

IT'S ABOUT TIME:  
TEMPORALITY IN MAGAZINE FEATURE STORIES

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by

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## **DEDICATION**

I'd like to thank my parents and sisters for always supporting me, even when I've acted like a zombie after long hours at the library. Thanks to Kati for being awesome. Thanks to all my friends who think I'm crazy for moving to Missouri and writing a long paper about time. They gave me perspective. Finally, I want to thank my grandparents. They keep inspiring me.

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# IT'S ABOUT TIME: TEMPORALITY IN MAGAZINE FEATURE STORIES

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## **ABSTRACT**

The media play a role in socially constructing time, among other things. This textual analysis examines how the concept of time is used in 12 award-winning magazine feature stories. This study was conducted to better understand how this basic aspect of narrative is presented, especially when considered alongside existing theories of time and narrative in fields such as history and literature.

This research shows that time is a central element of these 12 stories. While the subject matter of each story and social convention appear to drive the way an author writes about time, each author displays a high amount of autonomy when determining the order of events of his or her story's larger narrative structure. The organizing of time in each story appears to be a result of the author attempting to address a central problem or thesis. The problems or theses in these feature stories can be considered time-based problems.

In the end, this research shows that time is in many ways a tool to be used rather than a rule of narrative or force of nature by which authors abide. On a theoretical level, this study supports the idea of the social construction of time and some of the ideas of narrative found outside journalism, particularly David Carr.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Stories are often used to teach or illustrate facts or truths about reality. This is especially apparent in childhood when a parent reads a fairy tale that teaches a child a virtue such as sharing, when a math teacher tells a story about a farmer who sells apples to demonstrate how subtraction works or when a grandparent teaches about family by telling a story from his or her childhood. The sum of a person's stories, whether heard or experienced, constitutes a person's worldview (Aerts, Apostel, De Moor, Hellemans, Maex, Van Belle, & Van der Veken, 1994). Aerts et al. (1994) define worldview as

a system of co-ordinates or a frame of reference in which everything presented to us by our diverse experiences can be placed. It is a symbolic system of representation that allows us to integrate everything we know about the world and ourselves into a global picture, one that illuminates reality as it is presented to us within a certain culture (p. 9).

Descartes' famous statement, "Cogito, ergo sum" — "I think, therefore I am" — is a pithy summary of how one's reality and one's capacity to process that reality are inextricably bound together. Experiences aren't just reference materials filed away in memories; they are the very building blocks of our consciousness and act "like geographic maps [that] help us find our way and act coherently in this world"

(Aerts, et al., 1994, p.7). Reality is not just understood — through language, reality is constructed.

The media, a part of a person's social reality, play a critical role in the construction of a person's reality or worldview (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Because the media transmit these versions of reality to millions of people, it is important to ask the question "what do these stories say?" Media theories such as framing theory have emerged to help explain the different ways media present reality.

This study is designed to discover how the media, in particular persons who write feature stories in magazines, present the concept of time. Historically, time has proved to be a slippery concept. Scientists have developed ways to measure it, philosophers have developed ways to think around it and inventions such as the railroad helped usher in a common language common use of time, but there has never been agreement as to what time actually is or how it works (Elias, 1987). In *Confessions*, Augustine (2002) spoke for many when he wrote: "What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks me, I do not know" (p. 224).

Journalists have a stake in the discussion of time because they must daily grapple with the inconsistencies, contradictions and vagueness of time: Stories must reconcile the realms of past, present and future; stories often consist of multiple timelines; often, those timelines don't actually "overlap" but they do have an impact on one other (i.e. one could argue that the American Revolution in 1776, the development of the computer in the 1950s and Mark Zuckerberg all

affected the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, though the “time” of each story is separate from the others).

Journalists frequently set the scene for their readers by situating them in a particular place and a particular time and then showing readers changes that occur as time “progresses.” In observed reality, time might appear to be the thing behind action and change. Time serves a similar function in stories. Time is a foundational building block of meaning upon which other, more complicated meanings can be built. Although the physical setting of a story can be described sensuously, the time element of a story must be constructed using a variety of narrative techniques. And, as will be discussed in this paper, scholars have suggested that the meanings ascribed to time are socially constructed.

At this point, a better understanding of time in feature writing might seem interesting but not important enough to warrant scholarly attention. Additionally, the search for time in magazines might seem too abstract to yield anything of value. However, studies of similarly abstract concepts in seemingly unrelated fields have proved to be very fruitful. For example, researchers examined various characteristics that people ascribed to God and found that those abstract notions were a strong predictor of a person’s political and economic beliefs (Froese & Bader, 2008).

This study has both theoretical and practical applications. Although time is a fundamental unit of many stories, the body of scholarly work about the various ways time is presented by media is small (though the topic has been addressed in related fields such as history and literature). Second, this study can assist in

establishing the groundwork for future studies that examine the possible impact a particular understanding of time might have on a reader's worldview. For example, a researcher might investigate whether reading stories that present the future as a distant, inaccessible realm lead to a reader who is less able or less willing to plan ahead.

On a theoretical level, this study also will help investigate the way writers use time in narrative. Some theorists suggest narrative is distinct from reality and is used as a device to help navigate reality and identity while others suggest narrative is similar to reality and allows individuals and groups alike the opportunity to negotiate with time and interact with the world around them. This study will not pick a winner of that debate, but it will use those theories as lenses with which to view the stories and the implications the theories might have.

This study also has practical implications for practitioners of journalism. Although time is in many ways the track a story uses to get from beginning to end, writers and editors might not even be conscious of the decisions they make with regard to time in the story. Time is so pervasive that it can easily go unnoticed: Incorporating time into a story can easily become involuntary. Slowing down and examining just what it means to tell a story one way and not the other (for example, choosing to tell a story "forward" or "backward") or to present time with certain characteristics instead of others (linear as opposed to circular, for example) can help those for whom that element of writing has become rote. Reexamining this fundamental part of narrative can lead to more informed decisions and, consequently, better writing.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Social Construction of Reality/Creating a Worldview**

As at least one researcher points out, because humans are linguistic creatures, to understand their stories is perhaps the best way to understand their worldviews (Naugle, 2002). A worldview ties the fundamentals of a person's inner self together and exists as "a series of world-interpreting narratives that provide the individual's 'bottom line' as well as the primary cultural 'given' [that], consciously or unconsciously, form 'the well worn grooves of thought'" (Naugle, 2002, p. 329). "The material used to construct a world view comes from our inner experience and our practical dealings with things, as well as from the interpretation of history and of scientific knowledge about our world" (Aerts et al., 1994, p. 9).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) write that knowledge is a continual correspondence between an individual and a social bank of information, a perpetual state of incorporating or rejecting external knowledge into our existing schema of the world. As a result, an individual's understanding of reality is socially constructed. Language is the medium that allows those exchanges to occur. "Signs and symbols incorporate subjective truth into something that is objectively available in the common reality that [people] share ... An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of everyday life"

(p. 35). Language does not simply transmit data. It also assists in formulating patterns found in data into socially recognized “categories” and assigns meaning to the information (p. 37). “Because of its capacity to transcend the ‘here and now,’ language bridges different zones within the reality of everyday life and integrates them into a meaningful whole” (p. 37).

Time, in particular, is socially constructed. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), the social construction of time helps people associate with both the past and the future:

The symbolic universe also orders history. It locates all collective events in a cohesive unity that includes a past, present and future. With regard to the past, it establishes a ‘memory’ that is shared by all the individuals socialized within the collectivity. With regard to the future, it establishes a common frame of reference for the projection of individual actions. Thus the symbolic universe links men with their predecessors and their successors in a meaningful totality, serving to transcend the finitude of individual existence and bestowing meaning upon the individual’s death (p. 95).

In other words, the social construction of time is a critical function of society because, among other things, it enables the lessons of the past to remain relevant and makes the present generation’s impact on the future seem actual and tangible. In its orientation role, which “keeps us informed of the changes, events, issues, and characters in the world outside,” journalism assists readers in identifying those connections (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007).

The aim of this research is to examine how time, as both a concept in itself and a narrative structure, is presented in the feature stories of magazines with a history of critically acclaimed feature and essay writing.

### **Why Study Time?**

There are many instances in which time is intertwined — intentionally or not — into stories. Time is a fundamental unit of stories on two levels. Using time to organize a story — whether a story is told backward or forward, for example — is a decision a writer makes to create the narrative structure upon which his or her story will be built. How time works within that structure as part of the substance of the story — whether time repeats itself or continues on, linearly; whether the past or future might have any grip or influence on the present — is a second, deeper use of time in which the author acts as a meaning-maker and proposes one interpretation of reality to the reader.

Initially, time might seem like a concept that is not debatable and hence not important when considering how writers present it. That is because, in most instances, “we perceive ourselves as contained in a bubble of space whose extent is delimited by our viewpoint and the reach of our senses, and which moves and adjusts itself with us as we peregrinate through our personal worlds” (Butterfield, 1999, p. 218). However, the appearance of time is deceiving: The individual is not necessarily the focal point through which time operates. The many different properties time can be considered to have are often reduced to tangled thought-

experiments. However notional they might be, they do illuminate the complexities of time. For example,

a recurring objection goes like this: If in some way it makes sense to say that time flows, then it ought to be possible to say which way it flows. Does it flow from the past, welling up into the present and spilling out into the future? Or from the future, looming nearer and nearer and then ‘coming to pass?’ ...is it time itself that flows, or events that flow through time? Are we, the observers, being carried along by the stream, or are we on the bank watching it flow? Or maybe both? (Manchester, 2005, pp. 1-2).

The amorphous nature of time can be observed in the way language works. In English, the past, present and future tenses exist, but the boundaries between them are far from being airtight. For example, the present is an indefinite period which, when used, might refer to a period of seconds, minutes, days, weeks or more. More intricate verb forms denote time within time, such as the future-perfect tense, which denotes a future event as if it were a past event: “You will have finished reading this book by next week.”

### **Conceptual Framework**

Defining journalism is difficult (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2007). Journalism inherently lies at the nexus of multiple disciplines, including history and English. Additionally, journalism engages with an untold number of disciplines as subject matter warrants: A science writer brings physics into the fold while a court reporter incorporates law. The lack of distinct subject boundaries can present a challenge to those who study journalistic content. For this study, concepts from

three academic fields — history, literature and journalism — will be used to ground the research.

First, because many stories are accounts of past events, an understanding of how historians work will be useful. Hayden White's research provides a glimpse into the development and philosophy of history as a discipline. Next, because the feature writing often gives authors the freedom to write in a literary way, an understanding of narrative theory will be useful. In particular, Paul Ricoeur's *Narrative and Time* will be used as it addresses narrative in terms of temporality. Far from being disparate or randomly chosen, these two fields and authors have much in common and in some ways inform one another directly: As at least one scholar points out, when White struggled to deal with the historical text as a narrative whole, he looked to narrative theory. "This may explain how and why literary theory could become such a very prominent element in the discourse of historical theory since White and why his historical theory has often been characterized as 'narrativist'" (Ankersmit, 2009, p. 77). In particular, White turned to the work of Ricoeur (Partner, 2009, p. 96). After discussing the ideas of White and Ricoeur, Carr will be introduced. Carr addresses time, narrative and reality by bringing both White and Ricoeur into the discussion. While both agreeing and disagreeing with the latter two scholars, Carr outlines a narrative theory that addresses disconnects the others point out. Finally, significant scholarly work in journalism, including Schudson, will be outlined.

