



Ted Conover. Image by Phoebe Jones

## Ted Conover and the Origins of Immersion in Literary Journalism

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**Abstract:** This study explores the tension between memoir and journalism in the style of immersion journalism practiced by author Ted Conover, focusing on his newer work. The analysis looks at the way the role of “self” in his work has evolved and changed since his early writing. The paper focuses primarily on his most recent work—his exploration of roads in 2010’s *The Routes of Man*, his immersion in the world of a USDA meat inspector in “The Way of All Flesh” in the May 2013 edition of *Harper’s*, and his “Rolling Nowhere, Part 2” in *Outside* in July 2014. While focusing on those, the study analyzes the evolution from his earlier work, dating to the beginning of his career with *Rolling Nowhere*. The inquiry draws on scholarly analysis of immersion journalism, ethnography, and memoir, exploring the distinctions made by scholars in those areas—looking at how Conover navigates the spectrum of the respective approaches (journalism, ethnography, and memoir) in his own style. It uses other studies of literary journalism, comparable immersion work, and interviews with Conover. Ultimately, conclusions are drawn about how his latest work shows Conover has grown more comfortable including his “self” in his work, pushing the boundaries of memoir, and presenting his own story, but ultimately without sacrificing the primacy of the story of the subject itself. In doing this, the argument is made that Conover is essentially further redefining the genre.

**Keywords:** immersion – literary journalism – ethnography – participatory journalism – memoir

In the thirty-five years since Ted Conover transformed an undergraduate anthropology thesis into his first book, *Rolling Nowhere: Riding the Rails with America's Hoboes*,<sup>1</sup> he has been labeled many things: anthropologist and ethnographer<sup>2</sup>; participatory journalist<sup>3</sup>; “new, new journalist”<sup>4</sup>; and, simply, an adventurer.<sup>5</sup> His work can be seen through the lens of numerous disciplines, from anthropology to sociology to journalism. When assessed in the context of literary journalism, his work deserves analysis in terms of how it has marked an advancement of the concept we call “immersion.” Conover has set a new standard for immersion journalism, as his approach has drawn from the work of his predecessors and further developed what has become one of the essential techniques of literary journalism. Conover draws on the story of his subject and that of his actual reporting experiences, a careful balance he refers to throughout his most recent book, *Immersion: A Writer's Guide to Going Deep*,<sup>6</sup> in which he explains and reflects on the journalistic techniques he uses in his reporting and writing. In this piece, I will examine the way Conover navigates that balance between the story of the subjects and the details of his own personal narrative, as a human/journalist trying to get the story. Focusing on Conover's exploration of roads in *The Routes of Man: Travels in the Paved World*,<sup>7</sup> his immersion in the world of a USDA meat inspector in “The Way of All Flesh,”<sup>8</sup> and his far more personal tale, “Rolling Nowhere, Part 2,”<sup>9</sup> this analysis will explore how his “I” has evolved in this more recent work, and where he stands in the historical context of immersion journalism. The study will consider how he navigates the fuzzy border between journalism and memoir, forging his own brand of immersion with a delicate balance of the two, while mostly letting the subjects speak for themselves. The recent work demonstrates he has honed a more versatile “I,” an interpretive camera able to zoom in or step back, a camera able to put his perspective right up front or in the background, as needed, to tell the story.

### History I: Origins of the Term “Immersion”

When considering Conover's immersion journalism, it is important first to remember that immersion itself is a relatively recent term. It was in 1984, just three years after the first publication of *Rolling Nowhere*, that Norman Sims used the term in his introduction to *The Literary Journalists*. Sims wrote, “[L]iterary journalism demands immersion in complex, difficult subjects. The voice of the writer surfaces to show readers that an author is at work. Authority shows through.”<sup>10</sup> Sims identifies “immersion” as a key element in literary journalism, referencing the work of John McPhee, and noting that, “In its simplest form, immersion means time spent on the job.”<sup>11</sup> This modern definition focuses on the idea of the author's dogged reporting

as well as the “authority” and “voice” the reporting achieves in the work. It now seems appropriate that the beginning of Conover's career and the term “immersion” trace back to nearly the same time.

While the term “immersion” is a modern one, the foundational ideas behind it go back to some of the earliest American literary journalists. The principles of Conover's approach to exploring subcultures are visible in the words, more than a century ago, of Hutchins Hapgood, a writer for the *Commercial Advertiser* in New York. In 1905, Hapgood wrote of writers striving to know their subjects as well as novelists and playwrights know theirs: “Why should not these talented men, I said to myself, go directly to the lives of the people? . . . My idea would involve a method intensive rather than extensive—from within out, instead of from without, in.” He speaks of getting closer to the subject, writing, “No, let us go to life as we find it lived about us. . . .”<sup>12</sup> In one of the first references to the concept, Hapgood hits on the essence of immersion as used by Conover: getting inside a world and writing as an outsider. One of Hapgood's contemporaries at the *Commercial Advertiser*, Abraham Cahan, said if a journalist wants to “influence real live men” then “you must first become a live man yourself.”<sup>13</sup> Citing that interview, scholar Bruce J. Evensen observed that Cahan's approach in writing about the immigrant communities in New York involved using basic tactics of immersion, noting that “becoming a ‘live man’ meant immersion in the lives of the immigrant masses in their struggles to adapt themselves to America.”<sup>14</sup> This “live man” approach is not only what Conover does literally when he crosses the border with illegal immigrants in *Coyotes*, but also a strategy he uses in all his work, no matter the specific subculture.

Conover's style of immersion also relies on in-depth interviewing as a means of becoming “immersed.” In this way, he draws from the tactics that came with the rise of the *New Yorker* after 1925. At that time, Joseph Mitchell declared, “My whole idea of reporting—particularly reporting on conversation—is to talk to a man or a woman long enough under different circumstances . . . until, in effect, they reveal their inner selves.”<sup>15</sup> Mitchell referred to the amount of time and the different circumstances this reporting required. While this development in immersion lacked a new label, it shows further development of the approach Conover uses today: going to the people and probing deeply with interviews once having cracked their world.

