

Digital LJ . . .

Toward a New Aesthetic of Digital Literary Journalism: Charting the Fierce Evolution of the “Supreme Nonfiction”

David O. Dowling
University of Iowa, United States

Abstract: Increasing mobile audience engagement with long-form journalism has prompted industry to update the digital design conventions originally established by the *New York Times*'s Pulitzer-Prize winning “Snow Fall” in 2012. Since 2015, such innovations have adapted to smaller mobile screens with a leaner aesthetic orienting multimedia elements in succession rather than crowding them on the same screen. Increased automated activation via scrolling has intensified the immersive experience of the story world, making its function as cognitive container of reader attention even more potent than in the first wave of products following “Snow Fall.” With roots in *ekphrasis*, the word/image dialectic central to media theory, the aesthetic borrows from the photographic art movement of Pictorialism and from the cinematic montage method of Sergei Eisenstein. This new wave of innovative storytelling signals the latest attempts at capitalizing on engaged time without burdening users with excessive interactive elements. Legacy media have invested in major projects while start-ups less than a decade old have generated award-winning pieces, cementing their reputations as the latest powerhouses of literary journalism. Branded content is also on the leading edge of the genre as seen in the most recent productions of TBrand and WSJ Studios, the respective content marketing divisions of the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* that produced multimedia features to promote *Narcos* and *Orange Is the New Black* for Netflix, indicating corporate synergies between print, television, and online news media.

Keywords: digital long-form journalism – narrative aesthetics – mobile audiences – cognitive container – media convergence



Top: “Greenland Is Melting Away” (*New York Times*)
Bottom: “My Four Months as a Private Prison Guard” (*Mother Jones*)

“I trust the creative eye will continue to function, whatever technological innovations may develop.” — Ansel Adams

In December of 2016, Harvard University’s Nieman Storyboard spotlighted the *Washington Post*’s “A New Age of Walls” for crossing a new “storytelling frontier” in digital long-form journalism, thus designating it the most important advance in the genre’s brief but fierce evolution since the landmark 2012 publication of “Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek” in the *New York Times*.¹ Spanning “eight countries across three continents,” its announced purpose is to delve into “divisions between countries and peoples through interwoven words, video, and sound.”² Unlike “Snow Fall,” the *Post* had several close competitors in 2016. Longform.org—a major aggregator of digital literary journalism, along with Longreads.com—gave top honors for its Best of 2016 list³ to Shane Bauer’s “My Four Months as a Private Prison Guard” from *Mother Jones*. His story—culled from his 35,000-word manuscript—was the most ambitious in the history of the magazine.⁴ This chilling latter-day *New-jack* has prompted comparisons to Ted Conover’s magnum opus and earned mention among the most acclaimed works of undercover reporting dating back to Nelly Bly’s 1887 infiltration into Gilded Age madhouses.⁵ Second after Bauer on Longreads’ list is Evan Ratliff’s “The Mastermind,” an absorbing saga of Paul Le Roux’s leadership of a prescription drug, narcotics, and money laundering cartel while working as a D.E.A. cooperative. The piece appeared in the *Atavist Magazine*, which Ratliff founded and now edits, a platform that has emerged as a major force among startups in the digital long-form industry along with Byliner, Narratively, and the Big Roundtable.



Screenshot of Evan Ratliff, “Mastermind,” *Atavist*, March 10, 2016. Ratliff is the founder and editor of the digital magazine that revolutionized longform journalism online. *Atavist* produced its first print anthology, *Love and Ruin* (New York: Norton, 2016) to showcase its status as the first digital-only publication to win the prestigious Feature Writing category of the 2015 National Magazine Awards.

This new generation to follow the first wave of digital literary journalism inspired by “Snow Fall” reflects the latest developments in technological and industrial media convergence. Pew labs have recently found that despite the small screen and multitasking often associated with cellphones, consumers spend about twice the time with long-form news compared with short form.⁶ Industry has responded with stunning new products featuring unprecedented achievements in multimedia storytelling. Centuries of experimentation with mixed-media artistic expression preceded this radically hybridized form, beginning with the ancient Greeks’ use of *ekphrasis* and extending through Richard Wagner’s 1849 *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Now Wagner’s aim of “uniting every branch of Art into the *common* Artwork”⁷ appears more attainable than ever, promising to enable journalism to be conceived of as “literary, musical, visual, and performative, rather than just as one of these forms,” as Owen Smith notes.⁸ Through digital long form’s advanced media technology, *ekphrasis*—media at the intersection of word and image—has never been more capable of closing the gap between the verbal and the visual so that the effect “begins to seem paradigmatic of a fundamental tendency in all linguistic expression,” as W. J. T. Mitchell asserts in his seminal *Picture Theory*.⁹

