering the people who live there or the narratives they produce. Mediation must remain a one-way journey from that which is mediated.

Reality is, of course, much more complicated than Boas might lead us to believe. Carr and Cooper suggest this challenge by arguing that “the difficulty in collecting folklore lies in the collected object’s resistance to exactly the authenticity of which Boas dreams” (296). Hurston describes the difficulty with which she approaches and collects her intended subject matter as follows:

Folklore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually under-privileged, are the shyest. They are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives

by. And the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, "Get out of here!" We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing. The Indian resists curiosity by a stony silence. The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries. (2-3)

While Boas suggests that Hurston is able to penetrate this "feather-bed resistance" through her reporting, Hurston's writing suggests otherwise. In addition to illustrating the difficulty with which she approaches her subject, Hurston details the individual aspects of her position that hinder her goal. Her big new car makes "her look to prosperous" and some people assume she is a detective, which is "just the last thing they felt they needed on that 'job'" (61); her expensive Macy's dress stands out of place amongst mail-order dresses with one man telling her "dey say youse rich and dey ain't got de nerve to open dey mouf" (63); and her position as a new woman in the saw-mill makes her a target from other women to the point where she eventually runs off from a "jook" after a woman comes after her with a knife (150-154).<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, as Carr and Cooper reveal, "Hurston's account of her own ethnographic practice remains at some crucial distance from Boas's description of it" as she remains "split between the hypothetically white ethnographer/folklorist and the African-American rural people to be studied" (297). Far from existing purely within the black space which she records as Boas suggests, Hurston occupies a middle ground between the white world of Boas and her education and that world of working-class black people from which she came. While this unique position allows Hurston to navigate between those worlds in a

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<sup>9</sup>Hurston defines a jook as "[a] fun house. Where they sing, dance, gamble, love, and compose 'blues' songs incidentally" (*Mules and Men* 57).

way few others could, it does not suggest that she is fully a part of either, and Hurston encounters much resistance due to this fact.

In addition to making it difficult to capture narratives, Hurston's status also affects the way she presents the final narratives. Rather than having pure motivations to collect and present folktales to a white audience, or pure motivations to (in her description of black people) purposefully hide the truth from her readers, Hurston exists somewhere in between: believing in the importance of the art and tales of those on whom she reports while having a vested interest in their lives that could potentially distort her anthropological objectivity. Although Hurston was caught between these two worlds, that does not suggest that she is evenly split. The white world of her benefactor may fund her study and lifestyle, but Hurston remains deeply tied to these communities from her childhood. This strong connection undoubtedly affects Hurston's retelling of events. As Hayden White argues, "all narrative is not simply a recording of 'what happened' in the transition from one state of affairs to another, but a progressive *redescription* of sets of events in such a way as to dismantle a structure executed in one verbal mode in the beginning so as to justify a recording of it in another mode at the end" (98).

Hurston's position inherently must affect her "redescription" of these oral narratives that she takes a part in before recording into text, and it is difficult to tell which way these alterations occur. Hurston is both a black woman with firm roots in these communities as well as a trained anthropologist acting on behalf of her white editor and benefactor. Hurston focusing on each of these positions and the multiple elements that go into making them presents an extreme hypermediation that makes her lived experience an integral part of the production process of these narratives. Furthermore, by detailing her ties to each of these

communities, Hurston presents the reader with what appears to be an unmediated reality—Hurston is a member of these communities directly reporting her experience, after all—as she tells us the tales she already knows or, to take on her anthropological gaze, directly examines the people living in these communities. Daniel Harney, in his essay “Scholarship and the Modernist Public: Zora Neale Hurston and the Limitations of Art and Disciplinary Anthropology,” argues that, in spite of Boas’ presentation and Hurston’s claim that she was now “able to objectively analyze the folklore she had grown up with but had previously been too intimately acquainted with to examine critically, there is much in the ethnography that undercuts this metaphor and suggests that academia itself stymied her ability to understand herself and her culture” (475). Furthermore, Harney argues that “[t]hrough signifying practices [Hurston] slyly hints that her textual interaction with us might well be strewn with the same pleasant evasions or ‘feather-bed resistance’ used by the black folk she studies” (476).