## **Temporality in the Study of History – Hayden White**

“What does it mean to think historically?” White (1973) asks in the beginning of *Metahistory* (p. 1). Historians, philosophers and social theorists have all questioned what the study of history entails. History has played an integral role in journalism, too. Schudson (1986) writes that it’s not enough to ask “did it just happen?” when determining newsworthiness. Instead, a person must ask, “Does this *mean* something?” And that question cannot be answered without making some assumptions about history” (p. 84).

Over time, the “answers” to questions about history have been added to, subtracted from and revised. In short, historical inquiry used to be seen “within the context of the assumption that unambiguous answers could be provided for them:” History was a scientific inquiry (White, 1973, p. 1). But during the twentieth century, history became understood as a cross between facts and fiction, science and art (White, 1973, p. 2). “Histories combine a certain amount of ‘data,’ theoretical concepts for ‘explaining’ these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation” (White, 1973, p. ix). In addition, White writes that histories “contain a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic” (White, 1973, p. ix).

### **The process of making history**

White (1973) describes the history-making process: “First, elements are arranged in the temporal order of occurrence; then the chronicle is organized into a story by the further arrangement of the events into the components of a process or happening, which is thought to possess a beginning, middle and end” (p. 5).

Adhering to a strict chronological order is important in the beginning of the process, but chronology loses its primacy as the writer transitions from organizing to explaining. The space between the historian's dual roles of fact-conveyer and meaning-maker is where he or she presents his or her version of reality. An observed fact (people of Great Britain fought against people in its American colonies in the 1770s, for example) does not come with observable and definitive motives, causes, effects, etc. Into those spaces, historians insert their assertions:

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by 'finding,' 'identifying,' or 'uncovering' the 'stories' that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between 'history' and 'fiction' resides in the fact that the historian 'finds' his stories, whereas the fiction writer 'invents' his (White, 1973, p. 6).

Although the author does not have the liberty to alter known facts, he or she can cast existing facts in such a way to make a point: "Emplotment is the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind" (White, 1973, p. 7). According to White (1973), adherence to historical chronology plays second fiddle to adherence to narrative significance: "The historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events" (p. 7).

However, historians do not simply cast time aside. Historians write with a worldview (theirs), which includes a particular interpretation of time. To that end, White (1973) claims that a historian uses an understanding of time that is dependent on his or her political views — what White calls the “temporal location of the social ideal” (p. 25). He describes “four different strategies of ideological implication by which historians can suggest to their readers the import of their studies of the past for the comprehension of the present (p. 427).” “Conservatives are inclined to imagine historical evolution as a progressive elaboration of the institutional structure that *currently* prevails” (p. 25). “Liberals imagine a time in the *future* when this structure will have been improved” (p. 25). “Radicals are inclined to view the utopian condition as *imminent*” (p. 25). “Anarchists are inclined to idealize a *remote past* of natural-human innocence” (p. 25). In other words, even when time does play an organizing role in the construction of histories, time is not necessarily tied to chronology. A writer might arrange time to emphasize an event rather than show the succession of events. According to White, the events in a history that the author uses to point to his or her own thesis or purpose are endowed with the temporal qualities that jibe with the historian’s ideology.

White’s idea that the act of writing, or creating, history achieves something outside the story itself can be seen in other realms where narrative is used. For example, narrative reconciliation has been used in various types of therapy, most notably in South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1995 (Moon, 2006, p. 258). In sum, the TRC offered victims and perpetrators of apartheid to

come forward and share their stories of injustices suffered and perpetrated. The hope was that sharing narrative would allow the speaker/subject of the story to transcend the ruts of behavior, such as racial discrimination and hate, found in the narrative. As one scholar puts it, the act of narrative reconciliation “conditions what gets told and how” (Moon, 2006, p. 272). This process is “transformative,” casting new meaning on past events, and the “weight of meaning’ of the events recounted is ‘thrown forward’ onto a future just beyond the immediate present” (Moon, 2006, p. 272). In the case of apartheid, narrative “tells of what is past, violent conflict, what is passing, truth-revelation [confession] and remorse, and what is to come, reconciliation” (Moon, 2006, p. 272). Whether considering the theory that history and narrative are used for political ends or for reconciliation, the potential narrative has for doing something outside its own confines is a thought expressed by many.

### **History as an art form**

The last two centuries have undone history’s scientific authority, but White writes that history is still important. To refute the claim that history’s lack of scientific authority renders it hollow and incompetent, White (1973) turns to Benedetto Croce, whom White calls the “most talented historian of all the philosophers of history of the century” (p. 378). The problem lies not with the practice of history itself but instead with the category into which the practice has traditionally been placed. “The incorrect desire to place history among the sciences sprang from two false beliefs: that all knowledge had to be scientific knowledge and that art was not a mode of cognition but merely a stimulant to the

senses” (White, 1973, p. 382). By removing history from the positivist tradition altogether, Croce nullified the accusation that history fails to live up to positivist’s scientific expectations. Croce then set to task to do two things: 1) Show artistic truth’s validity apart from scientific truth’s validity and 2) distinguish the art of history from more traditional art forms.

White (1973) summarized that the “difference between art and science lay in the direction taken in the process of inquiry” (p. 383). Art is the intuition of the “world in its particularity to a representation of the world as a congeries of particulars” (White, 1973, p. 383). Science is intuition of the “world in its particularity to subsumption of the particulars under concepts” (White, 1973, p. 383). “Whereas science pursued a course toward universal understanding, art circumscribed distinct areas of our reality in order to represent them more clearly” (White, 1973, p. 383).

White (1973) then described how the art of history differs from other art forms: “Art in general sought to intuit the total possibilities of individual existence, art of history sought to intuit what had actually crystallized as existential particularities” (p. 383).

Under the auspices of White’s description of the historian, the journalist is not bound to organizing the events of a story into categories such that a reader can know the story like one knows the periodic table. Instead, the journalist is charged with making a representation of the event in order to bring both the reality of the event and reality in general into a higher resolution for readers. White’s understanding that the stories of history are not a true portrayal of reality

but rather an interpretation of reality that act as the means to an author's ends might be problematic for some journalists who, even if they cede that stories are to some degree representative, strive to not advance an agenda. The degree to which narrative reflects reality will be further discussed later in Chapter 2, but at this point the takeaway is this: writing history asks for something beyond observed realities — it calls for the writer to insert his or her interpretation of them.

### **Temporality in Literature — Paul Ricoeur**

Magazines are not the center of this study. Magazines are simply the medium in which the narrative of a feature story — the true unit of analysis in this study — is frequently found. Because feature stories typically rely on narrative, the narrative theory found in the study of literature can be helpful.

#### **Narrative: order and reordering**

Narrative is found in texts, broadly understood, everywhere. According to Ricoeur (1983), narrative

describes a sequence of actions and experiences done or undergone by a certain number of people, whether real or imaginary. These people are presented either in situations that change or as reacting to such change. In turn, these changes reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the people involved, and engender a new predicament which calls for thought, action, or both (p. 150).

Whether fiction or nonfiction, narrative is organized not by the exact imitation of reality but by an author's own reconstruction of it — a painting, not a photograph. Similar to White's historian, writers seek to convey facts that can be observed as well as certain unobservable truths about those facts. Of this dual role, Ricoeur (1983) writes:

This is why 'explaining' and 'describing' — in the narrative sense — are for so long taken as indistinguishable. For a simple narrative already does more than report events in their order of appearance. A list of facts without any ties between them is not a narrative (p. 148).

In fact, the explanative, meaning-making function of narrative is a defining characteristic of it: "A narrative that fails to explain is less than a narrative" (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 148).

Because this study relies heavily on Ricoeur's (1983) account of narrative, it is important to address his understanding of the inner workings of nonfiction writing, distinct from fiction. It might seem that history presents itself already formed to a writer — in which case all the writer must do is account for all the events and ensure they are presented as history seemed to have presented them, one after the other. However, that is not how historical narrative is created, according to Ricoeur.

One of his objections is that when a writer writes a story about an event that has already taken place, he or she first travels backward through the story. "It is only when we tell the story that we retrace forward what we have already traced backward," which is fundamentally different than simply starting at the

beginning (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 157). Second, because of limitations of space and time, the writer of a nonfiction story must exclude a significant amount of information about the event(s). Consequently, the events that are included carry a weight that is different from when the events actually occurred. Additionally, information included in the narrative might be arranged to emphasize connections to a theme or idea (as White also suggested) at the expense of disrupting the chronological order of events. Thus, Ricoeur (1983) states: “A plot is a very human and very unscientific mixture of material causes, ends, and chance events. Chronological order is not essential to it” (p. 170).

### **Reading the trees, seeing the forest**

Being able to grasp the story as a whole is key to understanding a narrative. “Historical understanding comes down to comprehending a complex event by seeing things together in a total and synoptic judgment” rather than by seeing history as a series of distinct events (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 156). Therefore, Ricoeur suggests that the narrative presented by an author is not a story that actually could be found in any actual time. For him, participants in the actual event would not necessarily recognize the story as the author ended up presenting it. The writer has effectively created a new world, complete with its own self-governing laws of time, in which selected facts about the original event are reconstructed in order to impart a meaning that is deeper than simply the knowledge of the order in which the events occurred.

Predictably, a writer who reorders a strict chronology to suit his or her narrative vision might face scrutiny. The truth of the story, the trustworthiness of

the writer and the genre itself might be questioned. However, according to Ricoeur (1983),

understanding is not the subjective side and explanation the objective one. Subjectivity is not a prison and objectivity is not our liberation from this prison. Far from conflicting, subjectivity and objectivity reinforce each other. 'Truth is double, for it is composed of truth both about the past and about the testimony offered by the historian (Marrou)' (p. 98).

In order to convey meaning, the narrative world must be self-contained to the extent that it can support itself. In other words, though the writer might, among other things, order events differently in order to impart meaning, he or she cannot do so haphazardly. The narrative as a whole supports the writer's conclusions. A writer cannot use events to set up a conclusion of his or her choice. The presentation of the events is a conclusion in itself: The conclusions "are exhibited by the narrative order rather than demonstrated. The actual meanings are provided by the total context" (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 156). Meaning is often found in the connections between the events in addition to the details of the events themselves, though "the 'one because of the other' is not always easy to extract from the 'one after the other'" (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 152). For this reason, a study into the temporal features exhibited in the narrative structures of feature stories is of interest.

Ultimately, Ricoeur finds that the time found in narrative is undoubtedly malleable, though questions surrounding narrative's likeness to reality remain.

## **Narrative and Reality — David Carr**

Narrative theorist David Carr addresses time, narrative and reality in his paper *Narrative and the Real World*. In the paper, he brings the theories of White and Ricoeur together in conversation. Carr makes a compelling argument in support of their understanding of temporality in narrative, but he disagrees with their opinion that narrative is dissimilar to reality.

The central question for Carr (1986) is this: "What is the relation between a narrative and the events it depicts?" (p. 117). Carr (1986) summarizes that White, Ricoeur and others believe "in virtue of its very form, any narrative account will present us with a distorted picture of the events it relates" (p. 117). According to Carr, White and Ricoeur fully accept this as an acceptable trade-off — it's not as if a better form exists — but problems of truth and validity remain. Carr (1986) offers the contrasting opinion that

Narrative is not merely a possible successful way of describing events; its structure inheres in the events themselves. Far from being a formal distortion of the events it relates, a narrative account is an extension of one of their primary features (p. 117).

Exploring the details and implications of White and Ricoeur's purported discontinuity as well as Carr's counterarguments is important to this study. This study is about the temporal qualities in and suggested by feature stories. The first step in this process is to simply identify what qualities the authors give to time in their stories. To that end, White, Ricoeur and Carr generally agree: The writer exerts some level of control over time in the story. But the second step of this

study, analyzing the impact those temporal qualities might have on the social construction of time in reality, is more complicated. On one hand, if narrative is markedly different from reality, the temporal features in the story might not be as compatible with the reality in which social construction takes place. On the other hand, if, as Carr suggests, narrative and reality are structurally similar, the temporal qualities identified in the stories might be more readily transferrable.