As old media and their attendant narrative powers converge with the latest digital storytelling technologies, industry has moved into a heightened state of economic competition that has inspired some of the most innovative achievements in digital literary journalism. This research examines how the market for digital literary journalism has accelerated into an experimental phase marked by a distinct turn toward streamlined app-inspired design features desired by mobile audiences. Those innovations have introduced a leaner narrative aesthetic marked by careful editorial selection and placement of multimedia elements prioritizing storytelling over displays of technological prowess. Intensified focus on linear narration marks a major advance in digital long form’s function as a cognitive container¹⁰ captivating reader attention. This study reveals how the burgeoning aesthetic of digital literary journalism is fueled by industry’s quest for audience engagement, and how the form’s largely unexplored adaptation of print conventions to cinema’s montage method is the lynchpin of its narrative function. If “the house of journalism,” as Robert Boynton envisions it, “is a big house” with many different rooms each with its own unique shape and décor bearing names like “feature,” “essay,” “foreign report,” and “book,” the digital interface has introduced space for the “supreme nonfiction.”¹¹ He reasons that if technological tools are designed to advance civilization and enhance the quality of life, and that if we expect constant improvements in media software and hardware devices that have raised the standard of quality for users’ expectations for



Screenshot of Shane Bauer's award-winning piece that he speculated was the most ambitious published in *Mother Jones* (July-August 2016). Aggregator Longform.org selected it as the Best of 2016.

what they watch, read, browse, listen to or communicate, we should expect journalism to rise to commensurate new supreme heights.

The following examination of literary journalism's digital renaissance builds on Nora Berning's assertion that "online literary reportages represent an imperative counterweight to conventional journalism," one "essential both for our emotional and intellectual survival."¹² Attention then turns to the aesthetics of the *Post's* "A New Age of Walls," followed by the form's broader adaptation of cinematic storytelling techniques. The conclusion considers the new—and surprisingly young—audiences the genre now attracts. The rising appeal and status of digital literary journalism testifies to Berning's assertion that "as part of the panoply of human communications, literary reportages on the Internet will, in the long term, serve as a fruitful alternative to tell stories in a captivating way."¹³ The new aesthetic underscores how digital long form is undergoing its next "cool moment" since "Snow Fall," as then-editor Jill Abramson described the impact of its 2012 release.¹⁴ The current media ecosystem has enabled journalists to perform "the double role of communicator and narrator to give shape to the information in a way that the print version does not allow," as Berning aptly observes.¹⁵



WSJ Studios, the content marketing division of the *Wall Street Journal's* Advertising Department, produced this story for Netflix to promote its original TV series, *Narcos*. This is a screenshot of the piece that won the 2016 Webby Award for Best Branded Editorial Experience Site.

Literary Journalism's Digital Renaissance

The aesthetic of digital narrative has evolved distinctly toward an immersive experience with an in-app feel that combines cinema's enthralling sense of audiovisual wonder with literary culture's craft of the written word. New rooms in the house of journalism have recently opened, and literary journalism scholars have only begun to explore their transformation of the art of narrative. Alternative production processes—which involve nontraditional funding and partnerships—have spawned products that have transformed online literary culture.¹⁶ Interactivity, for example, may be a benefit or detriment depending on how it is deployed. Because interactive elements in a long-form piece do not lend themselves well to iPhone use, industry has moved away from embedding them within the body of stories, placing them instead at the beginning or end of the text. After the denouement has settled in, readers can revisit the most salient points of the piece in an interactive format, as in the conclusion of WSJ Custom Studios' "Cocainomics," a *Wall Street Journal* paid piece commissioned by Netflix to promote *Narcos*.¹⁷ Its striking opening offers a pointer bearing the invitation, "click to interact" hovering near the letters of its title spelled out in the white powdery narcotic. Clicking, or tapping on a mobile device, enables the reader to move the snowy substance around the screen, breaking up the lettering, an effect both pleasing for its sheer feat of technological verisimilitude, and appalling to the reader's moral conscience. In this case, the interactive element is extremely effective at sounding the narrative's keynote and luring the reader into this highly immersive—and addictive—world of Pablo Escobar's deadly cartel.