In his use of an authorial “I” perspective, Conover's work draws, too, from what Tom Wolfe identified in 1973 as “Saturation Reporting.”<sup>16</sup> Wolfe wrote of how New Journalism was different from the work of essayists in terms of perspective and point of view—the use of the “I.” Speaking of the new form versus autobiography, he wrote:

It is the one form of nonfiction that has always had most of the powers of the novel. The technical problem of point of view is solved from the outset, because the autobiographer presents every scene from the same point of view, i.e., his own. In the best autobiographies this works perfectly because the protagonist—the author himself—was at the center of the action. He has not been a reporter; he has simply lived his story and presumably knows it in detail. . . .<sup>17</sup>

Wolfe distinguishes between this type of reporting and the work of an essayist using the vantage point of a “literary gentleman with a seat in the grandstand.” Of this person, Wolfe argues, “He has usually not done nearly enough reporting, nor the right type of reporting, to use the devices the new genre depends on.”<sup>18</sup> Wolfe sharpens the term, with its most specific definition to that point, when he describes “the kind of comprehensive reporting that enables one to portray scenes, extensive dialogue, status life and emotional life. . . .” He talks of journalists who “hope to get inside someone else’s world and stay awhile.”<sup>19</sup> This is closer to the essence of Conover’s approach—the idea of getting inside someone else’s world, not for the purpose of telling about his own experience alone, but in order to use that experience to shed light on that world—whether it’s a world of meat inspectors, Mexican immigrants, or of something more nuanced like the cultural importance of roads around the world.

Thomas B. Connery notes these labels—Sims’s “immersion,” Wolfe’s “saturation,” and Barbara Lounsbury’s related concept of “exhaustive research,” the work needed to provide enough evidence for the author to be credible—and argues the tactic is key for much of literary journalism, but not all.<sup>20</sup> John Hartsock calls immersion “one of the defining characteristics” of the form.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, it has become a central focus in literary journalism, one with various approaches. In Conover’s work, we see him using an approach that modernizes and builds on the concept, developing what can be considered the modern immersion style, with Conover acting as a new kind of “live man.”

### History II: Other Takes on Immersion

To study Conover’s work, it is critical to consider approaches related to immersion, starting in the field of anthropology. Conover majored in anthropology at Amherst College and often refers to himself as an ethnographer.<sup>22</sup> In assessing ethnography, Jane Singer describes an approach where the “researcher goes to the data, rather than sitting in an office and collecting it.”<sup>23</sup> She explores the journalist/ethnographer distinction when she writes:

. . . ethnographers have a more overt and substantial role in the story they tell than journalists do. Though journalists increasingly acknowledge that “objectivity” is more rhetoric than reality, most Western journalism still

posits a clear separation, a formal distance, between the observer—the reporter—and the participants or stakeholders in what is being reported. Ethnographers, on the other hand, rely on “participant observation,” which acknowledges not only the presence of the researcher but also the subjectivity of what is seen, recorded, and communicated.<sup>24</sup>

James M. Tim Wallace argues that apprentice ethnographers “learn how to deal with culture shock, understand a new culture from the ethnographer’s perspective, write about their experiences, and apply specific fieldwork techniques.”<sup>25</sup> He notes the close relationship with journalism when he recalls one of his best students switching her major to journalism after field school.<sup>26</sup>

Ethnography often does not account for the writer’s emotions. One scholar, Andrew Beatty, argues that ethnographers need to embrace their emotions more and that there should sometimes be more focus on narrative, but he also addresses the challenges:

The transition from life-as-lived to life-as-written poses a difficulty that the historian does not have to face, because ethnographers—actually, not just imaginatively—are part of the story. How much a part is a moot point. Once we acknowledge the deep emplacement of emotions, their entanglement in stories, plots, and pasts involving significant others, we cannot rely on our own emotions for insights into the emotions of people living very different lives.<sup>27</sup>

Beatty notes an ethnographer is “bound . . . to fit cases to arguments.”<sup>28</sup> An immersion journalist, however, is bound to let reporting show the story, a story based on a narrative. But Beatty also points out that, in ethnography, “[P]articipant observation, or at least the writing up, entailed a curious renunciation of the life around you, a kind of methodological asceticism.”<sup>29</sup> Despite the overlap, the distinctions are clear: An ethnographer’s goal is primarily to understand and interpret a culture, while a literary journalist must be focused, above all, on telling a story.

Anthropology also provides the context of “Be the Creature” style of immersion. This is work like that used in the *Be the Creature* wildlife series by Chris and Martin Kratt, where the goal is to blend in, so a world can be shown as if no outsider were there. Bill Reynolds has drawn the connection between this kind of approach and the work of Vancouver-based literary journalist John Vaillant, noting that when Vaillant arrived in Vancouver from the United States he found journalists not just wanting to be “in the story,” but trying to “be the story in order to tell the story better, or more thoroughly, reflecting not verisimilitude, but reality.”<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, there is the documentary approach of “Grizzly Man,” in which Werner Herzog uses the footage of bear enthusiast Timothy Treadwell as he

attempted to live with grizzly bears in Alaska. These approaches are different from the immersion of literary journalism—they are attempts to *become* the subject rather than to report on it. Scholars such as Jon Tuttle,<sup>31</sup> Hartsock,<sup>32</sup> James Atlas,<sup>33</sup> and others have applied the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle to journalism—anything studied is altered by that observation—and all of these immersive approaches face that challenge.

In the journalistic arena, one oft-discussed immersive style is the “fly-on-the-wall” approach used by Lillian Ross in her famous profile of Ernest Hemingway in the *New Yorker*.<sup>34</sup> It is a form of immersion where the author is at times nearly invisible to the reader as the writer “meticulously describes carefully selected dialogue, action, and setting,” an approach Ben Yagoda argues can be “deadly dull” but one that is “oddly exhilarating” in the hands of a master like Ross.<sup>35</sup> This variation involves the author selectively withdrawing from the scene—not revealing her viewpoint directly, but through what Ross described as her “choice” and “arrangement” of details.<sup>36</sup> More recently, a version of this approach was used by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc in *Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx*, as she steps back nearly into invisibility and dispassionately relays the painful events in the lives of Jessica, Coco, and others in one tough Bronx neighborhood.<sup>37</sup>

At the opposite end of this spectrum lies the broad category of “participatory journalism,” which would be included in what Yagoda classifies as “reporter at the forefront.”<sup>38</sup> This can be where the writer’s experience taking on a challenge becomes the story, à la George Plimpton getting a chance to suit up and train with the Detroit Lions—and ultimately play a few snaps in a preseason game—in *Paper Lion*.<sup>39</sup> This is a close relative of Conover’s immersion, but closer to what author Robin Hemley would call “immersion memoir”<sup>40</sup>—such as A. J. Jacobs’s *The Year of Living Biblically*, where the author attempts to actually live his life by following every rule in the Bible, literally.<sup>41</sup> “If your goal is an outward exploration of the world, then you’re most likely an immersion journalist,” Hemley writes. “If your goal is to explore yourself . . . then you’re more of a memoirist, as interested in your own transformation as the rest of the world’s.”<sup>42</sup> The question returns to how much self needs to be included in a story. In *Immersion: A Writer’s Guide to Going Deep*, Conover makes a stricter distinction between immersion and memoir. While memoir is a “cousin” of immersion writing, he writes, memoirists “put themselves front and center, and the experience that is their essential material is most often one through which they passed in the course of living their lives—not one they imagined in order to understand life for somebody else.”<sup>43</sup> Projects such as Jacobs’s and others, he argues, “are typically inquisitive in an inward direction; their goal is not to learn about the Other.”<sup>44</sup>