Hurston mediates, through the text and her history, between working-class black people and their culture and middle-class white people. More specifically in terms of whom she reports to directly, she mediates to white intellectuals. Although Hurston identifies with both of these groups, Harney’s argument that she enacts a “feather-bed resistance” aligns with her strong connection to the black communities that she mediates. If we take this to be the case, the authenticity Boas establishes in his Preface becomes much weaker (or at least altered) and Hurston stands a bit closer to Thompson in terms of her objectivity. Much as Thompson alters the stories on which he reports through his writing in order to craft his own personal narrative, Hurston manipulates the source narratives into the forms she wishes to craft. Rather than objectively reporting on what she finds and presenting it to the reader

as unedited as possible, Hurston purposefully avoids the reality in order to present the white audience with what they want to see: a highly honed and mediated text that presents black narratives as authentic while actually carefully tailoring them for consumption by a white audience.

Rather than reporting on some authentic and objective lived experience of black people and their folktales, Hurston alters her inside view of these communities. In fact, an accurate view or portrayal of even the folktales is impossible as they shift and change upon each retelling as locals add their own flavor. When describing folklore in “Folklore and Music,” Hurston reveals that “[i]t does not belong to any special time, place, nor people” and that it “is still in the making” at the time of her writing (183). If these stories are growing and shifting and changing upon each retelling—which occurs naturally in an oral tradition—then what is lost in print where they remain stagnant and permanent? What is lost in this translation, and how can we view these folktales on the page as compared to the oral tradition from which they come? How close are the folktales presented in *Mules and Men* to the original stories and how does the way in which they are presented affect our consumption of them as readers? Why does Boas ignore these facts in his introduction and focus instead on presenting *Mules and Men* as relatively pure anthropological research providing a new perspective of black people and their world to a middle-class white audience?

### **Hurston’s Narrative Frame: Mediating Mediations**

Tying all of these tales and songs together, Hurston’s narrative frame details her story and process journeying into Florida and the saw mills and collecting these stories directly from the source. Far from purely supplemental material, this narrative becomes as

important as the anthropological research she was sent to collect and gives new meaning to the book. From the beginning, Hurston explains that her journey back to the South was an opportunity for her to rediscover herself through her culture and newly found anthropological gaze, and this journey of self-discovery is at the heart of the narrative and legitimizes Hurston's actions throughout the book. By calling attention to her own process and motivations in the beginning, Hurston increases her own perceived authenticity as the reader follows the mediations between the folktales and text. Hurston details why she's doing this, how she's doing it, and why she's the one uniquely qualified to journey into these rural communities in a way few others would be capable of. By detailing these points to the reader and calling attention to the produced nature of the text, Hurston increases its perceived authenticity as the readers follows her throughout the process.

From the beginning of the collection with her return to Eatonville, Hurston uses this narrative frame to increase her perceived authority as a member of these communities:

As I crossed the Maitland-Eatonville township line I could see a group on the store porch. I was delighted. The town had not changed. Same love of talk and song. So I drove on down there before I stopped. Yes, there was George Thomas, Calvin Daniels, Jack and Charlie Jones, Gene Brazzle, B. Moseley and "Seaboard." Deep in a game of Florida-flip. All of those who were not actually playing were giving advice—"bet straightening" they call it. (7)

There are a few elements in this introductory paragraph that connect Hurston to the community she enters. First, her statement that the town has not changed suggests that she knows what it was like before (like when she was a child growing up there) and that the narratives she will capture remain unaltered by the outside world, which aligns with Boas staging the collection in the preservationist mode. This connection to her past allows Hurston to subtly increase the perceived authenticity (the town has not changed) and

immediacy (we must capture these narratives before they do) of the collection through her hypermediated narrative frame. Additionally, Hurston provides evidence for the town not changing. She knows everyone's names before she stops to talk (and even knows the nickname of "Seaboard") and is intimately familiar with the game Florida-flip. In this introduction to the first chapter and thereby the collection, Hurston's narrative frame hypermediates the everyday narratives of these communities and increases her authority as narrator between these worlds.