Screenshot of *New York Times's* Webby Award-winning story, October 27, 2015, arguably its most innovative storytelling since "Snow Fall" (2012).

The *New York Times's* "Greenland is Melting Away," which won a 2016 Webby Award for Best Individual Editorial Experience,¹⁸ typifies the latest move away from embedded interactives, especially optional elements to tap

or click that might interrupt downward scrolling that drives the narrative. Thus to *read* this story is to experience it in a *linear*, and thus more deeply absorbing top-to-bottom progression with no sidebars or diversions to pull the reader out of the main narrative sweep. Even the spectacular satellite zoom-in effect—which distinguishes this piece from the rest of the genre—is only interactive and thus user controlled through scrolling. Data visualizations tell their stories increasingly through automation as the reader progresses through the story. This is the *Times's* showcase of sterling prose working in tandem with photography, charts, graphics, and documents, and scrollytelling for an immersive *National Geographic* aesthetic, such as that established in “K2” for its tablet magazine.¹⁹

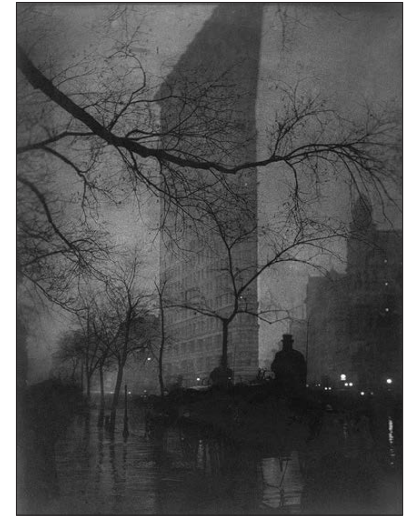
The industrial context for such digital production has shifted literary and book culture traditionally rooted in print toward the screen.²⁰ Encouraged by the expansion of smartphone screens and the growth of the tablet market, book publishers are investing in developing new combinations of textual forms. Scribner’s *Nixonland*, for example, appeared in a tablet version featuring footage from the CBS archive imbedded in the narrative as twenty-seven video clips. Integrated into the text at opportune moments, this footage contextualizes the prose storytelling.²¹ Literature’s migration onto the screen includes e-short publisher Byliner’s acquisition of original journalism by a host of renowned authors, including Anthony Swofford, Buzz Bissinger, Jon Krakauer, Lawrence Lessig, and Paige Williams.²² Krakauer’s *Three Cups of Deceit* was Byliner’s debut story that famously sold over 200,000 copies after the first 90,000 circulated as free publicity.²³ The print magazine industry has seized upon the new aesthetic potential of enhanced multimedia storytelling, as witnessed in *Wired's* pioneering iPad edition that encouraged similar digital products from *Popular Mechanics* and *Esquire*.²⁴

Byliner and *Atavist* charge readers for their stories, either as e-singles or by subscription, whereas the *Post's* “New Age of Walls” functions as a loss leader much in the way



Screenshot from the *Washington Post's* “A New Age of Walls” (October 12, 2016), spotlighted by *Nieman Storyboard* for crossing a storytelling frontier.

the products of WSJ Custom Studios and TBrand Studio (“Women Inmates”) circulate as free Netflix advertisements for *Narcos* and *Orange Is the New Black*. This radical experimentation in alternative business models has converged print media into cross-platform storytelling, as in Piper Kerman’s prison memoir finding new life on television and as long-form digital journalism.²⁵ In 2015, *Atavist* won its first National Magazine Award for Feature Writing for “Love and Ruin” by James Verini, prompting the publication of its first print anthology. Founder and editor Adam Ratliff could appreciate the irony of the situation, acknowledging, “We are known as much for our digital design as for the pieces animated by that digital design.” Yet publishing a print anthology carries special transmedia significance in his view, since, “stories meant as a breakwater against the creep of online ephemerality are naturally at home in print, the medium that originally inspired us to create them.”²⁶



Edward Steichen, *The Flatiron Building, New York City, on a Rainy Night, 1905* (Library of Congress/Wikipedia Commons). This atmospheric photograph epitomized the Pictorialist movement in photography, which promoted the medium of individual artistic expression. Its aesthetic—soft visual effects that use light to evoke a mood—are echoed in the *Post's* 2016 “A New Age of Walls.”