An assessment of immersion also must consider what the editors of *Harp-er’s* magazine call “submersion journalism.” Former editor Roger D. Hodge refers to the need here for “an experimental subject, an ‘I’ sufficiently armed with narrative powers both literary and historical, gifts of irony and indirection, and the soothing balms of description and implication, to go forth and find stories that might counteract the unhappy effects of our disorder.”<sup>45</sup> He calls this the “radical first person,” speaking of writers who “have braved the perils of the Bush Era and returned to tell their tales.”<sup>46</sup> This immersion is different because of its intensely partisan “I” taking up a cause. Bill Wasik also refers to how “submersion journalism” often involves “undercover” reporting that involves “minor deception by the reporter.”<sup>47</sup>

### History III: Practitioners of Immersion, Its Antecedents, and Related Tactics

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, examples of what might be considered the early roots of immersion are evident in the work of Hapgood, Cahan, Jack London, and Stephen Crane. In these works, we see the authors delving into other worlds, but often those worlds are closely connected to their own. For example, Cahan shows this kind of early immersion in works such as “Can’t Get Their Minds Ashore” and other pieces about immigrant life he wrote for the *Commercial Advertiser*. A Lithuanian who immigrated to America at age twenty-one, his voice is relatively detached describing a new wave of Jewish immigrants in Manhattan,<sup>48</sup> yet he is still writing about a world he already knows quite well. As a result, as he puts himself in this community and spends time in this world, he sometimes lacks a certain reportorial distance, despite the fact that he is not writing directly about his own experiences. His personal connection and his related sense of advocacy can be felt in the stories he tells, such as when he asks “What makes you so downhearted?” and “Why don’t you go to eat? Are you not hungry?”<sup>49</sup> Bruce Evansen notes, “Cahan’s empathy for the plight of the immigrant family is expressed in the details of a writer intimately familiar with his subject.”<sup>50</sup> Hapgood, too, did work that could be considered early immersion, learning Yiddish in order to explore Bowery life. But Connery notes how Hapgood sometimes loses “control” as he “sentimentalizes” and “romanticizes” the lower-class characters, meaning he hasn’t maintained that critical distance of modern immersion.<sup>51</sup>

Stephen Crane’s “Experiment in Misery” also can be seen as early immersion. He uses his brief foray into the homeless world to make subjective assessments such as how one youth “felt that there no longer could be pleasure in life.”<sup>52</sup> The approach was simple and the third-person references to the author would now be seen as antiquated, but it marked early immersion.

However, the approach was more simplistic than the immersion of Conover today, especially when considering the short amount of time Crane spent delving into this world—Crane spent parts of two days, while Conover typically spends months on his projects. Yagoda noted Crane's work was part of a journalistic "curiosity about the lives of the poor" at that time.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Kevin Kerrane and Yagoda point to London's *The People of the Abyss* as another example. Spending seven weeks living in a slum in the East End of London in 1902, Jack London showed the world from the inside, writing "for the first time in my life the fear of the crowd smote me. It was like the fear of the sea; and the miserable multitudes, street upon street, seemed so many waves of a vast and malodorous sea, lapping about me and threatening to well up and over me."<sup>54</sup> Kerrane observes that London's use of a "dropout narrator," where the author moves in and out of the foreground of the story, inspired Conover and others as he used what "later new journalists would call 'immersion reporting' . . ." <sup>55</sup> Similar work was done by Marvel Cooke ("The Bronx Slave Market")<sup>56</sup> and George Orwell ("The Spike")<sup>57</sup> as the form showed development later in the twentieth century. Cooke's immersion was classic undercover—disguising one's identity to reveal the true nature of something—an approach Conover mimicked in *Newjack*.<sup>58</sup> Kerrane points out that Orwell, who had once lived in poverty in France, was using a disguise here to build on the immersive model of *The People of the Abyss*, but that Orwell's work "dramatizes more than London's and editorializes less."<sup>59</sup> More focus on narrative and less editorializing marked a key development in the approach, something that Conover's work draws from today. While he addresses hot-button topics such as illegal immigration, incarceration, and income inequality around the world, the reader sees little blatant editorializing. Instead, Conover mostly steps back and lets subjects tell their own stories.

Modern immersion also owes a debt to John Steinbeck. Giles Fowler observes that both *The Grapes of Wrath* and the pamphlet on migrant farmers, *Their Blood Is Strong*, are built on techniques that can be categorized as immersion. Fowler writes that while Steinbeck gathered material for both, "part of his secret, it seems, was the use of total-immersion reporting in which he spent his days and weeks with the migrants, at times sharing the harshness of their lives."<sup>60</sup> William Howarth also explores this, looking into a question posed by Sims: "Why did John Steinbeck write *The Grapes of Wrath* as a novel, when he had a wealth of journalistic material?"<sup>61</sup> Of his reporting for the novel, Howarth writes how Steinbeck "cast himself increasingly as its witness or reporter, just giving an account of what passed before his eyes . . ." <sup>62</sup> This, along with James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*<sup>63</sup> a few years later, marked a continuation of this kind of reporting.

At the *New Yorker* in the 1930s, writers such as Joseph Mitchell and A. J. Liebling picked up the technique. Sims notes a major challenge with the approach: "How does a writer inject himself into the narrative without upsetting readers who are accustomed to impersonal newspaper prose?" Sims argues Agee threw himself into the foreground, while Liebling "portrayed himself as a secondary character along the margins of the storyline. . . ." Mitchell, Sims argues, "found another solution by merging himself with the characters of Mr. Flood and Joe Gould, and then writing about them in third person."<sup>64</sup> These writers each struggled with the central challenge of immersion, an area where Conover strikes a careful balance: How much of the author should be in the story?