In addition to connecting Hurston with these communities, the narrative frame was intended to make the text more readable for a wide range of audiences and fulfill Hurston's own authorial desires to do more than simply record and report. As Harney reveals, "[f]rom her earliest encounters with scientific methodologies at Columbia as an undergraduate, [Hurston] had ambitions to incorporate literary techniques into her anthropological scholarship so that she could reach a popular audience" (472). Throughout her career, Hurston wrote about the lives of working-class black people in a way that privileged their narratives and held their art forms (folktales, working songs, etc.) in just as high a regard as other works of art from Europe or the Americas. By constructing a narrative framework that potentially makes *Mules and Men* more readable to a general audience, Hurston maximizes the number of readers who will witness this art and thereby gain some new insight into black communities. This isn't to say that she objectively tells their folktales and stories. Rather, by constructing a fictional narrative between the folktales, Hurston controls the context in which they are heard and manipulates the way in which the reader engages with the text.

This manipulation of the text and the narratives it contains is crucial to audience perception. Hayden White argues "that the *shape* of the *relationships* which will appear to be

inherent in the objects inhabiting the field will in reality have been imposed on the field by the investigator in the very act of *identifying and describing* the objects that he finds there” (95). Not only does Hurston impact the way that the reader receives the narrative and the folktales through her narrative frame, she also affects the ways in which we read *Mules and Men* through the very act of putting these oral tales into print. While this may seem insignificant in terms of traditional fictional narratives, it has huge implications for a collection established as a way of presenting and preserving an inside view of black working-class people and the everyday art forms they produce. Furthermore, by staging the collection as a mediation of an oral tradition into print—and thereby increasing the frames through which we consume the media—Hurston increases the perceived authenticity of the text. The more mediated the stories appear, the more unmediated and authentic they feel.

Knowing that Hurston is altering these stories in at least two separate ways (through her constructed narrative and through the act of moving the folktales from one modality to another in the printed word), how accurately can we actually track these changes? If we can accept that Hurston manipulates her own story as well as the stories of those she interviews, then how do we think about these changes?<sup>10</sup> Knowing that Hurston stands separate from the intended audience of this collection in an inseparable way, how might she alter or manipulate the narrative(s)? Going back to Harney, one could argue that this narrative frame and Hurston’s presentation of these stories operates within her “feather-bed resistance” as she manipulates and mediates the story into one that will please white audiences. Rather than

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<sup>10</sup> This point is pretty well accepted in much Hurston scholarship. Theresa Love discusses Hurston’s editorial choices when using dialect; Susan Meisenhelder reveals that “Hurston carefully arranged her folktales and meticulously delineated the contexts in which they were narrated to reveal complex relationships between race and gender in Black life” (267); and Robert Hemenway famously calls Hurston’s authority into question, asking “was Hurston lying in 1931, passing off her own creative work as folklore?” (78).

presenting and recording black folktales as accurately and unadorned as possible, Hurston allows the probe to enter before smothering it under a lot of laughter and pleasantries (2-3).

I would like to close this section by briefly considering critical responses to these moves from Hurston and the text itself. A review in *The North American Review* argues that a “student of folk-lore will find a well-filled source-book” as “[s]hort of associating with the negro daily, there is no way you can learn more about him” (181-182). Joseph Williams, in a fairly critical review that finds fault with the modern situation of the folktales, concedes that “[t]he book really yields a valuable account of our Southern United State negro of the present day” (330). Alice Walker, in her essay “A Cautionary Tale and a Partisan View,” suggests the veracity of the folktales when describing how quickly she and her friends and family related to the folktales in *Mules and Men* as it “gave them back all the stories they had forgotten or of which they had grown ashamed (told to us years ago by our parents and grandparents—not one of whom could *not* tell a story to make us weep, or laugh) and showed how marvelous, and, indeed, priceless, they are” (64). Even through her mediations—or, one could argue, because of them—the inner life and culture of these groups inform this narrative that most readers would almost certainly never have encountered otherwise.