The Aesthetic Achievement of “A New Age of Walls”

“The New Age of Walls” has inaugurated a visual aesthetic not seen in media history since Pictorialism, the movement that aestheticized photography by depicting subjects with soft visual effects as in the brooding atmospheric of Edward Steichen’s *The Flat Iron Building*. Among the *Washington Post's* most visible innovations is that its videos appear only in black and white, casting the narrative’s aesthetic in a chilling almost surreal light. The color world we know and routinely see in journalistic photography and videography appears at an otherworldly critical distance in the piece. The “grayscale montage of recent speeches by world political figures from Trump to Boris Johnson to Marine Le Pen . . . strikes a retrospective chord, as though we were analyzing these events from a moment in the future,” *Nieman's* Allison Eck notes. The concussive violence of this sequence echoes the

rage of these leaders responsible for the global proliferation of walls between nations. Such dark moments are alleviated by video loops the open chapters with the daily life of migrant camps at borders, which function as “an ostinato against the bleakness of struggle.”²⁷

Such subtlety is not lost on the reader, who encounters one medium per screen, thus eliminating the multitasking of older designs that encouraged simultaneously playing videos and reading, a practice that erodes overall user cognition and robs power from the narrative.²⁸ The innovation has corrected for two other flaws in the original digital long-form design established in 2012: readers had too much autonomy to skip ahead in text-heavy formats, and conversely not enough freedom to navigate between sections in multimedia stories that flow from one scene to the next. The result is an immersive experience harkening back to 1990s video games in which video interludes end by landing players in a new environment, inviting them to continue their adventure through whatever channel and pace they desire. “Moon Shot” and “Beyond the Map,” both interactive online documentaries on the digital *Epic Magazine*, similarly provide immersion and cohesion through aerial video transitions, as well as user autonomy to select the video “chapter” of choice. This autonomy does not sacrifice, but instead encourages the deep reading associated with the literary mind that critics such as Nicholas Carr have feared would become obsolete in the digital age. These latest multimedia designs represent nearly two decades of innovation toward linear storytelling that has advanced well beyond the hyperlinked shovelware that encouraged superficial horizontal scanning and skimming practices associated with multitasking.²⁹ The aesthetic of digital long form now relies less on individual effects such as parallax scrolling, the dramatic “curtain effect” made famous by “Snow Fall.”³⁰ Editorial selection and sequencing of multimedia have never been more sensitive to the written narrative, thus gaining greater emphasis than technological pyrotechnics, as seen in the unmistakable documentary feel of

“The New Age of Walls” that frees readers from distracting opportunities to “interact” through a series of buttons.

New Media Spawn New Narratives

Both documentary film and print literary journalism depend on creative processes that demand time to consider events so they may be rendered in a “more detailed and often layered context.”³¹ Immersive reporting is a signature of both forms, which necessarily are investing in the aesthetics of narrative method. In some cases, such as Francois Girard’s *Thirty Two Short Films about Glen Gould*, a biopic of the eccentric musical virtuoso, the form can be radically experimental, eschewing the traditional Aristotelian narrative convention for one closer to Sergei Eisenstein’s montage.³² Montage, the process of creating a coherent composite from fragments, is the direct forbearer of digital literary journalism and its eclectic repertoire.³³ Recent research has established that visual transitional techniques integral to digital long form are responsible for “forging a space for linear narrative on the web,” especially in comparison to hyperlinked menus of items.³⁴ Whereas seminal studies of digital long form emphasize how the core elements of literary journalism drive linear narrative in the genre and spread brand identity,³⁵ research has yet to explore its full range of aesthetic expression of *ekphrasis*.