Wolfe, Plimpton, Gay Talese, and other New Journalists took varied approaches to this question. Talese typically took the "fly-on-the-wall" approach, leading to his famous portraits of Frank Sinatra, Joe DiMaggio, and Floyd Patterson, as well as the comprehensive study, *The Bridge: The Building of Verrazano-Narrows Bridge*,<sup>65</sup> keeping himself out of the constructed scenes. Wolfe's method was different. He used his "saturation reporting" to try to figure out what made a man willing to sit atop a lit rocket for *The Right Stuff*.<sup>66</sup> He used a narrative approach and largely kept himself out of that narrative. In work like *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*,<sup>67</sup> however, he took a more extreme immersive approach. The personal voice is often *loud*, even if he does sometimes refer to his outsider status in a self-deprecating way. The big tent of the New Journalism, of course, also had room for Plimpton, who took ownership of the "participatory journalism" under which many classify Conover. Plimpton addressed the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle issues by *becoming* his subject. With *Paper Lion*, Plimpton used a version of immersion that veers closest to autobiography, the original use of the "I." McPhee has since used his own version of the technique, serving as the reader's tour guide into other worlds and cultures in pieces such as "The Pine Barrens,"<sup>68</sup> "Travels in Georgia,"<sup>69</sup> and many other stories. And Tracy Kidder has built on the technique further, using a fully immersed "I" to more deeply explore both common, well-known worlds such as a fifth-grade classroom in *Among Schoolchildren*<sup>70</sup> and more mysterious, complex worlds such as the realm of coding and computer engineering in *The Soul of a New Machine*.<sup>71</sup>

### Conover's Approach to Immersion

In immersion journalism, the tension revolves around the balance between the author's story and *the* story—the perspective of the "I" and the distance it maintains from the subject. In some cases, a writer finds that putting himself in the story is the best way to center or ground it. In other cases, an editor

may want the author in the story to show the reader that there is something at stake for the writer—to give the reader a reason why he is writing it. Conover, in his work, uses first person to varying degrees and in varying amounts, depending on what is needed for him to tell that story.

Conover's work straddles the worlds of literary journalism, literature, and anthropology. Anthropologists have referenced his work. In "Coming Out to 'Hit the Road': Temporal, Spatial and Affective Mobilities of Taxi Drivers and Day Trippers in Kunming, China," for example, Beth E. Notar footnotes the fact that Conover wrote about Chinese driving clubs in *The Routes of Man* without discussing his exploration.<sup>72</sup> Andrew Beatty does not mention Conover, but suggests the writer's strength when he argues ethnographers need to embrace their emotions more and observes that narrative is beginning to return to ethnographic studies, which he deems a good thing.<sup>73</sup> These scholars may look to borrow from Conover a willingness to center their work around narrative and, sometimes, the author's emotional response.

In literature, Erik Skipper argues for a strong connection between Conover and Steinbeck. He notes how both "fend off political seduction by digging beneath the trenches." He writes, "They allow themselves a platform for objectivity that cannot be crippled by outside forces," focusing on the individual to lead a reader away from "preconceptions and prejudices."<sup>74</sup>

In literary journalism, Conover's work has been justly credited—if not sufficiently studied—for its role in the development of immersion. Bruce Gillespie, in calling *Rolling Nowhere* "an ethnography of railway hoboes," assesses the relationship between ethnography and literary journalism, saying ethnography's "founding principle was to try to understand social groups from the inside out, requiring a long-term commitment from the researcher who would embed himself or herself within a population and seek to earn its members' trust in order to study them."<sup>75</sup> Kerrane credits Conover for "social analyses . . . embedded in storytelling and in an open-hearted approach to his subjects."<sup>76</sup>

Robert S. Boynton also notes how Conover builds on the work of Wolfe and the New Journalists by using the immersive techniques to further investigate "subcultures in general, and impoverished subcultures in particular. . . ."<sup>77</sup> He describes how Conover's work explores "the fine lines separating 'us' from 'them,' and the elaborate rituals and markers . . . that we have developed to bolster such distinctions."<sup>78</sup> Boynton also emphasizes Conover as a bridge between the techniques of ethnography and literary journalism. As part of a Literary Reportage program at New York University, Boynton spoke of "an advanced reporting course based on the ethnographic methods of anthropologists—something we were able to accomplish when Ted Conover joined the faculty."<sup>79</sup>

Conover's work merits analysis of how it travels along what I would call a continuum from memoir to literary journalism. In a biography on his website, Conover showed awareness of the tension of self in his work. Referencing *The Routes of Man*, he wrote, "It's a book about roads, yes, but like my others it's also a book about me." He went on:

I continue to admire writing where the writer has something at stake; where he doesn't just depend on experts but rather takes time to think and research and participate, thereby transforming himself into an expert; where his caring and urgency of the subject can transform the writing into something that matters, an act of witnessing.<sup>80</sup>

In contrast to a writer like LeBlanc, who used the first person so minimally in *Random Family*,<sup>81</sup> Conover embraces his first person. "But the first person is how I best tell a story," he told Boynton. "Because my persona is so often that of the 'witness,' *not* using the first person would make me feel like a left-handed person who was forced to use his right hand."<sup>82</sup> In *Rolling Nowhere*, he uses the "I" to show the fear of hoboes on a train car:

Lightning flashed again through the window and lit up the car. Thunder must be following it, I thought, but the noise of the car being pulled over the tracks was like thunder itself, and if there was any outside, I couldn't hear it.

I dozed fitfully, fearful that every time the train slowed it was because a report of my presence had finally caught up with the authorities. Flashes of lightning I imagined to be the flashlight beams of cops, or of a tramp who had been hiding in the next caboose down the train, and was sneaking over to knock me on the head and steal my traveler's checks.<sup>83</sup>

This shows Conover writing about his experiences in an autobiographical way, but doing so in an effort to use his immersive experience to convey the feeling of "the other." Later, he uses his first person to show that part of the story is his insecurity: "Yet a change had occurred. In part because my own desire was so strong, the jungles were becoming my home. For weeks I had been concerned with appearances: Did I look like a tramp? When tramps looked at me, would they see themselves? Those seemed the most important things."<sup>84</sup>

Here, his "I" is playing the role of journalist and ethnographer, but there is also a personal story the reader can identify with. Conover writes in *Immersion* that he initially started *Rolling Nowhere* as a third-person piece, but changed course after realizing that so much of the first-person part of the story was essential to the narrative.<sup>85</sup>

The personal narrative is similar in *Coyotes* and *Newjack*. In both, the primary goal is exploration of a subculture. But he is still there. In *Coyotes*, the personal story is minimal, and the “I” is primarily used as the vantage point of a white, American, law-abiding journalist. However, in *Newjack*, Conover uses much more of his personal “I.” He makes a conscious decision to use the techniques of memoir in the chapter “My Heart Inside Out,” showing how the job affected him as a parent of a one-year-old daughter and three-year-old son, and as a husband. This is evident in a section where he disciplines his son, who is threatening to wake up his sister:

Something in me sort of snapped. All day long I was disrespected by criminals; I felt that home should be different. I ran up the stairs and picked him up by his pajama tops outside her door. “When I say no, you will listen!” I whispered angrily, giving him a spank, surprising myself.

I had never done that before, and it surprised him, too. He burst into tears. This woke his sister. I was furious, and ordered her to go back to sleep. She didn’t obey, either. The house filled with sobs. “Into your room,” I ordered my son, and carried him bodily when he “refused to comply.”<sup>86</sup>

Most of the first person Conover uses in *Newjack* is strictly for participatory purposes, but here the reader sees an emotional “I” affected by the experience.