The following section will outline two arguments Carr addresses.

### **Discontinuity #1 — cherry-picking the events in a narrative**

The first objection Carr (1986) addresses is the problem of selection. He summarizes the objection this way: "In a story everything has its place in a structure while the extraneous has been eliminated; and that in this it differs from 'life,' in which everything is 'scrambled messages'" (p. 119). Ricoeur, according to Carr (1986), concludes that narrative molds "agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results, etc." into an identifiable and coherent structure (p. 119). This differs from Ricoeur's understanding of reality in which "the experience of time is characterized essentially by 'discordance'" (Carr, 1986, p. 119). Thus, the net effect of narrative is this: "The various approaches to the problem of representation place stories or histories on a radically different plane from the real world they profess to depict" (Carr, 1986, p. 120).

It is important to note that this is not to say that narrative creation is without merit even if it were to be dissimilar from reality. Carr (1986) concurs with Ricoeur that both fictional and historical narratives "enlarge reality, expanding our notion of ourselves and of what is possible" (p. 120). However, for

Ricoeur this is a process different from reality while for Carr the process is imitative of reality. Carr (1986) adds that White in particular is "suspicious" of this process, stating that narrative "constitutes escape, conciliation, or diversion from reality; at worst it is an opiate" that can be used as "an instrument of power and manipulation (p.120). Elements of this interpretation can be seen in White's depictions of ideological slants evident in narrative form. Although Ricoeur's final assessment is not as severe, he nevertheless sides with White in finding reality to be fundamentally different from narrative.

### **The reality of experience**

To address this objection, Carr (1986) asks what the nature of the reality is that narrative is said to distort. If reality is said to be the observable physical world, as Carr suspects the other authors had in mind, the objection fails to grasp the true scope of reality. Carr argues that reality includes human experience, which lies outside the boundaries of the strictly physical realm.

One's understanding of temporality is affected by this distinction between physical and nonphysical phenomena. The understanding that the physical world constitutes reality inevitably leads to the dichotomy of causation and chaos, which in turn affects any understanding of the future and the way the future is related to the present. If reality is circumscribed by the physical world, it could be said to be either "random and haphazard" or "rigorously ordered along causal lines" (Carr, 1986, p. 121). Carr's alternative — that reality includes the experience of those physical sensations, which falls outside the physical realm — suggests "our very capacity to experience, be aware, spans future and past...[and] as we

encounter them, even at our most passive, events are charged with the significance they derive from our retentions and protentions" (Carr, 1986, p. 121). Addressing the same problem, narrative theorist Barbara Carr concurs, writing that narrative "is not to be regarded as an aesthetic invention used by artists to control, manipulate and order experience, but as a primary act of mind transferred to art from life" (Hardy, 1968, p. 5).

### **Action, time and explanation**

On a similar note, the correlation between time found in narrative and the action found in reality can present an additional obstacle, according to Carr. Objectors insist that the time found in narrative is simply a device used to manipulate action found in reality; writers use time in order to advance a particular point, which does not reflect the reality of the action that took place. In other words, action is not related to narrative's ordered time but is instead a parody of it, an imitation of life. To this, Carr (1986) states:

But is there not a kinship between the means-end structure of action and the beginning-middle-end structure of narrative? In action we are always in the midst of something, caught in the suspense of contingency which is supposed to find its resolution in the completion of our project. To be sure, a narrative unites many actions to form a plot. The resulting whole is often still designated, however, to be an action of larger scale; coming of age, conducting a love affair, or solving a murder. The structure of action, small-scale and large, is common to art and to life. ...What I am saying is that

the means-end structure of action displays some of the features of the beginning-middle-end structure which the discontinuity says is absent in real life" (p. 122).

Carr elaborates in a later paper in which he sets out to describe narrative's explanatory capability. He states that everyday experience can readily demonstrate that when we seek to answer a question about action — what happened? — we naturally turn toward time-based narrative.

For example, if we see a broken vase next to a table it had been sitting on, the action that took place is self-evident: a force moved the vase from its resting position, gravity took over and the force of the abrupt halt against the floor was just too much. But that does not satiate the human need for other answers. The questions "who knocked it over?" and "why?" are intimately connected to the "what" to such an extent that narrative holds the only satisfactory explanation (Carr, 2008, pp. 19-20). In fact, the question itself is a function of time:

If we start from a puzzling action, as we did in our example, the story we tell places that action in a temporal continuum, relating it to previous actions and events that led up to it; and it places the action also in relation to a future scenario or set of possible futures. The original action was puzzling in part because we didn't have its temporal context (Carr, 2008, p. 22).

But what if the storyteller doing the explaining is mistaken or lying? In the case of the broken vase, if a person came forward and said "I was carrying a large box, I didn't see the table, and I ran into it," that person could just as well have

been lying to cover up his or her clumsiness or malevolence. To this, Carr (2008) states that even if this were the case, the problem lies not with narrative being the wrong form but with the particular story being the wrong narrative (p. 21). A similar situation can also be observed in courts of law where different narratives vie for the label of truth. “A journalist might have similar concerns, wanting to reconstruct ‘what really happened’ out of the varying accounts of the original events” (Carr, 2008, p. 21).

Here the value of hindsight is that from [a writer’s] perspective [he or she] can reveal elements that augment the original story. Those looking back can assess the importance of unintended consequences ranging far beyond the perspectives and aims of the original participants (Carr, 2008, p. 21).

In sum, Carr suggests that reality, which White and Ricoeur depict as being substantially different from its narrative counterpart, is actually quite similar on a fundamental level.

### **Discontinuity #2 – the omniscient narrator**

A second argument that undermines the narrative-reality relationship is this: The *ex post* position of the narrator is problematic because the narrator assumes a viewpoint that is not found in reality (Carr, 1986, p. 123). According to this argument:

"[in reality] we are forced to swim with the events and take things as they come. We are constrained by the present and denied the authoritative, retrospective point of view of the story-teller. Thus the real difference between 'art' and 'life' is not organization vs. chaos, but rather the absence

in life of that point of view which transforms events into a story by telling them. Telling is not just a verbal activity and not just a recounting of events but one informed by a certain kind of superior knowledge" (Carr, 1986, p. 124).

The narrator's omniscient oversight of a situation is too far removed from the uncertainties of a present reality to warrant the appraisal that narrative and reality are linked, according to this objection. Narrative is not necessarily labeled as a deceitful form, but it does bring to question how the content of narrative translates to a reader's reality. In terms of this study, the lingering question is this: If narrative is indeed removed from reality, is the narrative's construction of temporality even transferable to the reader's reality in the first place?

### **The future-perfect present**

Carr rejects the assumption that we are confined to the present. To him, the present is not a distinct point-of-view but rather the name for a continual negotiation that occurs with both the past and the future. "We do not simply sit and wait for stimuli to hit us" (Carr, 1986, p. 124).

The teleological nature of action, of course, lends it the same future-oriented character. Not only do our acts and our movements, present and past, derive their sense from the projected end they serve; our surroundings function as a sphere of operations and the objects we encounter figure in our experience in furtherance of (or hindrance to) our purposes (Carr, 1986, p.124).

According to Carr, in terms of a time-value, the present actually has a

"quasi-retrospective character which corresponds to the future-perfect tense: the elements and phases of an action, though they unfold through time, are viewed from the perspective of their having been completed" (Carr, 1986, p. 124).

Thus, the selection of events that narrators engage in (cherry-picking) is not an unnatural or dishonest practice. In reality, our perceived present is not confined to the immediate, and when we engage with the past and future we recognize much of the immediate present to be static and move it aside: narrative and reality at minimum share these deep similarities.

Furthermore, in reality "we are constantly striving, with more or less success, to occupy the story-tellers' position with respect to our own lives" and at other times the role of an audience member (Carr, 1986, p. 125). Carr elaborates on the idea with this example:

Sometimes we must change the story to accommodate the events; sometimes we change the events, by acting, to accommodate the story. It is not the case that we first live and act and then afterward, seated around the fire, as it were, tell about what we have done, thereby creating something entirely new thanks to a new perspective. The retrospective view of the narrator, with its capacity for seeing the whole in all its irony, is not an irreconcilable opposition to the agent's view but is an extension and refinement of a viewpoint inherent in action itself (Carr, 1986, p. 126).

In addition to describing where the future-perfect viewpoint of the present can be seen in reality, Carr further connects narrative to reality. He does this by

demonstrating the triangular storyteller-subject-audience relationships that exist both in narrative and reality:

Rather than a merely temporally persisting substance which underlies and supports the changing effects of time, like a thing in relation to its properties, I am the subject of a life-story which is constantly being told and reared in the process of being lived. I am also the principal teller of this tale, and belong as well to the audience to which it is told" (Carr, 1986, p. 126).

Instead of describing the past, present and future in terms of containers, with individuals who stand in the present and continually receive experience from the future before passing it off to the past, Carr describes time to be a negotiation individuals have with themselves. Individuals occupy more than a static position in the present. They also stand in the future-perfect point-of-view. In doing so, individuals perceive time with the similar omniscient-narrative outlook found in narrative, though their omniscience is hypothetical (which, ultimately, is the same fate for writers, who by no measure write with omniscience — redactions and corrections take place at every level of journalism). For these reasons, Carr suggests narrative is less a reflection of life and more a working model of it.

### **Individual history and social history: the collective subject**

The final statement Carr considers (which also has the greatest implication in the analysis of the stories to be studied) is the role of the individual vs. the role of the collective. Up to this point in his paper, Carr writes about the individual

subject and the individual narrator. However, the narrative of a single subject is not representative of narrative settings, nor is it representative of the settings of the stories used in this study. Carr addresses this issue:

What we have said is methodologically tied to a first-person point of view.

History, by contrast, deals primarily with social units, and with individuals only to the extent that their lives and actions are important for the society to which they belong (Carr, 1986, p. 127).

Although the difference between individual narrative and social narrative might seem great if only because of quantity, the difference between them is actually slim according to Carr. As a result of the narrator-subject-audience (or even narrator-audience) relationship that is inherent to narrative, narrative is social at the outset. It's not as if it has to rework itself or be transformed to accommodate multiple roles, perspective, characters, etc. Furthermore, "our view of the self is itself an interplay of roles...we are socially constructed by ourselves in some way" (Carr, 1986, p. 128). Social human time is constructed, and community exists, by definition, because of shared narrative, whether inherent or socially constructed (Carr, 1986, p. 128). Narrative and community are self-reinforcing concepts.

David Carr's analysis of time, narrative and reality constitute the basis for one of the theoretical implications of this study. Examples of Carr's assertion that narrators are less like observers of physical realities and more like empathetic sharers of experience will be looked for. In addition, examples that support or oppose the assertion that narrative is similar to reality will be looked for in the

stories studied. Finally, each story's depiction of the narrative present presented by the writers will be gauged (whether gazing outward toward the future constitutes the present, or, as Carr suggests, the present consists of a quasi-retrospective or future-perfect viewpoint).

### **Temporality in Journalism**

Journalism research echoes much of the history and narrative theories described above. In *Public Opinion*, Lippmann (1991) writes that between a person and reality lies a "pseudo-environment" constructed by others, on which people generally base their actions (p. 25). For example, most people do not get a chance to meet presidential candidates, nor are they intimately aware of the details of the issues on each candidate's platform, yet that does not stop people from voting. They base their opinions not on a firsthand account of reality but on a pseudo-reality constructed by media. Reinforcing Aerts et al. and Berger and Luckmann, Lippmann shows how media play a central role in creating intermediary pseudo-environments.