The standard narrative staples of setting, characters, events, and plot play vital roles in digital long form.³⁶ Yet more ambitious plot structures reach toward an epic global scale, while others experiment with complexity, such as the Russian doll method of recursively embedded storytelling. Marie-Laure Ryan’s definition of narrative as “a mental representation of causally connected states and events that captures a segment in the history of a world and of its members” is intentionally broad enough to accommodate a wide range of modalities expressed through converged media. “This logico-semantic characterization of narrative is sufficiently abstract to be regarded as a cognitive universal but flexible enough to tolerate a wide range of variations,” such as simple, dramatic, complex, parallel, and epic storytelling structures.³⁷ Theoretical nomenclature must ascend beyond basic categories to properly identify the new narratives that new media is producing. Technological prowess is not an end in itself, but is at the heart of these new digital long-form narratives, as the latest research interventions by Tuomo Hiiippala into the structure of multimodal documents demonstrate.³⁸

Kathryn Hayles has shown that digital media do not simply place us before a static text, but instead situate us within a system continually producing a dynamic object. So immersed, “we are the medium and the medium is us,”³⁹ according to her twenty-first century version of Marshall McLuhan’s



Screenshot from the *Washington Post*'s “A New Age of Walls” (October 12, 2016), spotlighted by *Nieman Storyboard* for crossing a storytelling frontier.

famous formulation. A side-by-side comparison of “Snow Fall” with its more recent counterparts such as “A New Age of Walls” highlights the importance of increased linearity in design innovation. Designers have taken seriously the point made by literary critic Sven Birkerts that “if readers are really caught in narrative suspense, eager to find what happens next or emotionally bonded to the characters, they would rather turn pages under the guidance of the author than freely explore a textual network.”⁴⁰ Phones and tablets now mimic books in precisely this manner. Fewer lateral features appear in the margins beside the written text of “A New Age of Walls,” making it far better adapted for reading on a smartphone. The new streamlined designs have encouraged more linear reading on a vertical axis akin to book reading or film viewing rather than surveying a news landing page or database of hyperlinks across a broader, rather than deeper, horizontal axis.

New Narratives Beckon New Audiences

Complex long form is not beyond the reach of today’s online audiences, who are more sophisticated than the stereotype of online readers with short attention spans suggests. Many news organizations have discovered alternatives to clickbait, headline-driven news briefs, and stories generated by a single tweet. Multiplying niches, media, and templates have encouraged a sharp rise in the supply of narrative reporting. The charge that literary journalism is a “small niche activity, produced for a limited and culturally privileged audience” is no longer tenable, as Erik Neveu argues, even across media such as television’s online renaissance that thrives on the proliferation of choice that is “endlessly increasing, fragmenting audiences.”⁴¹ The long tail of the internet now includes not only on-demand streaming video, but long-form in-depth podcasting, as the triumph of NPR’s *Serial* illustrates. Length and complexity may be a reason for, not a hindrance to, success as seen in the increasing complexity of narrative on television (*The Wire*, *House of Cards*, *Game of Thrones*, *The Leftovers*, *Black Mirror*).

Television’s link to print literary journalism and the book publishing industry is readily apparent in the example of Piper Kerman, the Smith College graduate—and felon—whose book, *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women’s Prison*, Netflix acquired for its series. Rising interest in digital long form thus converges with the literary world and lengthy on-demand television series to reinforce recent findings indicating decreasing attention span is more myth than documented fact.⁴² Even BuzzFeed, the platform most notorious for its “snackable” content, has entered the long-form market with content that now competes with august platforms, such as the *Guardian*.⁴³ Because audiences now search and *witness* events themselves, journalism must

not become obsolete. This post-scoop era should free journalists to “return to an older and higher view of their calling: not as reporters of what’s going on,” but as literary artists, equipped with digital tools to “[strengthen] our understanding of the world” with “informed, interpretive, explanatory, even opinionated takes on current events,” as Mitchell Stephens explains.⁴⁴ With this freedom, the supreme nonfiction as Boynton envisioned it is soaring at the height of its powers.

David Dowling, Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Iowa School of Journalism & Mass Communication, specializes in publishing industries and the culture of media production. The author of six books and one monograph, his articles have appeared in such journals as Convergence, Genre, American Journalism, Digital Humanities Quarterly, and Digital Journalism. His next book, A Delicate Aggression: Savagery and Survival in Paul Engle’s Iowa Writers’ Workshop, is under advance contract with Yale University Press. This article draws on research for his current book project, “Immersed: Longform Journalism’s Digital Renaissance.”