Conover wears first person differently in *Whiteout: Lost in Aspen*. As he explores the different worlds of the resort town, he draws from his perspective growing up in Colorado. He uses traditional “immersive” approaches, working as a taxi driver, a newspaper reporter, and in other roles. But he also draws from his background growing up in Denver (using past experience with his subject, à la London and Cahan). That context is critical in the perspective he brings. However, his is not the “I” of straight memoir here; instead, he is applying the “I” of experience to his effort to explore a subculture. At one point, Conover uses the “I” of personal experience when he recounts a conversation with an old Colorado friend, as they observe celebrities in a ski lodge:

A few months earlier, I remembered, I would have felt intimidated here. All these perfect people, all the beautiful smiles and taut bodies and right clothes: It could really wear on you, the kind of pressure the place exerted. But Tracey had helped me become less self-conscious. We grew up in Colorado, she reminded me. It’s our place, we’ve been at it since we were kids. The fashions were superficial; these people would come and go, but we would last. It was the only snobbery available to us, the underdogs.<sup>87</sup>

Conover is using his background much more personally. It shows in the next chapter, too, as he explores John Denver in a way that only someone

who grew up in Colorado can. After working as an extra on the filming of a John Denver Christmas TV special, he writes, “We Coloradans, lacking our own strong regional identity, are susceptible to outside influences.” Recalling singing Denver’s songs in school growing up, he writes, “Here in Colorado we lack hillbillies, Appalachians, indigenous culture. What we have instead is John Denver.”<sup>88</sup>

As in *Newjack*, he focuses on the changes that result in himself. This use of true personal perspective culminates at the end, when he writes how a friend took him to an old standby Mexican restaurant in Denver late in his reporting, and he acts disappointed. She asks what has happened to him and he responds, “I knew immediately that Aspen had happened to me. . . . Experience had happened to me, temptation. I had been seduced, but it was always too simple to blame only the seductress. I said something about Aspen, and she said I ought to come home.”<sup>89</sup>

#### Conover’s “I” in Recent Work I: *The Routes of Man*

Using his own perspective is critical to Conover. “It keeps me as a writer from wandering too far afield from the true meaning of something if at the end of the day I have to square it with my own experience,” he said in an author interview. “Where I part ways with a lot of people is how much I place myself in the story.”<sup>90</sup> In *The Routes of Man*, “The Way of All Flesh,” and “Rolling Nowhere, Part Two,” Conover tries on “I” in varied ways—and varying amounts. As he writes in *Immersion*, “Narrative persona in first-person nonfiction is thus another way of saying ‘choice of selves.’”<sup>91</sup>

In *The Routes of Man*, Conover tries on a slightly different first person. He immerses himself in a more divergent and concrete world (that of roads), and it takes him into a wide array of subcultures rather than one. Dealing with roads in Peru, East Africa, the West Bank, China, Nigeria, and the Himalayas, he must adapt his approach. He finds his approach tested as he investigates the lives of truckers and the spread of HIV in Kenya. After spending most of the chapter talking to male truckers, he talks to a group of women. Some of them have worked as prostitutes, and he finds his reportorial persona challenged as they seek to engage him personally:

. . . I told them I was making a donation to the group, as it seemed very worthwhile. I started to put away my notebook and get ready to leave.

“But what do you think?” Constance asked abruptly. None of the women, I noticed, were standing up. I sat back down.

“What do I think about what?” I asked.

“About our situation.”

“Well, I think working to support a group like this is good, and paying close attention to your medicine and health is the right—”

“No!” said Constance. “We mean, about our *situation*. . .”

I was so thick. I thought I’d just been interviewing them about the work they used to do. “You mean,” I said, “you’re still hooking now?”

She nodded.

“All of you?”

They all nodded.<sup>92</sup>

After some back and forth, Conover offers, “I guess it means you should do other work.”<sup>93</sup> This challenged Conover’s first person in ways it never was in other work, exposing his vulnerability, which he then uses to enlighten the reader.

In *The Routes of Man*, Conover mostly steps back and lets the people and the roads tell and show the story. But when he does engage more in a personal voice, it shows the cumulative effect of years of reporting, such as this interaction with a Palestinian waiter on the Arab side of East Jerusalem:

I told him about the Mexicans who sneak into the United States seeking better-paying work, but noted the different quality of that migration— it involved an international border and raised questions about national sovereignty. Here migration looked different: the soldiers weren’t keeping West Bankers out of Israel, they were merely keeping Palestinians from moving around too much. It reminded me of the way officers run a prison like Sing Sing: by dividing it up into discrete pieces, and forbidding or restricting movement between them.<sup>94</sup>

The personal story becomes self-referential here, but to his previous *reporting* background.

The “I” also changes here because it’s not *his* journey. While watching activity at an Israeli checkpoint, he observes, “I watched them allow cars with yellow-and-black Israeli license plates, as opposed to white-and-green Palestinian ones, to skip the queue and pass through the checkpoint by using the oncoming-traffic lane.” He describes guards making a pregnant woman wait more than twenty minutes in the hot sun while they run her ID. He observes an old woman climbing out of her car and saying she’s not going to wait a minute more, before walking by and saying, “Go ahead and shoot me!”<sup>95</sup> He uses that style he calls “an act of witnessing,” but it is not “fly on the wall.” Nor, however, is it Plimpton’s participatory “I.” It is something more complex. This is Conover using that interpretative camera in a different way. He

shows that he can take himself out of the picture when needed, to use himself sometimes only as the director selecting powerful scenes, not the actor taking over the stage.

But Conover also demonstrates his versatility in other sections of this work, showing that at times he has become more willing to judiciously use personal vignettes to enhance to power of the story. Before getting into the world of Chinese group driving trips, he includes a section on his love of driving. He writes, “I grew up a passenger in a Rambler station wagon, and then an Oldsmobile. My first experience of incarceration was being buckled into the back seat of that Oldsmobile as my father drove the family across the seemingly endless American West on a summer vacation.”<sup>96</sup> Conover is using his first person to observe and witness, but also to help frame the story.