Schudson (1986) acknowledges that journalists might be asked to write about a story that might reach back several millennia, several centuries or a few days (p. 87). As such, the journalist frequently wears the hat of the historian: "The past tense of the news story, simultaneously, gives the reader the sense that anything he or she reads is history" (Schudson, 1986, p. 106). Schudson (1986) adds that the way these stories are selected and pursued are apt to be influenced by "the intentions and intelligence of the officials who provide the news, the

seriousness of the newspaper, the knowledgeability of the reporter, and the set of presuppositions journalists carry in their heads” (p. 86).

Schudson goes on to state that temporality is frequently inconsistent within a given story. Headlines and captions are often written in present tense while stories are in past tense, though he adds that the continuous present is used at times, too (p. 89). Of writing about the future, Schudson (1986) writes that despite a “jocular hostility toward people who claim to know something about the future, the newspaper regularly writes about the future and seeks to explain the present in terms of a consensually agreed-upon sense of the future” (p. 92). This passage reinforces that time — in this case, the future — is socially constructed. And things get more complicated for the reporter: “Uncomfortable as the journalist is in speculating about the future, in fact reporters sometimes write about the past through the prism of the future” (Schudson, 1986, p. 94). “Another kind of reporting describes the past as if it *were* the future” (Schudson, 1986, p. 95).

Many of the above references were made with traditional newspaper reporting in mind. However, this research is focused on features. Schudson (1986) briefly addresses the differences: He says that feature stories are often considered to be “interesting” rather than “important,” “timeless” instead of “timely” and focused on “what is considered eternal or universal in human affairs” (p. 106). To this, Schudson (1986) adds that many feature stories are “subjunctive reporting,” which is a grammatical mood that expresses supposition, desire, hypothesis, possibility, etc., rather than state an actual fact” (p. 106). The

subjunctive — in which facts are unattached to any historical timeline — offers writers a wide latitude of possibilities with regard to how they construct the time of their stories.

Last, Schudson (1986) makes the case that, far from being trivial, the way in which journalists present time in their stories has significant implications:

When [journalists] take the English language and its various possibilities into their own hands, they challenge the everyday politics of the press that, on the whole, keep the news media a fourth branch of government, the unofficial outlet for official voices. When they seek a sense of time independent of official clocks, they make a claim to a professional autonomy that rides up against a powerful politics of time (p. 108).

In sum, the features of time and narrative (and all associated questions and problems) found in history and literature are recognized by others to be part of journalism, too. However, the concepts are not studied in the field of journalism to the same extent as they are in other disciplines.

### **The Concept of Time, Defined**

For this study, the concept of time is split into two categories: structural and conceptual. “At issue is the distinction between the what and the how, or what is being told versus the manner in which it is told” (Herman, 2007, p. 94). The manner in which a story is told is associated with time as a structural element whereas content within a story that directly or indirectly addresses time is the conceptual.

## **Structural time**

One of the ways time will be examined is its function as a structural element of a story. When writing narrative, writers use specific emotional attributions to underscore the impact of [sic] unexpected or noncanonical (and thus reportable noteworthy) sequence of events, which happened on this one occasion, in this specific locale, and in this particular way (Herman, 2007, p. 11).

But it is rare that stories follow a strict chronology. As one researcher puts it: “Even tedious narratives cannot consist of an untrammelled journey from A to B; it is impossible, just as it is impossible to imagine an object that has only one dimension” (Cobley, 2001, p. 10).

The way in which the events of a story are ordered is the structural level of time. A story might be told forward, backward or nonlinearly. Readers follow the events “in order to ‘see’ the series of events as intelligible pattern of relationships” (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 157). In the process, the organization of the story is also an unspoken statement about how time works, at least in the context of the particular story.

The fact that the genre of narrative even exists challenges the widely held, Western view of time:

It is as though recollection inverted the so-called ‘natural’ order of time. In reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending, we also learn to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial

conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences (Ricoeur, 1983, pp. 67-68).

Additionally, substructures within a given story might yield time working differently in the same story. For example, when telling a story about two people, a writer might choose to tell the story of subject A backward but the story of subject B forward.

The fact that writers have these options is the reason this study exists in the first place, but, at the same time, the use of nonlinear narrative poses certain challenges in researching it. “The negotiated, nonlinear, and interactional nature of storytelling thus presents a dilemma to inquirers who want to ensure validity and clarity of findings” (Mello, 2002, pp. 233-234). When identifying structural elements of the story, the researcher must continually zoom in and out of the story in order to investigate particular details about the story while not losing a grasp as the story-as-a-whole. Reading a narrative

is not just a matter of paying attention to individual incidents on the timeline; it is most importantly about expectation and memory: reading the end in the beginning and reading the beginning in the end (Cobley, 2001, p. 19).

Textual analysis allows the researcher to make well-formed conclusions about the text without consulting the writer; therefore, the researcher must maintain a disposition toward the text that keeps him or her grounded in the story.

## **Conceptual time**

Aside from ordering the events in a narrative, writers frequently use time as a concept in the process of telling the story. For example, writers can comment on the way time works explicitly — i.e. time might be described as circular, or the present might be presented as being controlled by past or future events — or writers can comment on time indirectly by, for example, assigning “norms, values, rules and responsibilities about the time at which life events are expected to occur” (Mills, 2000, p. 102).

Two famous story-starters — “In the beginning” and “Once upon a time” — both say something about the way time works or will work in the stories that follow. This aligns with the common understanding about the way people use narrative to socially construct their reality:

Narratives, in particular, are loaded with worldview expressions: they reveal inherited communal and personal views of human conduct — this is their generic goal. The roles which people play, how they understand themselves and others, how the world itself is structured and operates are a function of the narrative plots that reign in a human community (Naugle, 2002, p. 301).

An oft-cited example of time in narrative is one of the first — Augustine in *The Confessions* (Augustine, 1998). Time takes on a near human form as Augustine attempts to identify what time is essentially. Ricoeur, in his book *Narrative and Time*, insists that the kind of temporality encountered in narrative has more to do with the interpretative mode prefigured in Augustine’s comments

than it has to do with the commonplace version of time as a series of instants arranged along a line” (Cobley, 2001, p. 19).

For the purpose of this study, explicit and implicit references to time as a concept will be looked for. A writer might give time attributes directly, via metaphor or personification. But a writer might also suggest something about time without being so explicit. For example, a writer might begin a story about the anniversary of the moon landing with stories from July 20, 1969. Or, the writer might begin by hypothesizing about NASA in 2069. The writer then might make 1969 seem like yesterday or like distant history. Whichever decisions the writer makes, statements about time are made even though indirect.

With regard to the social-constructivist research design and the findings it yields, Creswell (2009) writes: “These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas” (p. 8). The ways in which time can be used in a narrative are too numerous to count. So, instead of listing all the ways in which time might be explained or explored in a text and fitting the story into prefigured categories, it would be more practical to be aware of the places in a story where time can be ascribed a particular meaning. Once the places in which the text refers to time are identified, the researcher can then determine what meaning the writer ascribed. For example, metaphors can hold valuable information about meaning, and so special attention will be paid to metaphors present in the text.

## **Why Study Magazines?**

### **The media's influence on society**

In their many forms — TV, radio, newspaper, etc. — media seek to explain things we have not witnessed and give meaning to things we don't understand. The text is able to accomplish this because of the human brain's ability to understand abstract thoughts and incorporate them into our realities. In their study, Matlock et al. (2003) suggest that “abstract, metaphorical knowledge about motion involves the same structures used in understanding literal motion,” which underscores the close relationship between that which is simply known and that which is observed or real (p. 1). In other words, a person reading a story about Belarusian politics is able to intimately comprehend it, even though Belarus and Belarusian politics might be subjects with which the reader is unfamiliar. Because our brains are able to soak up and assemble information that is both observed and read, the media play an integral role in our realities, from which we derive our worldview. As Aerts et al. (1994) point out; “not only scientific experience, but also aesthetic and ethical sensitivity will have a deep influence on our attempts at a world view construction” (p. 10).

Magazines are distinct from other media. Abrahamson (2007) argues “magazines not only reflect or are a product of the social reality of the times, but they also serve a larger and more pro-active function — that they can also be a catalyst, shaping the very social reality of their sociocultural moment” (p. 667). Magazines carry such influence because rather than focusing on relaying facts, they frequently offer analysis and nuanced opinion. In addition, magazines are

published less frequently than daily newspapers and have production schedules that can span many months, which allows space to develop long pieces. Moreover, magazines often have an agenda that is determined internally whereas newspaper content is usually driven by the perceived importance of the events in a given day. In sum, feature stories present among the most thoroughly edited and thought-out content in media. Because features are longer and more literary than recurring department sections, they are more likely to contain the metaphors and other devices that convey deep meaning.

The ways in which magazines have influenced — not just informed — society is well documented. Johnson and Prijatel (2007) show how magazines have been agenda-setters for hundreds of years. They chart the ways in which magazines have brought the conversation of political events from the American Revolution to Abolition to the Civil Rights movement to the Vietnam War into millions of homes. Magazines not only critique society; they also help build it.

It is important to note that reading a particular magazine does not necessarily mean that that a magazine's worldview will be adopted by the reader. In addition, finding gaping holes or inconsistencies in a story would be just as valuable and insightful as finding a fully formed understanding. This study seeks to simply identify what is currently being presented and is not designed to make any judgments about the validity of the interpretation of time that is constructed.

### **Chapter 3: Research Questions**

1) How is time used as a narrative structure in award-winning feature stories in magazines recognized for quality writing?

2A) How is time implicitly used as a socially constructed concept in award-winning feature stories in magazines recognized for quality writing?

2B) How is time explicitly used as a socially constructed concept in award-winning feature stories in magazines recognized for quality writing?

## **Chapter 4: Research Method**

A close examination of magazine articles is necessary to successfully complete this study, which is designed to discover how writers of feature stories in magazines use time as a narrative structure and as a concept within the story.

### **Research Design**

Because this study is designed to answer questions directly related to how a story might contribute to a person's understanding of the world, a textual analysis is best suited. As one scholar puts it:

Textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. It is a methodology — a data-gathering process — for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live (McKee, 2003, p. 1).

This methodology is especially appropriate to this particular study, in which the representations of abstract concepts are being sought because using textual analysis is a way of identifying “differences in the existence of abstract things” (McKee, 2003, p. 7).

Textual analysis also allows the researcher to dive to the depths of each text and look for deep meaning that otherwise might be glossed over:

The most familiar, most primitive, most ancient and seemingly most straightforward of stories reveals depths that we might hitherto have failed to anticipate. That we do not anticipate them is usually because we do not attend to the network of relations in which a story resides (Cobley, 2001, p. 2).

A textual analysis begins with a close reading of the texts, followed by a period of rereading and consideration — a soaking in of the material. Although the researcher should refrain from asserting too much in initial readings, it is important to note that analysis and interpretation are intertwined so closely that they are often inseparable (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 372). This process is repeated several times, during which new insights might emerge. During these stages, “it is important to look for rival or competing themes and explanations” (Patton, 1991, p. 1191). This can involve “looking for other ways of organizing the data that might lead to different findings” or it might mean “thinking about other logical possibilities and then seeing if those possibilities can be supported by the data” (Patton, 1991, p. 1191). Eventually, an interpretation of the material that has the most weight emerges. In order to maintain a high level of exactitude, there must be “evidence that the particular interpretations are reasonable,” especially because “doing textual analysis means making an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of the text” (McKee, 2003, p. 70).