Notes

¹ Allison Eck, “The *Washington Post* Crosses a Storytelling Frontier with ‘A New Age of Walls,’” *Nieman Storyboard*, December 20, 2016, <http://niemanstoryboard.org/stories/the-washington-post-crosses-a-storytelling-frontier-with-a-new-age-of-walls/>.

² Samuel Granados, Zoëann Murphy, Kevin Schaul, and Anthony Faiola, “A New Age of Walls, Episode 1: Raising Barriers,” *Washington Post*, October 12, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/world/border-barriers/global-illegal-immigration-prevention/>.

³ “Best of 2016,” *Longform*, accessed May 20, 2017, <https://longform.org/lists/best-of-2016>.

⁴ Davis Harper, “Notable Narrative: Shane Bauer and ‘My Four Months as

a Private Prison Guard,” *Nieman Storyboard*, July 21, 2016, <http://niemanstoryboard.org/stories/notable-narrative-shane-bauer-and-my-four-months-as-a-private-prison-guard/>.

⁵ The American Society of Magazine Editors named *Mother Jones* Magazine of the Year in part on the strength of Bauer, who earned the highly competitive Best Reporting category. David Uberti, “Inside *Mother Jones*’ Monster Investigation of Private Prisons,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, June 24, 2016, http://www.cjr.org/criticism/mother_jones_private_prison_undercover.php; Sid Holt and Susan Russ, “Ellie Awards 2017 Winners Announced,” ASME: American Society of Magazine Editors, February 7, 2017, <http://www.magazine.org/industry-news/press-releases/asme-press-releases/asme/ellie-awards-2017-winners-announced>.

⁶ Amy Mitchell, Galen Stocking, and Katerina Eva Matsa, “Long-form Reading Shows Signs of Life in Our Mobile News World,” Pew Research Center, May 7, 2016, <http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/05/long-form-reading-shows-signs-of-life-in-our-mobile-news-world/>.

⁷ Richard Wagner, “‘Outlines of the Artwork of the Future,’ *The Artwork of the Future* [1849]” in *Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality*, ed. Randall Packer and Ken Jordan (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 4 (emphasis in the original).

⁸ Owen F. Smith, “Fluxus Praxis: An Exploration of Connections, Creativity, and Community,” in *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 126.

⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 153.

¹⁰ This point extends the concept of the cognitive container first introduced in David Dowling and Travis Vogan, “‘Can We ‘Snowfall’ This?’: Digital Long-form and the Race for the Tablet Market,” *Digital Journalism* 3, no. 2 (2015): 209–24. doi: 10.1080/21670811.2014.930250. The original iteration emphasized the coherence of multimedia elements around a single narrative, all of which were available within the story itself rather than on the open web via hyperlinks, thereby minimizing distraction associated with superficial reading on the web. The current argument here is that the cognitive container of digital long form since 2015 now works against distraction not only through its in-app self-contained feel, but more specifically through sequenced multimedia elements that yield to each other in succession screen-by-screen rather than crowding onto the same screen. Typically, the new effect of the cognitive container is marked by linear succession via scrolling whereby the media are not pitted in competition with each other for the reader’s attention. “Snow Fall” contains multiple clips that users can play while they read; this option has been pruned out of the latest design, as clips more often play automatically and take up their own screen, as with animated maps and graphics. This allows written text to occupy unmitigated space for full comprehension with transitions to multimedia selected to enrich its meaning.

¹¹ Robert S. Boynton, “Notes toward a Supreme Nonfiction: Teaching Literary Reportage in the Twenty-first Century,” *Literary Journalism Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall

2013): 129, 125.

¹² Nora Berning, “Narrative Journalism in the Age of the Internet: New Ways to Create Authenticity in Online Literary Reportages,” *Textpraxis* 3, no. 2 (2011): 12.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

¹⁴ Jim Romenesko, “More Than 3.5 Million Page Views for *New York Times*’ ‘Snow Fall’ Feature,” *Jimromenesko.com*, December 27, 2012.

¹⁵ Berning, “Narrative Journalism in the Age of the Internet,” 13.

¹⁶ Rigid canon formation during this crucial phase might stymie the accelerated growth and diversification of the genre; prescriptive approaches adhering to technological determinism might unnecessarily eliminate certain technological designs from consideration as literary journalism. Such an approach would risk reprising the homogenizing literary canon formation witnessed during the heyday of mid-twentieth century New Criticism and critics such as F. O. Matthiessen and a host of scholars lacking in gender and ethnic diversity. According to Nina Baym, the American literary canon is rooted in hegemonic misogynist and masculinist nationalism, Nina Baym, *Feminism and American Literary History: Essays* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 95–96, 99. For more on the ideology of the New Criticism and its impact on canon formation, see John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 155–160.