### **“Don’t be so astorperious”: Hurston’s Use of Dialect**

Hurston’s use of dialect when mediating these narratives and dialogue calls attention to the produced nature of these stories by reminding the reader that they are consuming an oral narrative in textual form, especially when alongside the standard dialect of Hurston’s narrative frame:

And without waiting for an answer Mathilda began to tell why women always take advantage of men.

You see in de very first days, God made a man and a woman and put 'em in a house together to live. 'Way back in them days de woman was just as strong as de man and both of 'em did de same things. They useter get to fussin' 'bout who gointer do this and that and sometime they'd fight, but they was even balanced and neither one could whip de other one. (30-31)

There are a few things I would like to point out about this brief passage. First, the difference in the standard written English narrative that makes up Hurston's narration and introduction of this story stands in stark contrast to the black dialect of the folktales, folksongs, and narration from other characters. This difference draws further attention to the dialect as a hypermediated narrative tool that increases the perceived authenticity of the subjects as we imagine them speaking the words we read. Second, the dialect that Hurston writes in is relatively easy to read. Compared to a text like Joel Chandler Harris' Uncle Remus narrator, these folktales have minor alterations to make them appear in black dialect while remaining easily read and consumed by a white audience.<sup>11</sup> Lastly, this use of dialect hypermediates the text and reminds the reader that they are reading an oral narrative. Even as Hurston crafts it to make it easier to read, dialect pushes at the limit of the print format as it attempts to capture the speech patterns of the speakers of these tales. This manipulation of form calls attention to the print format of the text and reminds the reader of the mediated nature of the texts they consume as an oral tradition transitions into a print format.

Bolter and Grusin "call [this] representation of one medium in another *remediation*" and argue that during this remediation, "the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged

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<sup>11</sup> For example, in "Uncle Remus Initiates the Little Boy," Remus begins, "Bimeby, one day, arter Brer Fox bin doin' all dat he could fer ter ketch Brer Rabbit, en Brer Rabbit bin doin' all he could fer ter keep 'im fum it, Brer Fox say to hisse'f dat he'd put up a game on Brer Rabbit" (2).

ways” (45-47). We see this clearly in Hunter S. Thompson when he translates the tapes he recorded in the moment into text later on, but we also see a similar event happening here with Hurston. Hurston records folktales based on an oral tradition and presents them in print format in *Mules and Men*, and dialect is a large part of this mediation/representation/remediation. Dialect gets closer to the experience one has hearing these stories from the source (or at least give the perception that this is the case) as it imitates the speech patterns of those telling the stories. At its core, dialect pushes the limit of the print format and calls attention to the mediated experience of imitating speech patterns on the written page as a way of getting closer to this experience. This relationship brings the produced nature of the text into focus and thereby increases the perceived authenticity of the folktales as the reader believes they are getting an inside view of something not normally heard. If the folktales were written in the language of dominant discourse (white and privileged), then they would seem more distanced from the actual experience. Dialect jars the reader and makes them aware of the fact that this is a mediated experience attempting to get as close as possible to the inside view of working-class black people and their art.

Theresa Love, in her essay “Zora Neale Hurston’s America,” details some of Hurston’s editorial choices when recording these folktales by discussing “phonological deviations from those of the General Dialect” that we know frame other anthropological research and surmises that “Hurston’s use of Black Dialect forms substantiates the theory that she is willing to sacrifice her interest in anthropology—which discipline would emphasize the need for photographic descriptive passages—for the sake of artistic expediency” (52).<sup>12</sup> Even in her use of dialect, Hurston makes specific editorial choices to

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<sup>12</sup> In one passage, for example, Love explains that “the omission of the *s* signal as an indication of the third person singular present tense (“he eat”) and the use of the pronominal

increase the readability of these folktales for consumption by white audiences. Rather than try to imitate as closely as possible the speech patterns of those whom she records using the anthropological tools she gained through her study with Boas, Hurston chooses how to use dialect to affect the tales while still keeping them readable for a broad audience. Dialect, like other elements within the text, tells the reader how to engage with stories as a hypermediated experience. To that end, it is more valuable to give the perception of dialect as literary device than to attempt an accurate textual representation of an oral narrative.