The purpose of this study is not only to describe what writers have done with time in their stories but also to show *how* time is used. To that end, White's (1973) ideology of time will be a primary lens used when reading the texts (p. 25). White suggests looking to what the author might be trying to achieve by making claims about time — whether the past, present or future holds the writer's ideals, for example. This is done not just by looking at what was written but by looking at what alternatives were discarded.

Metaphor criticism, a form of textual analysis, is specifically geared toward identifying and interpreting metaphors and will be useful in this study. Metaphor consists of tenor and vehicle (Foss, 2009). "Tenor is the topic or subject being explained... Vehicle is the mechanism or lens through which the topic is viewed" (Foss, 2009, p. 299). Foss (2009) identifies a four-step process to analyze metaphors (p. 301). First the researcher examines the artifact for a general sense of its dimensions and context. Next, the researcher isolates the metaphors. Third, the metaphors are sorted into groups according to vehicle or tenor. Finally, the researcher discovers an explanation for the artifact by looking for signs such as the frequency or intensity of a particular metaphor.

A magazine does not need to have a fully defined or consistent understanding of time in order for this study to be successful, nor does a magazine need to present a particular interpretation of time to be considered valid. Instead, this study simply seeks to identify what is being presented; the level of "correctness" or consistency is irrelevant. Unlike the philosopher or the

physicist, who seek to identify and define the true nature of time, this research attempts to identify how writers present time, or, as one researcher writes:

the sociologist can undertake the more modest task of tracing the nature of that human experience which we call temporal and the consequences of working through that experience: norms and ways of organizing time invented to satisfy prevailing needs, individual choices, and the values and priority meanings that are attributed to it” (Tabboni, 2001, p. 6).

To this end, finding gaping holes or inconsistencies in a story’s presentation of time or among the group of stories to be studied would be just as valuable and insightful as finding a fully formed understanding.

### **Identifying Time in Narrative**

Time and narrative are closely related. In fact, some suggest that the element of time is what distinguishes narrative from other forms of writing, which affirms the use of narrative in this study:

Narrative's temporal profile helps distinguish the prototypical narrative from many examples of description... narrative traverses paths taken by particularized individuals faced with decision points at one or more temporal junctures in a storyworld; those paths lead to consequences that take shape against a larger backdrop in which other possible paths might have been pursued, but were not (Herman, 2007, p. 19).

Although readers typically don’t scrutinize how time is presented in a story, they have a general sense that time plays an essential role (Herman, 2007, p. 52).

Time “is thus more than a background element in narrative; [it is] a part of its

fabric, affecting our basic understanding of a narrative text. [It] profoundly influences the way in which we build mental images of what we read” (Herman, 2007, p. 53).

Being able to identify when writers are using time in their stories is essential to this study. But when reading a narrative, the meaning of the story and the way in which the story is told can become blurred:

In other words, narrative answers the question “Why?” at the same time that it answers the question “What?” To tell what has happened is to tell why it happened...The “one because of the other” is not always easy to extract from the “one after the other” (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 152).

Herman (2007) writes that the elements of narrative include description and explanation (p. iv). Description is defined as “the ascription of properties to entities within a mental model of the world” (Herman, 2007, p. 90). Explanation is defined as “the thing explained is accounted for by virtue of its being subsumed under or 'covered' by a law-like regularity that applies in analogous circumstances, all other things being equal” (Herman, 2007, p. 98). Description can be either static, showing an observation (i.e. “that tree has green leaves”) or dynamic, surmising something about action, cause-and-effect, etc. (i.e. “that tree lost its leaves because it is autumn”).

Using these elements, writers assemble stories using, among other conventions, flashbacks and flashforwards (Herman, 2007, p. 94). Together, these temporal elements and conventions of narrative give writers the power of “worldmaking” with which they endow the story with meaning. Some ways

writers can do this include: composing and decomposing (dividing wholes into parts and adding parts into wholes); weighting (deciding what is relevant and irrelevant); ordering (creating hierarchies); deletion and supplementation (adding, removing something from storyworld); deformation (reshaping) (Herman, 2007, p. 111). When multiple viewpoints or character timelines are used in a narrative, the writer can offer them simultaneously, retrospectively, prospectively, or interlaced (Herman, 2007, p. 129).

The frequency with which these many sub-units of narratives occur from story to story is varied. In fact, the malleability of narrative is a prime reason they are being studied in this research. Rather than prescribing how time might be used in each of these components of stories and then looking for examples to fit into a category, it is enough to be aware that these are the tools a writer uses. This way, when flying above a story at bird's eye view, these smaller units can be used to identify zones in which meaning-making is occurring. Like flying over vast farmland where the noticeable patchwork of fields helps a viewer orient himself or herself and interpret what they see, so too will these smaller elements of narrative help the researcher zoom into the story more readily.

In addition to being aware of the basic elements of narrative that Herman identifies, this research will also employ some of the ways in which Ricoeur explains explicitly how to identify time in narrative. Ricoeur (1983) begins by summarizing what occurs when a person reads narrative:

To follow a story is to move forward in the midst of contingencies and *perpeteia* under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfillment in

the "conclusion" of the story. This conclusion is not logically implied by some previous premises. It gives the story an "end point," which, in turn, furnishes the point of view from which the story can be perceived as forming a whole. To understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which, far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story (p. 67).

In other words, reading a story is not simply following events until they end. Instead, reading is a convention by which an author furnishes a reader with a new point of view, which consists of everything in the story. The arrangement of story elements "transforms the succession of events into one meaningful whole, which is the correlate of the act of assembling the events together which makes the story followable. ... the entire plot can be translated into one 'thought'" (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 67).

In communicating this unified "thought" to the reader, writers use different techniques that represent time symbolically. For instance, writers often "chunk" time into varying dimensions, depending on what they are writing about. An article about dinosaurs might treat a period of 10,000 years using the same language a story about Jimmy Carter uses to address a single year. "The divisibility of time ends where the most detailed analysis does" (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 123). The pacing of a story can also exhibit "slow time" or "rapid time," which can have several implications, depending on the specific scenario (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 104).

The instances in which time is presented are not isolated. They must be thought of as working together with the entirety of the narrative. Whether a feature of structural time or conceptual time, an instance in which time is mentioned or addressed must be in constant dialogue with the narrative as a whole. This is a key concept of both textual analysis as a research method and narrative theory. A narrative, in which a writer creates a storyworld, is a world that is run by self-contained laws. These worlds might or might not resemble possibilities familiar to the researcher, and so it is important to keep in mind the story in its entirety. “This is why we have to follow a story to its conclusion, which is something completely different than following an argument whose conclusion is compelled to be what it is” (Ricoeur, 1983, p. 150).

### **Example**

A feature article can be analyzed using the abovementioned techniques. As a demonstration, those techniques will be applied to this opening paragraph of a feature story:

Not long after Steve Jobs got married, in 1991, he moved with his wife to a nineteen-thirties, Cotswolds-style house in old Palo Alto. Jobs always found it difficult to furnish the places where he lived. His previous house had only a mattress, a table, and chairs. He needed things to be perfect, and it took time to figure out what perfect was. This time, he had a wife and family in tow, but it made little difference. “We spoke about furniture in theory for eight years,” his wife, Laurene Powell, tells Walter Isaacson, in “Steve Jobs,” Isaacson’s enthralling new biography of the Apple founder.

“We spent a lot of time asking ourselves, ‘What is the purpose of a sofa?’  
(Gladwell, 2011).

Multiple expressions related to time are made in the first sentence. The first decision the writer made was to give the inexact “not long after” the most prominent place in the sentence while a more exact measure of time — 1991 — was relegated to a subordinate role later in the sentence. Exactitude is not what the writer was after. 1991 could just as well have been 1891: Orienting the reader to a significant event, Jobs’ wedding, was of more importance. Choosing a socio-emotional marker of time rather than a scientific marker immediately sets the expectation that emotions will drive the temporality of the narrative, at least for the rest of this sub-story. Jobs’ house is given an attribute of scientific time (“nineteen-thirties”) in addition to another emotional-time marker. Whereas the house Jobs’ lived in in an earlier time was without family, the house in the story-present had family. That old-new comparison acts as an antecedent to the time statement made in the next sentence: “it took time to figure out what perfect was.” Time was the currency Jobs used to find what was important. Without it, he could not have found “perfect.” But he did, and the house of the past compared to the house of the present serves as a metaphor for Jobs. The metaphor demonstrates how time is both the vehicle for change (different houses) and the vehicle for consistency (both houses remained sparsely decorated).

These threads would be followed into the next paragraph to find if they are developed further, if they are modified, if they contradict themselves or if they are

dropped completely. Other threads of meaning are likely to arise in the rest of the story.

### **Research sample**

The magazine stories to be used in this research were selected because they are considered to be the best examples of feature writing in magazines. Other designs — a random sampling, for example — might also yield valuable results, but the aim of this project is to examine influential writers. Thus, a purposive research sample is best suited. “The focus [of purposive sampling] is on understanding and illuminating important cases rather than on generalizing from a sample to a population” (Patton, 1999, p. 1197).

Despite the researcher’s role in influencing the texts to be studied, a sense of purpose and reason must exist in the choices. To this end, the researcher will turn to the magazine industry to define what constitutes today’s best and most influential writers instead of using personal opinion.

The American Society of Magazine Editors is “the principal organization for magazine journalists in the United States” and has more than 700 members (ASME website). In existence for more than 50 years, ASME has, among other things, overseen the National Magazine Awards, which highlight the best in magazine journalism. This satisfies the guideline: “rigor in case selection involves explicitly and thoughtfully picking cases that are congruent with the study purpose and that will yield data on major study questions” (Patton, 1999, p. 1197). Using the ASME awards as a standard eliminates researcher bias (though it does add structural bias). It also eliminates the need to rely on the preference of

an individual expert or an arbitrary grading system: Because a committee of respected industry leaders awards the ASME awards, the winners can be considered true exemplars of journalistic excellence.

This study will use feature stories that have won or been nominated for an ASME award for feature writings. The stories will be selected from four magazines with solid reputations for feature writing. Of the 118 feature stories nominated for best feature story since the award began, *The Atlantic* has eight, *GQ* has 11, *The New Yorker* has 16 and *Esquire* has 17. Together, these four publications account for nearly half of all nominations. They are the leaders in the field of feature writing. As stated before, studying the leaders of the pack, as it were, will help show how the most influential writers and editors today handle the concept of time. To ensure this study is finished within its time constraints — one semester — a total of 12 features will be examined. The features to be studied are the 12 stories from these magazines most recently nominated for an ASME award in feature writing. That criterion ensures this study is the most up-to-date expression of current authorship: The 12 most recently nominated articles were written between 2006 and 2011.

## **Chapter 5: The Structure of Time in Narrative Feature Stories**

To answer this research question, twelve stories were examined. After distilling each story down to its central thesis or theme, it became clear that time played a significant role not just in isolated instances within each story but also in the overall thesis or theme of each story. After comparing these themes and theses to one another, two groups, or story-types, emerged: stories that sought to reconcile time that had been disrupted and stories that sought to explain or uncover things hidden by time. In both instances, the narrative goal can be interpreted as an attempt to resolve an issue with time. Beginning this chapter in this way will also provide a brief overview of each the twelve stories studied.

### **Stories Attempt to Explain Something Hidden by Time**

Six of the twelve stories were constructed to explain one section of time (past, present or future) in light of another (in these stories, the past). For example, at the heart of *Underworld*, a story about the coal mining industry in the U.S. lies the question: why are things in the present the way they are? (Laskas, 2007). To answer this, the writer looks to the past, which includes information from 2006 to 200 million years ago. *Up and Then Down*, which tells the history of elevators, asks the same question. The writer uses the past to explain the present.