His “I” in *The Routes of Man* is a cultural “I,” used to reflect the material he has learned, but typically de-emphasizing himself. He uses his personal view as the glue to hold the stories together, but the focus remains on the culture of the roads, avoiding the pitfall of what Conover calls “making every story your next adventure.”<sup>97</sup> His “I” is not the young man’s “I” of *Rolling Nowhere*; it is the “I” of experience, not afraid to engage the subject, but not taking over. He uses his perspective to frame a situation, such as when he describes the casual intimacy of a trucker saying a quiet, touch-less goodbye to his wife before heading back out on the road. Conover notes that the two spoke closely and exchanged money before saying goodbye. “There are so many ways to be a couple,” he writes. “My wife and I would have kissed, but theirs was a different intimacy.”<sup>98</sup>

### Conover’s “I” in Recent Work II: “The Way of All Flesh”

In “The Way of All Flesh,” Conover puts his first person back at the center of the story, working as a meat inspector for the Department of Agriculture at a slaughterhouse in Schuyler, Nebraska. The “I” here is similar to the one in *Newjack*, *Coyotes*, and *Rolling Nowhere*. He uses personal experience as a lens through which to tell a story. He writes of going into the facility with his ID badge and the way it made him feel: “Though I tend to dislike scrutiny, I actually don’t mind the shack, because it makes me feel important: instead of a Cargill I.D., I get to flash my police-style USDA badge. And when I leave, at shift’s end, the guards can’t ask to see what’s in my bag, as they can the regular workers.”<sup>99</sup>

The “I” here goes back to his earlier approach, as he is using it to give the reader perspective on that world by using his personal experience. He is not just accentuating the story—his experience is the story.

Conover uses the “I” as a way to connect the story to a reader who does



not know the world of meat inspection. He writes about another inspector and how she had experience with a knife in a kosher slaughterhouse. “Which I do not,” he writes. “That experience, I will soon learn, counts for a lot.”<sup>100</sup> That type of approach is something Conover says he consciously tries to use as a means of using himself to convey the experience to the readers, much as with the prostitutes in *The Routes of Man*. “Showing the awkwardness that I stumble into can help readers understand the world I’m getting to know,” Conover added in an interview. “Misunderstandings are interesting.”<sup>101</sup>

He draws only minimally from the anthropological “I” here. Of inspectors changing out of bloody clothes in the locker room, he writes they look like “overseers of an industrial process” in their uniforms, and that “. . . naked, we resembled something else: a group of predators (a pack you might say) presiding over the slaughter of vast herds far too numerous for us to eat ourselves.”<sup>102</sup> This approach is similar to the way he described correctional officers in *Newjack*, but stronger because he uses it less. He uses the personal “I” to show pain, noting how his forearms are sore from the physical labor—specifically “hook arm.” After it spreads to his left arm, he gets advice from colleagues, procures a brace, and finds some relief. He then ties his personal experience to a broader story: “Turnover in the meat industry is said to be extremely high. Pain and these kinds of deep bloodless injuries have to be a main reason why.”<sup>103</sup>

In the final paragraph, he shifts to how the experience changed him. In journalism, this can be sacrilegious, but Conover takes the gamble, writing:

I know that going vegan is perhaps the proper ending to my story, and truly, it’s the one I foresaw. But appetite is a hard thing to control; a lifetime of habit doesn’t just go away. I do know that I eat much less beef than I did before, and I pay more for better stuff. I have subtracted 90 percent of the hamburger from my diet, and I now seek meat that requires a knife to eat. It will be better meat—and using the knife will mean I have to think about it, every single bite.<sup>104</sup>

“I wanted that in the piece,” Conover said in an interview, adding that he had become about ninety-five percent vegetarian. “But I didn’t want it in the piece too much. I felt I owed it to the reader.”<sup>105</sup> Above all, it shows an increasing willingness to intersperse more of his personal “I.”

“The Way of All Flesh” uses a version closer to his earlier “I,” one akin to parts of *Newjack* and *Coyotes*, one where he tries on a new role, using himself as a lens to show the world to outsiders. He does not incorporate much ethnography or much memoir, except when he uses his personal “I” to show the experience didn’t turn him completely into a vegan. For most of the piece, he uses a journalistic “I,” once again demonstrating how he can modify his immersive camera so that it is best equipped to tell the story of that particular subject.

### Conover’s “I” in Recent Work III: “Rolling Nowhere, Part Two”

“Rolling Nowhere, Part Two” marks the greatest departure from his style. Thirty-three years after *Rolling Nowhere*, Conover crosses into a different first person as he decides to write about riding the rails with his eighteen-year-old son, Asa. It could have become a sort of “Older Plimpton returns to try out for Detroit Lions with teenage son as wide receiver.” Instead, Conover goes to the anthropological “I,” aimed inward at the relationship between father and son, no longer just using himself as a vehicle. Now, the story/ethnography is about him. This is an “I” Conover has not used before, where “I” is father first and reporter/ethnographer second:

With the train rumbling past, I told Asa where to stand. Then I jogged away from him toward the back of it and nervously waited for the right kind of car—one we could ride. When one finally drew even with me, I set off at a sprint, trying to keep up—and decided I couldn’t.

“Too fast!” I shouted at Asa, waving him off. My rule: the train couldn’t be going any faster than I could run, and this one, well, possibly was. It was hard to be sure. It had been a while. As we stepped away from the train, I thought ruefully that at 22, I probably would have grabbed it.<sup>106</sup>

It is a viewpoint that allows him to take on a different role, that of a participant reporter who is also a memoirist.

The piece takes a risk, engaging Conover’s personal life like never before. This perspective provides for a new kind of reflection. Now he is the thing being studied. Here, there are new stakes: “The prospect of Asa getting injured had been haunting me the whole trip.”<sup>107</sup> The collision between memoir and literary journalism culminates late in the piece when he fully crosses over into the personal: “After a minute, he placed his head on my upper arm as if resting. Then he put his arm around my shoulder. I put my arm around him, looked straight at the back of the grainer rumbling in front of us in the dark, tried not to cry. Wished the moment would last and last. It was one of the nicest things ever. How much credit can we take when a kid turns out well?”<sup>108</sup>

Conover’s “I” here is not a journalist’s, but a father’s. It is almost purely memoir: The “subculture” under investigation is his son and him.

In “Rolling Nowhere, Part Two,” Conover takes his first person almost all the way across the journalism/memoir divide. This story is about him and his relationship with his son. The self the reader gets here is all Conover—the person, not the journalist. This is a rare exception for Conover, not an indication of a change in his style. He capitalizes on his credentials as an established immersion journalist to tell a personal story.

### Conclusion

Conover's work borrows from many approaches. But the question remains where and how to classify it—considering the different disciplines he straddles and the various writing/reporting techniques he can be seen as using. It is most logical to start by considering the realm of anthropology, where he has roots. But while his reporting may fit there, his writing does not. His narrative sets it apart from being classified as pure ethnography because he depends on characters and dramatic events—essential story elements. Likewise, Conover's approach does not involve him trying to “be the creature.” He describes being not a “tourist” but a “traveler” trying to develop deeper connections with his surroundings.<sup>109</sup> “If you immerse yourself completely, you lose all critical distance; you ‘go native,’” Conover wrote in an e-mail.<sup>110</sup> His work shows him using first-person to step back from the narrative and assess what is going on.