Interestingly, these choices relate back to Boas' introduction and his mention of Uncle Remus' folktales and white audiences' fascination with this culture. As Love reveals, Joel Chandler Harris' "Uncle Remus tales are seldom read because of the difficulty which the modern reader has with the heavy, nineteenth-century Black Dialect in which they are written" (52). By choosing when and how to use dialect rather than allowing the source to dictate the form, Hurston's work remains more easily consumed by a broad audience. This fact hearkens to Marshall McLuhan's *The Medium is the Message* as the medium of the text and the way it is presented within that medium influences the way in which it is read. This manipulation reveals that, for Hurston, increasing readability is more important than attempting an objective or anthropologically precise collection of the events, or, as Love argues, "[h]er goal was not merely to collect folklore but to show the beauty and wealth of genuine Negro material" (50). In order to show this beauty to as many people as possible, Hurston ensures that it can reach a large audience. Rather than producing a piece of obscure and detailed anthropological research, Hurston presents something between fiction and research that allows the audience in without forcing them to pierce through a wall of

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appositive ("The gopher he couldn't stop") [...] are interesting because they represent two of the most frequently recurring features of the variant dialect" (52).

scholarly work and difficult to consume speech patterns. Furthermore, she obscures this simplification from the reader, presenting the collection as pure anthropological research tied together with her own personal narrative. Again, it becomes more mediated—as the mediations become mediated—in order to appear more immediate and authentic to the reader.

Given this approach and these goals, then, it seems that Hurston’s use of dialect also operates within this “feather-bed resistance” as it allows the probe to enter these communities and provides an amiable yet different presentation of these people and their tales. By using dialect as literary device that calls attention to the manufactured and produced nature of the narrative attempting to represent an oral tradition, Hurston brings the reader in and controls how they receive what they read. The selective use of dialect suggests that the people in these communities are slightly different, but not completely. Their speech is a bit different, but only in how it may accentuate their own culture and stories. As White points out when describing historical narratives, however,

what has happened is that a set of events originally encoded in one way is simply being decoded by being recoded in another. The events themselves are not substantially changed from one account to another. That is to say, the data that are to be analyzed are not significantly different in the different accounts. What is different are the modalities of their relationships. (97)

The oral folktales themselves are not altered by Hurston’s presentation of them, but our relationship with them is entirely different. Of course that relationship is essentially nonexistent since it would have been difficult for middle-class white Americans to gain this intimate perspective without reading this collection, but through her use of dialect, Hurston

manipulates the reader's engagement with these folktales and controls what we see and how we see it.

### **The Tapes Beyond the Text: Hurston's Work for the WPA**

I would like to close by briefly mentioning another instance of Hurston gathering black folktales. In 1938—three years after the publication of *Mules and Men*—Hurston began work for the Federal Writer's Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) collecting and recording black folktales and songs. Here, she was able to gather new stories and songs, which became the basis of her collection *Tell My Horse* in 1938, but many of the songs had already been recorded with music in the appendix of *Mules and Men*. What this project provided, however, was a chance to record some of these songs onto 12" aluminum discs so the audio could be preserved. Interestingly, most of these recordings are of Hurston herself singing the songs. This fact supports many views of Hurston as a representative of the communities on whom she reports in her professional and academic circles (which many critics fault her for), but it is important to remember that she was a member of these communities. Zora Neale Hurston was from an all-black town (the first such place in the country) and grew up around working-class black people. Her education and connection with white benefactors may have distanced her from that community in a way that put her between two worlds, but she remained inalterably a member of each.