In both stories, multiple narratives of individuals are woven into a single narrative form to help illustrate a larger history (i.e. the history of coal or elevators). That larger history is then shown to have an effect on the individuals used to describe it in the first place. In *Underworld*, the narratives of several miners are told in order to tell the story of coal mining, and the history of coal mining is shown to have an impact on the miners. The narrative of a man who was stuck in an elevator for 41 hours was used in *Up and Then Down* to weave together the history of elevators, and the different elements of elevators are shown to have an impact on the man (Paumgarten, 2008).

*Countdown to a Meltdown*, a letter to a fictional future (2016) presidential candidate, is a commentary on the present from the perspective of an imagined future. Like the two stories above, this story asks why the present (though a future present) is the way it is. The current/future economic situation is explained in terms of policy decisions that extend back to the 1930s (Fallows, 2005, p. 51).

*The Loved Ones*, the story of a family whose nursing home was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, sought to explain the present with the past as in the other stories (Junod, 2006). Like the other stories, the writer explores multiple narratives. Unlike the other stories, the writer does not combine the multiple narratives into one. Instead, different narratives of the past vie for the label of truth as government officials and a few of the children whose parents died blame the nursing home owners while the nursing home owners blame the hurricane

and unorganized government. The writer must assess the competing narrative explanations.

*A Boy's Life*, the story of Brandon, who was born a boy but insists he's a girl, explores age roles and expectations (Rosin, 2008). Central to the story is the question "at what age do we take people's intentions seriously?" Age, a measure of time, is in question as the characters in the story are unsure of what expectations to have of certain ages.

*Swingers* is a story in which the writer assesses two competing views of bonobo monkeys (Parker, 2007). One camp claims the monkeys are a transcendent species that reject violence and embrace acceptance and selflessness. The other claims the monkeys are just as violent and selfish as other species. Both groups offer different narratives of the monkey and the writer sifts through both. The writer explores topics such as the past being encoded in DNA and how much time is needed before observations become reliable vantage points that describe reality.

### **Stories Attempt to Reconcile "Broken" Time**

Reconciliation is at the heart of the other six of stories. Different from explanation, in which continuity is exposed, reconciliation exposes a discontinuity. This discontinuity is made manifest in various ways, but, generally speaking, a character experiences such different realities in separate times that viewing the two together is difficult or impossible. In short, something must reconcile this disconnect.

In *The Long Shadow of War*, the story about a Vietnam veteran struggling with a memory of Vietnam, the past haunts the present (Dobie, 2007). The writer explores why Cecil Ison, the veteran, became paralyzed by memories that had been dormant for years. Ison's attempt to continue his life in the present is brought to a halt, and he must reconcile his present with his past before moving on. This reconciliation between past and present is mirrored, albeit to a lesser degree, by the writer, who writes about her attempts to get Ison to share the one specific memory that keeps coming back to him, a memory that he has only shared with his therapist via a letter (Dobie, 2007, p. 134). Additionally, the author of *The Long Shadow of War* describes her attempts to coax the memory out of Ison on multiple occasions for the benefit of the story she's writing, but Ison refuses to share his war memory. Ison eventually begins to function normally again, but the writer's narrative is left unresolved as Ison does not tell her his memory. *The Long Shadow of War* ends on a postscript in which the author writes that Ison decided to tell her what happened to him in Vietnam. Ison sent the author his handwritten letter with his memory with instructions that she burn it after reading and not include it in the story (Dobie, 2007, p. 136). The story's narrative problem is left unresolved though the two sub-narratives (Ison's and the author's) are resolved.

Similar to *The Long Shadow of War*, *The Other Side of Hate*, the story of a white Zimbabwean farmer and a black Zimbabwean priest who go through dynamic personal changes before becoming close friends, is about the reconciliation of a present broken from the past (Corsello, 2006). Each character

separates from the characteristics of his former self and goes through difficult readjustment periods as they each strive to make sense of their former lives with their new lives. Both characters struggle to acknowledge the violence and injustices of the past amid their present striving for a more peaceful existence.

One story lies at the center of two significant disconnects in time. *Sgt. Wells's New Skull*, the story of a soldier injured in Iraq, is the story of reconciling past with present (the soldier must accept the reality of his injury) and future with present (the soldier must accept the uncertainty of his prognosis) (Mockenhaupt, 2007).

Another story about a lack of reconciliation, *Prairie Fire*, is the story of an intellectually gifted teen who killed himself despite a lack of typical warning signs beforehand. The author explores the phenomenon of making expectations and defining a person based on age (Konigsberg, 2006). Despite the writer's inquiry, at the end of the story the question still lingers — why did the boy kill himself? In this story, reconciliation is sought but does not come as clearly as in other stories.

*The Last Abortion Doctor* conveys the present as the repository of tensions between the past and present (the main character's friend, who also was an abortion doctor, had recently been assassinated; legal decisions of the past were brought into question; the doctor worked amid protests, clashes and political movements) and the future and present (which include the doctor's uncertainty about his own safety and the political future of abortion in the U.S.) (Richardson, 2009). Although the narrative naturally seeks to reconcile these tensions, the writer does not achieve this: The tension in the story is just as high in the end as

it is in the beginning of the story. The tension in the story's main thesis is also reflected in the individual narratives of patients who go through the doctor's clinic. The pregnant women (and occasionally the women's mothers, boyfriends, husbands, etc.) are in a high-pressure present as they weigh the past against possible futures and must come to a decision. This tension is the thrust behind the main themes and theses of these stories whether the disconnects in time are resolved or left unresolved.

*The Things That Carried Him* follows Joe Montgomery, a soldier killed in Iraq, beginning with his gravesite, back through each iteration of the transport and ceremonial processes, until the end of the story, when we see him alive (Jones, 2008). Like the other war stories studied, this story is about reconciling the past with the present.

### **Writers use Narrative Tools Based on Time to Create the Story**

The narrative goals of the stories were achieved, in part, by using storytelling tools, many of which are based on time. First, a number of writers included their own narrative alongside the narrative of their subject(s). The examples studied in this research suggest that by inserting their own narrative, the writers open a narrative timespace in which readers can enter and view the narrative in something closer to real-time than the more distant, third-person observational stance that some stories allow for. Similar techniques, such as making the reader a hypothetical character achieve the same effects and will be discussed later in this section.

### **Author uses own narrative time-space for the reader to occupy**

In eight of the 12 stories, the author inserts his or her personal narrative into the narrative of the story. To be clear, the author is not simply identifying himself or herself before offering an opinion or first-person analysis. Instead, the author is in fact reporting a personal timeline, a narrative that often intersects the narrative of the main subject(s) in the story. The author-narratives span in length anywhere from days to years. For example: “I first heard about Cecil Ison while researching a story about archaeological sites...” (Dobie, 2007); “One morning not long ago, I met James Fortune, the man who designed that elevator system...” (Paumgarten, 2008, p. 109); “I spent months trying to position myself and my world around these people” (Laskas, 2007, p. 220). In most instances, the author’s narrative resurfaces throughout the story, which makes it more significant than if it were part of the story but outside the formal narrative (if it were a prologue or epilogue, for example).

One plausible function of this narrative technique is to create a space in the story for the reader to stand and view the story from within. Many characteristics of the authors’ narratives support this interpretation. As a supporting character in the story, the author’s role is usually sympathetic, identifying with the main subject’s dilemma. For example, interspersed in the story about children who state they want to be the opposite gender, the author writes about her own family (Rosin, 2008). She explains to readers how her narrative intersected her subjects’ narrative on a deeper level than simple a reporter-subject relationship (“My pregnancy brought up a certain nostalgia for

the parents, because it reminded them of a time when life was simpler...” [Rosin, 2008, p. 70]). It seems plausible that the author is inviting the reader to do the same (or at least pretend they are her).

Despite the author’s narrative surfacing at multiple points in the story, her narrative does not play a pivotal role. Additionally, because the author does not explain or imply why she should be considered a dynamic character in the story, it seems less likely that she intended to be one. By making herself a somewhat generic or background character, she becomes a character to whom the average reader is more likely to relate given that most of the subjects of these stories are story-worthy only because of their unusual or extraordinary situations. By doing this, the author has created a new perspective from which the reader, for whom relating to the story’s subject might be difficult to fathom, can understand or “get into” the narrative. This creates a kind of triangle (along with reader and story subject) on which the reader and writer can move about to experience different perspectives. The story’s subject, however, remains grounded.

### **Author actively makes reader into a character**

Creating a narrative time-space for the reader to occupy was accomplished in a different way by the author of *The Last Abortion Doctor*. The story is written in active voice, which makes the action in the story seem more immediate, closer, in the now. The author also uses second-person writing in place of what obviously was his own first-person account as a reporter. Doing so makes the reader the person doing the action (Example: “Now it’s 1:47, and you’re sitting down in a counseling room with the young couple who arrived in Wichita just in time to see

the news...” [Richardson, 2009, p. 170]). Doing this creates a similar triangle for a reader hesitant to receive the story directly, but rather than merely offer the opportunity to readers, the author has made the decision for the reader. The writer actively puts the reader into the narrative.

The author also employs the use of active verb tense. The action, though already having taken place, is placed again in the present. Ostensibly, the author of the story is attempting to accomplish the same thing by doing this as he is by using second person. Present tense is personal and immediate.

### **Big Moments “Pin” Up a Timeline / The Illusion of Linear Time**

Another tool writers use to pursue the narrative goal is the use of “big moments,” watershed moments in which what follows is distinctly different from what came before. These instances of clean breaks from the past are typically used to show the cause of a particular effect such as: being trapped in an elevator was the cause of a life unraveling (Paumgarten, 2008); a moment of rage ushered in a change of perspective (Corsello, 2006). These moments stand in contrast to change that is slow and gradual with no discernable point of departure to the present from the past.

Describing the entirety of what happened — every action and event that occupied the time of the story — is not an attainable goal for writers. There is simply too much. The writer’s discretion becomes the final arbiter of events. In fact, this phenomenon could be a natural effect of the writing process itself.

In the many instances this phenomenon is examined, the result of the process is often questioned — Do the events that made it into the story

appropriately represent the whole? Was anything left out? The result of that process is not of as much interest to this study as is the assumption that this process rests upon, the assumption that the integrity of time in the story remains in tact despite the fact that hours, days, weeks, months, even years can be passed over, unacknowledged. To judge the result would require something to compare the story to. Rather than determine the quality of *what* time is used, this study instead seeks to understand how writers use time. More importantly, given that these stories do appear to hold together (they won awards, after all), how do the writers handle the disparities?

As Chapter 2 suggests, stories are often considered linear when in fact the “line” is not a line at all: Stories are an archipelago of times — dots of temporality with spaces in between. The events might be logical with regard to the story’s main point or thesis, but the events aren’t reliably sequential, as evidenced by *The Things That Carried Him*, in which the idea of order and continuity are turned upside down (Jones, 2008). In this story, the death and burial of a soldier are told in iterations, backward, beginning at the gravesite. If told forward, this story actually displays remarkable continuity; the three-day process is described in great detail. The reporter probed every part of the process from the people who initially tried to save the soldier’s life in Iraq to the man who filled the Indiana grave. Few gaps exist in the timeline the reporter reconstructed. Nevertheless, the writer chose to break this start-to-finish continuity by telling the story backward.

The decision to structure this particular story in this way challenges many traditional assumptions about narrative time and understanding, including

assumptions such as: the ending of a narrative is the end of the story; that which comes before the ending is subservient to it; in the ending lies the story's meaning. Multiple possible reasons exist as to why ordering time this way would be preferential. For example, rather than beginning the story alive only to slowly decay as a body, the soldier, Joe Montgomery, instead slowly comes to life. The depiction of the moment of his death at the same time we finally read about him as being alive is dramatic and emotional. Placing both at the end makes for a doubly powerful narrative arc. Whatever the author's actual reasons, the point is that in this story, the author chose against using a straightforward linear timeline, despite the availability of it.