Conover's work does not fall under “submersion journalism.” His “I” is rarely politically charged. If his work is advocacy, it is through the story itself, rather than via his voice. In terms of the undercover aspect of “submersion,” Conover notes that while the undercover label stuck with *Newjack* and “The Way of All Flesh,” he sees the tactic is mostly as the “easy way out.”<sup>111</sup> His other work involves him being straightforward and visible—his subjects know what he is doing.

Historically, Conover has roots in early immersion journalists such as Cahlan, Hapgood, Crane, and London, all of whom set out to inspect other perspectives, too. Likewise, Conover clearly borrows from the observational and sometimes more distanced approach of Orwell. And, in terms of the sheer depth of his reporting, Conover draws from Steinbeck, Agee, and Mitchell. But he has developed a more nuanced approach. He can be read and interpreted through a New Journalism lens, but only so far. Much of the study on the relationship between journalism and autobiography/memoir has focused on the New Journalists. Jason Mosser evaluated this boundary as he contrasted Hunter S. Thompson with Truman Capote and Wolfe, noting, “The key difference between Thompson's participatory approach and the approaches adopted by Capote and Wolfe is that the narrative persona in their works does not appear. . . .” He refers to the “narrative distance that Capote and Wolfe create. . . .”<sup>112</sup> Conover's work shows a high level of immersion, but, except for “Rolling Nowhere, Part Two,” he typically doesn't make himself a character. In *The Routes of Man* he is himself, making observations and cultural assessments. In “The Way of All Flesh,” he is a character, but the character is a meat inspector, not Conover “personally.”

Plimpton is a relative, but Conover is more Wolfe than Thompson. He

seeks to tell a story, keeping attention mostly away from himself. Boynton observes how Wolfe focused on “status,” while Conover is concerned about “subcultures” and views “the disenfranchised not as exotic tribes, but as people whose problems are symptomatic of the dilemmas that vex America.”<sup>113</sup> Conover treats his subjects as slices of humanity, using the “I” to connect and understand, not gawk.

Thomas Meisenhelder, in comparing the tactics of the New Journalists to methods of the “Chicago School” of sociology in the 1920s and 1930s, writes that the New Journalist had to be aware of himself in his writing. He writes how “the new journalist forces the reader to become aware of the author's personal presence ‘in’ the research and how that presence adds to the report.” He also notes “. . . unlike most sociologists, the new journalist understands that he too is part of the phenomena-under-study.”<sup>114</sup> Conover knows he is part of the study, but does not take it to the extreme of Plimpton. Boynton's assessment of Conover as a “new new journalist” may fit best, as he has built on New Journalism to develop an increasingly multi-dimensional first-person approach.

Conover's purpose is to explore another world deeply, much as early immersion journalists did. His reporting methods are similar to the intense styles of Talese and Wolfe, and he builds on the tactics of Steinbeck and Agee. He involves himself in a participatory way, much like Plimpton, but avoids being a spectacle. He seeks to explore a culture, much like an anthropologist, but with a storytelling purpose. He belongs most in the company of Kidder and McPhee because he balances his presence in his writing. He arrives only when necessary, neither never appearing (like LeBlanc) nor taking over (like Plimpton). “By using the first person, I need to be able to take the writing to another level of meaning for the reader,” he said in an interview. “I need to earn it if I'm going to put myself in there.”<sup>115</sup>

The subjects in *The Routes of Man* and “The Way of All Flesh” show Conover broadening his horizons. He appears to be consciously trying to avoid being perceived as looking for that “next adventure.” *The Routes of Man* is daring for its scope, as he explores a common issue in a global world with a breadth rarely attempted by previous immersion journalists. He shows the wide range of subjects to which a skilled journalist can apply immersion. Conover chooses those subjects with the goal of exploring them culturally and not, primarily, politically. “The Way of All Flesh” is no diatribe about the meat industry, nor is “The Routes of Man” an attack on political systems. He also shows an immersion journalist can use a personal story and make it deeper than autobiography: “Rolling Nowhere, Part Two” is memoir, but told with the perspective of an ethnographer/journalist.

Conover is also showing further advancement of the tactic of immersion in his latest work. He isn't trying to dance around the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle or be a "fly on the wall." He is not simply a participatory journalist, as he shows too much concern for the anthropological—the meaning behind mankind. Instead, he further demonstrates that the versatile "I" camera he has developed can be used in varying degrees and from different angles—the purely journalistic, the ethnographic, and even the more intensely personal—depending on the world that needs to be explored. His approach hasn't become bolder or braver, exactly. Rather, he has developed a more adaptable immersion, one capable of using "I" in very different ways to fully tell the nuanced, complex stories of our time.

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### Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Robert S. Boynton, "Notes toward a Supreme Nonfiction: Teaching Literary Reportage in the Twenty-first Century," *Literary Journalism Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 128.

<sup>3</sup> Robert S. Boynton, "Ted Conover," in *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Janet Maslin, "A Collector of Road Trips, Just Passing Through," review of *The Routes of Man: How Roads Are Changing the World and the Way We Live Today*

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<sup>6</sup> Ted Conover, *Immersion: A Writer's Guide to Going Deep* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Ted Conover, *The Routes of Man: Travels in the Paved World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Ted Conover, "The Way of All Flesh," *Harper's*, May 2013, <http://harpers.org/archive/2013/05/the-way-of-all-flesh/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ted Conover, "Rolling Nowhere, Part Two," *Outside*, June 10, 2014, <http://www.outsideonline.com/1922756/rolling-nowhere-part-two>.

<sup>10</sup> Norman Sims, ed., *The Literary Journalists* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>12</sup> Hutchins Hapgood, "A New Form of Literature," *The Bookman: An Illustrated Magazine of Literature and Life*, vol. 21, March–August 1905, 424–27; 424, 425, 426.

<sup>13</sup> Ernest Poole, "Abraham Cahan: Socialist, Journalist, Friend of the Ghetto," *Outlook*, October 28, 1911, 476.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce J. Evensen, "Abraham Cahan," *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre*, ed. Thomas B. Connery (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 91.

<sup>15</sup> Norman Sims, "Joseph Mitchell and the *New Yorker* Nonfiction Writers," in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 92.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," in *The New Journalism: With an Anthology*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 52.

<sup>17</sup> Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 42.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 50–52, 50, 51.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas B. Connery, "Discovering a Literary Form," in Connery, *Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, 4–5.

<sup>21</sup> John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 95.