¹⁷ Peter S. Green, “Cocainomics,” *WSJ Custom Studios*. September 24, 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/ad/cocainomics>.

¹⁸ “2016 People’s Voice/Webby Award Winner,” 2016, Webby Awards, <http://webbyawards.com/winners/2016/websites/website-features-and-design/best-individual-editorial-experience/nyt-greenland-is-melting-away/>.

¹⁹ For more on scrollytelling and user expectations of *National Geographic*, see Cornelia Wolf and Alexander Godulla, “Potentials of Digital Longforms in Journalism: A Survey among Mobile Internet Users about the Relevance of Online Devices, Internet-specific Qualities, and Modes of Payment,” *Journal of Media Business Studies* 13, no. 4 (2016): 199–221.

²⁰ Sherman Young, *The Book Is Dead, Long Live the Book* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007).

²¹ Tablet and iPhone app versions of award-winning and classic literary works such as Harry Mantel’s *Wolf Hall* and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, both published before the 2010 release of the iPad, have been repurposed into enhanced multimedia versions for mobile audiences. See Graham Meikle and Sherman Young, *Media Convergence: Networked Digital Media in Everyday Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 89–90.

²² A *New Yorker* staff writer since 2015, Paige Williams is a National Magazine Award winner, former editor of *Neiman Storyboard*, and professor of literary journalism.

²³ Rachel Kaufman, “The Business of Byliner,” *Ad Week*, December 14, 2011, <http://www.adweek.com/digital/the-business-of-byliner/>.

²⁴ Meikle and Young, *Media Convergence: Networked Digital*, 93.

²⁵ This pattern is indicative of media ownership's tendency to grow more concentrated so that fewer companies are now making a greater diversity of products. The "top tier of media firms show that ownership in the media environment grows ever-more concentrated, . . . at the same time as these businesses diversify their platforms and products to increasingly segmented and fragmented audiences," *Ibid.*, 39; see also, Manuel Castell, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 93.

²⁶ Evan Ratliff, "Editor's Foreword," in *Love and Ruin: Stories of Obsession, Danger, and Heartbreak from the Atavist Magazine*, ed. Evan Ratliff (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016), xi.

²⁷ Eck, "Washington Post Crosses a Storytelling Frontier," 2.

²⁸ For more on multitasking's effect on reading, see Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), 122.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 27. Elsewhere David Ciccoricco notes, "amid the alarm of attentional breakdowns, contemporary cognitive science" has proven that there is no simple on-off switch for attention, but rather a series of types of attentional focus. Activities such as writing an essay, playing tennis, or engaging in a phone conversation, each "require engagement in different tasks that recruit a different part or parts of the brain in order to execute them." Thus "attention is always divided, and this is a biologically necessary state of affairs." However, heavy demands on supervisory attention via interactives in multimedia long form may "inhibit and override all other competing signals in favor of a prioritized one" to the detriment of the reader's focus on the narrative, David Ciccoricco, *Refiguring Minds in Narrative Media* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 71. However, if the nature of the interactive builds directly upon the narrative, the reverse could be true depending on its design.

³⁰ Parallax is simply a wipe transition in film, only user activated through scrolling, and traveling from top to bottom with text on one plane and image on another, rather than horizontally across the screen with film footage typically on both planes. Tuomo Hiippala notes that "a wipe transition is not the most common choice for transitions between semiotic modes in the longform genre, but simply constitutes one alternative among the more traditional scroll and click transitions," in Tuomo Hiippala, "The Multimodality of Digital Longform Journalism," *Digital Journalism*, 5, no. 4 (2016): 420–42, 429, 437.

³¹ Sheila Curran Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction on Screen*, 4th ed. (New York: Focal Press, 2016), 4.