Again, the important thought to take away is not that the reordering of time happens (that this can happen would surprise few), but that this appears to be an acceptable if not preferable way to understand temporality. Time in a story is more like images in a flipbook, consisting of separate, manipulable images strung together, than it is like running water, formless and inseparable. The two major factors in ordering events in narrative — 1) which events to include and 2) the order to place them in — are both left to the discretion of the writer, who can do what he or she wants with them in order to answer other questions about the events. Time is not used as a gauge of the narrative's truth but instead is a tool at the writer's disposal.

## **Molding the Future, Molding the Past**

Along with the first two components of this section — 1) time is found in the main thesis of each story, and 2) time-based narrative tools are used to address those theses — the conclusion of each story, the place those theses and tools take the narrative to, is significant. In the end, authors approached the problems the subjects faced in the narrative (the legal battles stemming from Hurricane Katrina [Junod, 2006], living amid the danger of the coalmines [Laskas, 2007], needing skull surgery [Mockenhaupt, 2007]) in the same way authors approached the task of writing: Whether the story was about the past, present or future, molding a narrative of the past was the solution to whatever the problem at hand was.

This theme emerged out of a contradiction that could be seen in multiple stories. The contradiction was this: Stories suggested a vaguely mechanistic version of the future (wherein people possess considerable ability to predict or know what was to come) while at the same time suggesting that the future was entirely uncontrollable. This contradiction was present among the stories and also within single articles, which is most noteworthy. The most extensive example of this is found in *Countdown to a Meltdown*, which suggests that the future is both reliably predictable and not (Fallows, 2005).

### **The future's missing future in *Countdown to a Meltdown***

The concept of *Countdown to a Meltdown* is itself a statement about the future. Written as a memo to a hypothetical presidential candidate in 2016, the article (which in reality was written in 2005) appears to be both a forecast of the

future and a suggested course of action in light of the forecast. At the same time, what the writer is doing as an author in reality is projecting his thoughts onto a hypothetical future in order to say something about the actual present. However, the reality of that hypothetical future, specifically the economic landscape of the U.S., is not completely separated from reality. On the contrary, the author spends most of the article connecting his hypothetical future to actual past events and trends dating as far back as the 1930s.

The past is told in terms of watershed moments that are intimately connected. Scores of events, which are commonly described in terms of “points” that have distinct before and afters, constitute most of the story. The sequence of events is likened to “falling dominos” (Fallows, 2005, p. 56) and a “flow” of events (p. 57). According to the story, these future events are measurable and analyzable, making “forecasts” possible and manipulation of the future theoretically possible as well.

However, on five separate occasions, the author claims that, “In retrospect, the ugly end is so obvious and inevitable” (Fallows, 2005, pp. 54, 56, 58, 60), which suggests that either the possibility of control over the future is illusory or that humans are simply bad at it. The author fails to resolve this disconnect. Some statements, such as “unless we understand how we got here, we won’t be able to find the way out” suggest that the future is within reach while others such as statements about unavoidable “cycles” of life suggest that the future is carried along by powerful undercurrents (Fallows, 2005, p. 58). It’s

possible the author has in mind a mix of the two, however he never approaches the issue.

But the story is not about uncertainty: There is actually an undeniable sense of certainty about it, though it becomes clear that certainty about the future is not the certainty that the author had in mind. Over the course of the story, the author makes a deeper statement about time that is more profound than the possibility of affecting the future. Written as a political memo, one of the first sentences reads “Nothing is guaranteed in politics,” ostensibly a statement about the future (Fallows, 2005, p. 51). But, being what it is, the memo also suggests what the politician ought to do in light of the economic reality presented in the memo; the author suggests the hypothetical candidate must set a course of action. The solution?: Instead of molding the future, mold the past.

In the introduction, the author states “politics is about stories...the national story of how America’s long saga has led to today’s dramas...we have work to do on the national story” (Fallows, 2005, p. 51). According to the writer, a function of politics is storytelling, creating a narrative, showing a series of events portrayed as connected by time to have a particular meaning. A politician seeking to control his or her narrative is as old a practice as any, but in the context of this study, another insight emerges.

The final paragraph of the story makes the following statements about time and the future and states explicitly what the candidate is supposed to do about it: “This story is now yours to tell...but remember that the reality of the story reaches backward” (Fallows, 2005, p. 64). Everything that comes between

the opening and closing lines of this feature story are pieces of a narrative, and though the story is about “The coming year — and beyond” and at first appeared to be a plan for the future, there is not a single mention about a time following the fictional date of authorship, 2016 (Fallows, 2005, p. 51). Not one projection, forecast or plan for 2017, 2018 or 2019 is made. Instead, the entire article stirs up facts and events from 1976, 1992 (Fallows, 2005, p. 52), 2001 (p. 52), the 1950s and 1960s (p. 54), etc. That closing thought — “the reality of the story reaches backward” — is the most telling statement about time in this story. Although the surface of the story appears to be about the future and whether future events are malleable or controllable, the story’s real claim is that focusing on molding the narrative of history is the end worth following. In short, if you can’t shape the future, shape the past instead.

### **Other examples**

*Countdown to a Meltdown* was the most illustrative example of molding the past as a stand-in for molding the future, but the theme is seen in many of the stories studied. In *The Loved Ones*, the future of the Manganos, a family charged with negligence amid Hurricane Katrina, is dependent on a judge deciding which narrative among many best describes the past, and consequently, the future (Junod, 2006). In *The Long Shadow of Way*, Cecil Ison’s present and future are depicted as being in a state of arrested terror until he can come to terms with or control a narrative about Vietnam that “leapt up and grabbed him” (Dobie, 2007, p. 126)

## **Chapter 6: Time Used Explicitly as a Social Construction**

Throughout the stories studied, the authors made various statements about time within the story. Unlike the previous section, which explored what the structure of a feature story as a whole suggested about the concept of time, this section explores instances where a certain construction of time was used within the larger narrative.

Many references to time were made within the stories and, of course, there's no telling which of these statements a person might integrate into his or her understanding of time. However, certain statements about time did stand out because of their repetition in and among the 12 stories. These statements are noteworthy because of their frequency, the cohesiveness of the concept across stories and the weight given to them in the context of each story.

In some instances, these statements were made explicitly. That is, the writer named time specifically in his or her statements. The statements that constructed time in the most significant ways fall into two categories: Clock time and the economy of time. Both concepts reflect the theories outlined in Chapter 2. These 12 stories are evidence that the theories of the social construction of time are accurate. Additionally, the examples in this section show more than a simple affirmation that the social construction of time as a theory is accurate; they show particular ways in which writers reinforce these ideas.

## **Outside Clock Time**

The measurement of time — clock time — is, not surprisingly, the commonly accepted, if only tacitly, construction of time in these stories. Writers and characters don't often question the validity of clock time. The pervasiveness of dates and times in each story shows at the very least a heavy reliance on the clock for the description of time. It's foolish to read into the underlying reasons too much (writers could very well be using clock time simply because anything else would seem foreign and difficult to the magazine's broad base of readers). However, there are moments in multiple stories when that fundamental notion is explicitly challenged. Because these situations are a marked contrast from the norm and were instances in which the author deliberately set out to discuss and use time, they provide a better glimpse into the writer's assertions about time.

These moments frequently occur during the narrative climax of the story, which gives the statements more weight and makes them stand out even further from the standard clock-time references. The significance given to these moments when the clock and the calendar are (momentarily) tossed out the window says something about the way time works, the way we perceive it and the difference between the two that can be examined in narrative.

### **Example 1 — Temporal expectations in *Up and Then Down***

In *Up and Then Down*, the story of a man, Nicholas White, who became trapped in an elevator, this phenomenon is on full display (Paumgarten, 2008). Interspersed with the history of elevators, the narrative of White begins with him entering an elevator “around eleven o'clock on a Friday night in October, 1999,” a

moment very specifically tied to clock time (Paumgarten, 2008, p. 106). The elevator becomes jammed in the elevator shaft and nobody outside notices until nearly two days later. Although one can imagine plenty of unnerving consequences of becoming stuck in an elevator for that long — claustrophobia, fear of heights, hunger, loneliness, etc. — the narrative largely focuses on White's existence outside of clock time. After he tried ringing the alarm and waiting, the first signs of his disorientation are described: "Some time passed, although he was not sure how much, because he had no watch or cell phone" (Paumgarten, 2008, p. 106). At one point, between two segments of White's narrative, the author writes "In elevating, as in life, the essential variables are time and space," which is evidence of the recognizance that time is a crucial element to reality (Paumgarten, 2008, p. 110).

As the story continues, it's clear that the variable of space is known — the size of the elevator — while the variable of time is the unknown, which, consequently, creates the tension that drives the story forward. The author contrasts the "actually long" with the "merely perceptibly long" while he explains the engineering of elevators before he continues with the White narrative (Paumgarten, 2008, p. 111). White "was unable to tell whether it was night or day," which isn't surprising due to the lack of sunlight in the elevator, however the decision to include this obvious statement reinforces the idea that time exists outside of a person and is known primarily through external means (Paumgarten, 2008, p. 113). White's situation degrades into complete disorientation with him lying on the ground for hours at a time before he is rescued. Although the things

White does or wants to do while he is stuck such as eat, sleep, drink and relax are universal if not mundane activities, they appear to be ridiculous when they occur at the wrong time, relatively speaking. The assignment of socially constructed temporal spaces to particular actions becomes apparent, as does the reliance on those associations.

### **Example 2 — Outside the jurisdiction of time in *Swingers***

In *Swingers*, a jungle outpost is one of the settings of the story (Parker, 2007). Other settings in the story are more scientific (laboratories, university offices) and come with dates and times to place them in. But in the African outpost used to observe bonobos, a type of ape, clock time is replaced by a more primitive sense of either “now” or “not now.” In one of the first scenes in the camp, the author describes a 2006 wall calendar “that had been neatly converted — with glue, paper, and an extravagant superfluity of time — into a 2007 calendar” (Parker, 2007, p. 54). It’s a small detail, but it’s a telling one: In describing a remote jungle outpost to readers (a jungle full of unfamiliar sights, smells, etc.) why would the author choose to use the anecdote of a commonplace calendar on the wall if not to say something about why the calendar was important?

At first glance, this description might be interpreted as the writer implying that the researchers are attached to the calendar and have an unwillingness to let it go similar to a child’s attachment to a blanket. However, this anecdote also strongly suggests that the researchers viewed the tracking of time by means of a calendar to be almost meaningless in their setting. The days of 2006, seemingly set in stone, are loosed with nothing more than a pair of scissors, and 2007 is

haphazardly constructed with some glue, as if time were made like crafts at a summer camp. Moreover, the researchers seem to create 2007 for reasons other than a need for the calendar itself. Other passages show the lack of a need for traditional time despite the researcher's scientific responsibilities. Perhaps the writer is suggesting nostalgia or boredom. Either way, the author implies that the function of clock time is to fulfill a need other than the explanation of things essential about temporality.

### **Example 3 — Freedom from time in *The Other Side of Hate***

*The Other Side of Hate* provides the most illuminating example of time outside clock time (Corsello, 2006). Jim Steele, a third-generation Zimbabwean farmer, was kicked off his farm by the government because he was white. Steele is described as a man with a severe temper, which makes his reaction to his displacement counterintuitive; he did not leave his farm as instructed, but he also did not put up a fight. He simply watched as scores of Shona families moved onto his land (Corsello, 2006, p. 186). He was moved by, among other things, their joy amid poverty and their connectedness to the land, which he respected.