<sup>22</sup> Boynton, "Ted Conover," in *The New New Journalism*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Jane B. Singer, "Ethnography," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 191.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>25</sup> James M. Tim Wallace, "Mentoring Apprentice Ethnographers through Field Schools: Introduction," in Special Reflections from the Field, ed. James M. Tim Wallace, special issue section, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (January 2008): 217.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Beatty, "How Did It Feel for You? Emotion, Narrative, and the Limits of Ethnography," *American Anthropologist* 112, no. 3 (2010): 432,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 437.

<sup>30</sup> Bill Reynolds, "The Edge of Canadian Literary Journalism," in *Literary Journalism across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, ed. John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 63.

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<sup>33</sup> James Atlas, "The Art of the Interview," *New York Times*, July 9, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/10/opinion/sunday/10biography.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/10/opinion/sunday/10biography.html?_r=0).

<sup>34</sup> Lillian Ross, "How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?" *New Yorker*, May 13, 1950, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1950/05/13/how-do-you-like-it-now-gentlemen>.

<sup>35</sup> Ben Yagoda, introduction to "From 'Portrait of Hemingway,'" by Lillian Ross, in *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism*, ed. Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 129.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, *Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx* (New York: Scribner, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> Yagoda, preface to Kerrane and Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> George Plimpton, *Paper Lion: Confessions of a Last-string Quarterback* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

<sup>40</sup> Robin Hemley, "Immersion Memoir," in *A Field Guide for Immersion Writing: Memoir, Journalism and Travel* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 11–54.

<sup>41</sup> A. J. Jacobs, *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007). See also Hemley, *Field Guide for Immersion Writing*, 26–29.

<sup>42</sup> Hemley, *Field Guide for Immersion Writing*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Conover, "Why Immerse," chap. 1 in *Immersion*, 30.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>45</sup> Roger D. Hodge, introduction to *Submersion Journalism: Reporting in the Radical First Person from Harper's Magazine*, ed. Bill Wasik (New York: New Press, 2008), x.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>47</sup> Bill Wasik, ed., "Part One: Politics," in *Submersion Journalism*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Abraham Cahan, "Can't Get Their Minds Ashore," in Kerrane and Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, 76–79. Originally published in the *Commercial Advertiser* in 1898.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 78–79.

<sup>50</sup> Evensen, "Abraham Cahan," in Connery, *Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, 94.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas B. Connery, "Hutchins Hapgood," in Connery, *Sourcebook of*

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<sup>52</sup> Stephen Crane, "An Experiment in Misery," in Kerrane and Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, 63–70, 63.

<sup>53</sup> Ben Yagoda, introduction to "When Man Falls, a Crowd Gathers," by Steven Crane, in Kerrane and Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, 58.

<sup>54</sup> Jack London, "From *The People of the Abyss*," in Kerrane and Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, 83–89, 86.

<sup>55</sup> Kerrane, introduction to "From *The People of the Abyss*," Ibid., 83–84.

<sup>56</sup> Marvel Cooke, "The Bronx Slave Market (1950)," in *Daily Compass*, January 8–12, 1950, <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/the-bronx-slave-market-1950/>. See also Marvel Cooke, "From 'The Bronx Slave Market,'" in Kerrane and Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, 252–57.

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<sup>58</sup> Ted Conover, *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Kerrane, introduction to "The Spike," by George Orwell, in Kerrane and Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, 245.

<sup>60</sup> Giles Fowler, "John Steinbeck," in Connery, *Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, 225.

<sup>61</sup> Norman Sims, preface to the 2008 edition, in Sims, *Literary Journalism*, xv.

<sup>62</sup> William Howarth, "The Mother of Literature: Journalism and *The Grapes of Wrath*," in Sims, *Literary Journalism*, 69.

<sup>63</sup> James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, A Death in the Family, and Shorter Fiction* (New York: Library of America, 2005).

<sup>64</sup> Sims, "Joseph Mitchell," in Sims, *Literary Journalism*, 100–101.

<sup>65</sup> Boynton, "Gay Talese," in *The New New Journalism*, 361–65.

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<sup>73</sup> Beatty, "How Did It Feel for You," 430–31.

<sup>74</sup> Erik Skipper, "Conover's Coyotes: A Continuation of Steinbeck's Migrant Worker Legacy," *Steinbeck Review* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 31–40, 33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41582052>.

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<sup>76</sup> Kerrane, introduction to “From Coyotes,” by Ted Conover, in Kerrane and Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, 331.

<sup>77</sup> Boynton, introduction to *The New New Journalism*, xiv.

<sup>78</sup> Boynton, “Ted Conover,” in *The New New Journalism*, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Boynton, “Notes toward a Supreme Nonfiction,” 128.

<sup>80</sup> Ted Conover website, accessed July 2, 2015, <http://tedconover.com/blog/bio/>.

<sup>81</sup> Leblanc, *Random Family*.

<sup>82</sup> Boynton, “Ted Conover,” in *The New New Journalism*, 27.

<sup>83</sup> Conover, *Rolling Nowhere*, 19.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>85</sup> Conover, “Writing It,” chap. 5 in *Immersion*, 112–19.

<sup>86</sup> Conover, *Newjack*, 244.

<sup>87</sup> Conover, “In the Temple of the Silly Gods,” chap. 2 in *Whiteout: Lost in Aspen* (New York: Random House, 1993), e-book Smashwords edition.

<sup>88</sup> Conover, “His Rocky Mountain Highness,” chap. 3 in *Whiteout*.

<sup>89</sup> Conover, “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” chap. 9 in *Whiteout*.

<sup>90</sup> Ted Conover, interview by author, July 8, 2015.

<sup>91</sup> Conover, “Writing It,” chap. 5 in *Immersion*, 117.

<sup>92</sup> Conover, *The Routes of Man*, 149.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Conover, *The Routes of Man*, 193.

<sup>95</sup> Conover, *The Routes of Man*, 214.

<sup>96</sup> Conover, *The Routes of Man*, 221.

<sup>97</sup> Conover, interview by author.

<sup>98</sup> Conover, *The Routes of Man*, 158.

<sup>99</sup> Conover, “The Way of All Flesh,” n.p.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Conover, interview by author.

<sup>102</sup> Conover, “The Way of All Flesh,” n.p.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Conover, interview by author.

<sup>106</sup> Conover, “Rolling Nowhere, Part Two,” n.p.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Boynton, “Ted Conover,” in *The New New Journalism*, 8.

<sup>110</sup> Ted Conover, e-mail message to author, March 30, 2008.

<sup>111</sup> Conover, “Undercover: Moving beyond Stunt,” chap. 4 in *Immersion*, 90.

<sup>112</sup> Jason Mosser, *The Participatory Journalism of Michael Herr, Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson, and Joan Didion: Creating New Reporting Styles* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2012), 9.

<sup>113</sup> Boynton, *The New New Journalism*, xiv–xv.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Meisenhelder, “Sociology and New Journalism,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1977): 471–72.

<sup>115</sup> Conover, interview by author.