## Conclusion

### Another Hypermediated Node in the Network

*Outright censorship is an old-fashioned way of controlling access to information. It's a holdover from the age of print. It was effective then; the authorities could easily seize a printing press and burn all extant copies of a newspaper or a book. But such an approach doesn't work very well in the age of the network. It goes against the grain of digital technology.*

Steven Shaviro  
*Connected* (46)

Investigations of hypermediation in our contemporary networked society are incredibly important, and we can learn much by looking back at the history in which they operate. If it is difficult to trace these mediations and modulations in older texts, how much more in our contemporary era? In an era where everyone has access to cell phones equipped with cameras and microphones that present their point of view as authentic and immediate through hypermediation, how do we begin to question those narratives? In a time where young black people are dying because we as a country don't take their narratives seriously—if we did, we could do nothing less than significantly and immediately alter the way that authorities operate and the privileges they are granted—how do we then question those narratives without destabilizing the movement? How do we question the technologies without belittling or dismissing the crucial narratives they capture? How do we consider all of our individual positions within the network without giving more power to some of us than others? How do we use the tools available to us (technological and philosophical) to positively alter the system in which we live? How do we hypermediate our hypermediations?

One answer could be to constantly question positions from entrenched authority and always privilege those representations coming from disempowered positions. Attempting this approach would, at best, equalize the way we as a society interact with less privileged

positions as we generally give more authority and power to voices that reinforce the status quo. Furthermore, even if we had an imbalance towards disenfranchised populations, this would only serve to begin reversing centuries of oppressions from hegemonic power structures that need altering. It wouldn't be an answer to the issues surrounding civil rights, immigration, classism, etc., but it wouldn't be a bad place to start.

Another response could be to attempt a decentering of these hegemonic power structures in our everyday lives. By giving more authority to disenfranchised populations presenting their narratives, we can begin the revolutions Deleuze and Guattari hint at in their discussions of rhizomes (*A Thousand Plateaus*). Interestingly, one could argue that technologies such as cell phone cameras already enact this redistribution of power. In the networked society, hegemonic power structures lose their authority as individuals go to other sources for a variety of narratives. Rather than getting all of our information directly from the state, corporations, or huge news conglomerates for reporting on events, we look to cell phone videos, social networks, and blogs for alternative narratives. These technologies give voice to populations that might not otherwise be heard and we get a new perspective into events as they unfold. In spite of this view, however, these messages are still being mediated and modulated by powerful and privileged corporations and organizations, and it is crucial that we remain critical of the media we receive and the various mediations they undergo.

The answer to consuming these (hyper)mediations could be that we need to consume broadly and beware of the singular narrative. Situations are always more complicated than they might at first appear. Watching a cell phone video of a civil rights protest and believing we know what it was like to actually be there—or even have a close approximation of this experience—is an oversimplification of what is always a more

complicated situation. These technologies, more than other more traditional forms of reporting, give the impression of a more authentic and immediate experience through hypermediation, but that impression does not make it so. While these representations are necessary and important, they are not objective and it is necessary to remain critical of all narratives. By consuming broadly and gathering as much information as possible about any given event, we can begin to comprehend a situation, even if we don't completely understand.

In spite of these issues surrounding mediations of hypermediated narratives, these voices and representations are crucial to affecting the change we need to positively alter our perceptions and reality. Just because we can't believe everything we see or read, that doesn't make it untrue. Even as these narratives are mediated through various technologies and institutions, it is crucial that we continue to rely on them for reporting from inside the event. All reporting is mediated, and narratives coming from inside the event, at the very least, give voice to populations that we might not otherwise hear. They may still be mediated in ways we can't see, but that doesn't make them less accurate than traditional forms of reporting. They may increase their authority through hypermediation, but that doesn't make them completely false. They may not inherently be more true or accurate than other forms of reporting, but they can, at the very least, begin to redistribute power into the networked rhizomatic society.

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