³² Sergei Eisenstein, *Towards a Theory of Montage, vol. 2, Sergei Eisenstein, Selected Works*, ed. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor, trans. Michael Glenny (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

³³ Although cinematic "traditional montage is less effective at displaying networked relationality, the notion of difference in space is better suited to a single plane which is then bisected one or more times," a point that illustrates precisely the

difference between the segmented screens of news landing pages and the self-contained (i.e., cognitive container) of digital long-form stories, Alexander R. Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012), 117. Landing pages disperse the reader's attention across the page, whereas digital long-form stories draws it downward deeper into the narrative through scrolling. Networked relationality, furthermore, may be displayed in non-distracting ways that do not sacrifice linearity, as that intense momentum of the story may be maintained while also pointing to a complex spatial orientation periodically through transitional devices such as animated maps and aerial visuals.

³⁴ Susan Jacobson, Jacqueline Marino, and Robert E. Gutsche, Jr., "The Digital Animation of Literary Journalism," *Journalism: Theory, Practice, and Criticism* 17, no. 4 (2016): 539.

³⁵ *Ibid.*; Hiippala, "Multimodality of Digital Longform Journalism"; Dowling and Vogan, "'Can We 'Snowfall' This?"; Richard Koci Hernandez and Jeremy Rue, *The Principles of Multimedia Journalism: Packaging Digital News* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Hanna Pincus, Magdalena Wojcieszak, and Hajo Boomgarden, "Do Multimedia Matter? Cognitive and Affective Effects of Embedded Multimedia Journalism," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, June 27, 2016, doi: 10.77699016654679; David Dowling and Travis Vogan, "Longform Narrative Journalism: 'Snow Fall' and Beyond," in *The Routledge Companion to Digital Journalism Studies*, eds. Bob Franklin and Scott Eldridge II (New York: Routledge, 2017), 478–86.

³⁶ Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, Jr., 532.

³⁷ Marie-Laure Ryan, "Will New Media Produce New Narratives?" in *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 337. "A New Age of Walls" represents both epic and complex narrative methods, as it spans the globe to profile immigrants facing similar dilemmas despite being continents apart.

³⁸ Hiippala, "Multimodality of Digital Longform Journalism," 421.

³⁹ N. Kathryn Hayles, "The Transformation of Narrative and the Materiality of Hypertext," *Narrative* 9, no. 1 (2001), 37.

⁴⁰ Sven Bikerts, quoted in Marie-Laure Ryan, introduction to Part 5, "Digital Media," in Ryan, *Narrative Across Media*, 331.

⁴¹ Erik Neveu, "Revisiting Narrative Journalism as One of the Futures of Journalism," in *The Future of Journalism: In an Age of Digital Media and Economic Uncertainty*, ed. Bob Franklin (New York: Routledge, 2016), 83–84.

⁴² Mitchell, Stocking, and Matsa, "Long-form Reading Shows Signs of Life," 1. Other studies corroborating longform's increasing popularity among an array of audiences including younger demographics previously thought to have short attention spans include, Jacqueline Marino, Susan Jacobson, and Robert Gutsche, Jr., "Scrolling for Story: How Millennials Interact with Longform Journalism on Mobile Devices," Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute, August 1, 2016; Michael Z. Newman, "New Media, Young Audiences and Discourses of Attention," *Media, Culture & Society* 32, no.4 (2010): 581–96; and Chris Giliberti, "Three Reasons Why Mil-

lennials Want Long Form Storytelling Over ‘Snackable’ Content,” *Forbes*, March 8, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/under30network/2016/03/08/3-reasons-why-millennials-want-long-form-storytelling-over-snackable-content/#38057aca380e>.

⁴³ Even popular online news organizations specializing in stories with fewer than 3,000 words have responded to the surging demand for long form. BuzzFeed, for example, produces high-quality long-form articles that resonate with their audiences, as evidenced by how they consistently perform better on social media than shorter pieces, with an average of 38,000 shares. See Steve Rayson, “BuzzFeed’s Most Shared Content Is Not What You Think,” *Buzzsumo*, May 2, 2015, <http://buzzsumo.com/blog/buzzfeeds-most-shared-content-format-is-not-what-you-think/>.

⁴⁴ Mitchell Stephens, “Quality in Journalism Reconsidered: The Limits of Realism,” in *Journalism and Technological Change: Historical Perspectives, Contemporary Trends*, ed. Martin Schreiber and Clemens Zimmermann (New York: Campus Verlag, 2014), 231–32, 240–41. See also Mitchell Stephens, *Beyond News: The Future of Journalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).