Perhaps more than anything, the Shona's understanding of time was enough to alter the way Steele saw the world:

Even their understanding of time and distance was fluid: If Steele asked a settler on his land how far it was to Chinhoyi, the answer depended on where the sun sat in the sky at that moment. In the morning, it was "not far." If the sun was low in the west, it was "too far" — since (of course) one was on foot and had to consider what might emerge from the bush after

dark. “White men keep watches,” Paul laughed when Jim asked. “Shona keep time” (Corsello, 2006, p. 190).

More than just an observation, this understanding of time fundamentally changed Steele’s worldview. Time ceased being finite: “He [Steele] would comprehend death not as an ending but as a point on an unending continuum” (Corsello, 2006, p. 190). Whereas before he was concerned with the long-term status of his farm, he turned his attention to the immediacy of the present: “God says we must live one day at a time,’ he said to the dark. ‘Whether we are here four days, until the end of Heros’ weekend, or whether we are here four weeks or four years...” (Corsello, 2006 p. 192). There are markedly different statements than the opening scenes in the story wherein Steele shoved a young boy’s hand into a stove because he had left the fire unattended for too long.

The climax of this story occurs in a prison yard, where Steele has been placed as a show of force by the government, alongside hardened criminals. Steele began preaching to the all the imprisoned men, and the Malawians began to sing. “Time lost its purchase when the Malawians sang, so it was hard to know if they were singing for thirty minutes or an hour or two hours. They simply sang until they stopped” (Corsello, 2006, p. 192). Steele’s conversion from clock time was complete. The writer depicted Steele’s turning from clock time as freeing, which implies that the adherence to clock time is binding or restrictive.

### **Economy of time**

Throughout the 12 stories, writers discuss time using the languages of economics and currency.

A supply-and-demand system is frequently used in many of the stories. One can have too much time or not enough (Paumgarten, 2008, p. 113). One “spends” time on things (“Diamond now spends his time collecting case studies of transsexuals who have a twin... “[Rosin, 2008, p. 62]), and what one chooses to “spend” time on is representative of who that person is (“Now Chris wears her hair in a ponytail, walks like a girl, and spends hours on the phone, talking to girlfriends about boys” [Rosin, 2008, p. 70]; “He joined the Army so he wouldn't spend his days making pizzas and smoking pot” [Mockenhaupt, 2007, p. 136]).

In addition, the sum of time spent on a particular thing or action, which includes the age of something or somebody, is one of the most prevalent ways of describing something, particularly its relative worth or value, and gives a sense of the amount of respect to show it (“Twenty years, hurricanes came buzz-sawing in off the Gulf, and Sal and Mabel Mangano stayed put” [Junod, 2006, p. 221]; “These were men who lived underground together for ten-hour shifts, five days at a stretch, often spending more time with each other than they did with their families, so they knew everything about each other” [Laskas, 2007, p. 220]).

### **Age expectations**

Two stories in particular stood out in these regards as age played a central role to their theses. *A Boy's Life* and *Prairie Fire* both address the unstable and unpredictable expectations placed on youth as a direct result of their age. The parents of the young subjects of *A Boy's Life* wrestle with whether to allow their children who demonstrate behavior traditionally displayed by the opposite gender to continue doing so (Rosin, 2008). The problem that drives the narrative

is twofold: The story obviously addresses gender and gender roles, but it also addresses the issues of age expectations. Gender-specific behavior is frequently tied to time: “Boys ride dirt bikes through the woods starting at age 5” (Rosin, 2008, p. 57). However, when a child behaves otherwise, the parents are unsure about how to proceed. If the child were an adult, the situation would be altogether different, according to the narrative. But the situation is in fact difficult for the parents in the story specifically because of the age factor. Age-based explanations for the children’s nontraditional behavior include: 1) children are essentially androgynous until a certain age, so their actions mean nothing with regard to gender (Rosin, 2008, p. 68); 2) children have gender from birth but one can’t read into their actions seriously because it’s probably “playing” or “acting” (Rosin, 2008, p. 68); 3) the children’s actions are demonstrative of the gender they “ought” to be and, as such, should be taken seriously (Rosin, 2008, p. 70).

Whether parents encourage or discourage their children from acting as the traditionally opposite gender, age-based expectations remain. Even after the mother of a child born a boy but self-identified as a girl decides to acknowledge the child’s gender preference, she explains “It’s like I have to teach her what’s appropriate for a girl her age” (Rosin, 2008, p. 71). The story suggests that as a person ages, their intentions and actions are given more weight. This is hardly surprising and might even seem self-evident to the point of being an insignificant observation. But doing so would be to misplace the significance of the

observation. The significance does not lie in the behavior or psychology associated with the age-expectations but the time-based language that the entire equation rests upon. What in life might appear to be a function of behavior or maturity is seen in these feature stories to be a function of time.

### **Dates Can't Stand Alone**

During the initial coding of these stories, every instance where time was mentioned was highlighted. To help identify patterns, time was subdivided into three categories. A specific time used to answer the question “when?” — Jan. 20; 11:15 a.m.; 1982, etc. — was marked in orange. A period of time used to answer the question “for how long?” — for four years, six-year-old girl, since 1962 — was marked by blue. Any statement about time that didn't fit into those categories — before the accident, he saw his own future, she was out of time — was marked by yellow.

During this initial coding, a particular pattern emerged. In instances where the author used a specific measurement of time (orange), one of the other two types of time-statements about time was frequently used to further qualify that particular timestamp on the narrative. Examples include: “In 1974, not long after Horn left Africa” (Parker, 2007, p. 53); “Silverman arrived in Boulder in 1972, after receiving a Ph.D. in educational psychology” (Konigsberg, 2006, p. 48); “At the end of May, when they were just back from a rafting trip” (Richardson, 2009, p. 139).

From this observation, two important ideas emerged. First, the use of specific timestamp is not enough to orient the reader. For the writers, using the

date alone — although a date is a very specific indication of time — might not communicate time in the story effectively. Tethering the date to an action or event, even a loosely related one not otherwise significant to the story, seems to be a satisfactory solution based on the frequency with which this pattern was observed.

The second idea is this: Despite a timestamp not being able to stand alone, it is neither disposable nor replaceable. The combination of a timestamp and another qualifier appear to be the preferred method of orienting readers in narrative time.

## **Chapter 7: Time Used Implicitly as a Social Construction**

This section highlights statements about time made implicitly. In these instances, the writer does not address the concept of time directly as in the previous section, but the connection to time is clear, whether by choice or by chance.

### **Subject Matter Reflects Precision of Time**

Writers have many options to choose from when describing time in their stories. In the stories studied, there is a strong connection between the subject matter and the way time is described. A plausible explanation is that the subject matter is a driving force behind the way time is used.

Many of the stories are about or have scenes related to the military, medical treatment and the scientific process. In those stories and instances, the use of specific clock time was palpably different from scenes outside those sorts of institutions. In *The Last Abortion Doctor*, a sequence of events occurring at “1:35,” “1:43” and “1:47” respectively reflect the exactness of the medical office in which the scene is set (Richardson, 2009, pp. 169-170). In *Prairie Fire*, exact times are rarely used (in most instances, a year is given to set the scene) until Brandenn shoots himself, which ushers in the medical section: Then, the gunshot is reported to have been heard at 5:45; harvesting of Brandenn’s organs took two

and a half days; and the urgency of transporting the organs to donors was a matter of “counting the minutes” (Konigsberg, 2006, p. 55).

Slowing time down, or at least being more precise about describing it, might seem like a tactic borrowed from Hollywood, where slow-motion scenes often come at dramatic moments. But in other stories studied, dramatic moments that weren't medical or military related did not carry the same precision. The setting seems to be a better indicator of precision than a heightened sense of drama or emotion.

## **Features of the Past**

### **Truth in past**

Together, the stories suggest that the past, generally speaking, holds truth. This truth is often inaccessible or hard to reach, but it lies there, dormant, until somebody stumbles upon it (*The Long Shadow of War*, *The Loved Ones*, *Underworld*, *Sgt. Wells's New Skull*, *Prairie Fire*). Despite evidence that truth is not absolute (multiple versions of the Hurricane Katrina narrative don't match up in *The Loved Ones*), the tone of the stories suggests a truth exists; humanity simply hasn't mined it or identified it yet.

By constructing this general characteristic of the past, the writers validate their reason for being, among other things. Aligning closely with the study of history as outlined in Chapter 2, this understanding creates the need for a person to find that truth, a person who doesn't necessarily have anything to do with the original event. As is the case with a few of the observations in the findings, this concept, which probably surprises few, might not appear to be particularly

helpful or insightful. However, the self-referencing and self-reaffirming that the writers continually use when writing about their subjects is certainly noteworthy. By defining the past in this way, writers simultaneously create a need for the reader and step in to fulfill it.

### **Various Pasts**

Writers also construct the nature of the past in different ways depending on its relative distance to the present. Generally speaking the further an event is from the present, the more assured the writers are that the event is “correct” and that its implications to subsequent events are clear. Events that have occurred most recently are the most contentious. Logically, this is counterintuitive. Given human nature, it’s completely normal. Either way, the past, a component of temporality, is constructed in this way for readers.

For example, in *Swingers*, the long history of the bonobo monkey is described with a certain authority: “The evolutionary tree looks like this:..” (Parker, 2007, p. 52). Later in the same story, specific scenes from nearly 100 years ago are described as if a video proof exists: “One afternoon in 1928, Harold Coolidge, a Harvard zoologist, was picking through a storage tray of ape bones in a museum near Brussels” (Parker, 2007, p. 52). Admittedly, when the writers describe the distant past or ancient past, they often paint the picture with large brushstrokes, sometimes up to a million years at a time, which leaves plenty of room for error. However, the tone used is not a tone that indicates uncertainty or estimation.

## **Chapter 8: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

This study was designed to discover how the authors of twelve magazine feature stories used the concept of time. The concept of time has puzzled people from multiple disciplines for centuries. Concurrently, the concept of time is also an essential component of narrative. Narrative is also the bedrock of many journalistic stories, especially feature stories. With multiple understandings and descriptions of time at their disposal, journalists must select from the many options available. Even if the writer is not attempting to say anything about time, he or she must, at the very least, decide how to order the events of the narrative and describe when events occurred. When a writer makes any decision related to time, he or she is making a statement about the way time works and the way it doesn't.

Two concepts were discussed at length in Chapter 2. First, Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of the social construction of reality provided the theoretical outlines for why this inquiry is relevant and important to the field of journalism. In short, reality, of which time is a part, is created and propagated by collective interpretation. Journalism scholars such as Lippmann (1991) suggest that the media play a significant role in this process. The media, which disseminate information to millions, present a construction of reality that reaches

more people than nearly any other organization or institution. People receive information — media's messages included — and assemble these messages and constructions into the reality they see — their worldview (Aerts et al., 1994) (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

While this transaction isn't always one-to-one (that is, people can accept or reject information or ideas presented to them), media nevertheless have the capacity to influence. This study was not designed to examine which time-related messages were incorporated most frequently or which time-related messages ought to be spread but rather to examine various ways in which authors presented those messages.

The second concept discussed at length was narrative. The concept of time in narrative has been discussed in research in the field of journalism as well as the fields of history and literature. Because the practical components of these three fields are similar in many ways, much of the theoretical basis for the understanding of narrative in this study was drawn from all three disciplines, a practice also used by journalism scholars such as Schudson (1986).

The three major figures in the conceptual framework section of Chapter 2 (White, Ricoeur and Carr) agreed that writers do and should rearrange the strict order, or timeline, of events to suit other narrative needs, such as the advancement of a particular thesis or point of view.

The three disagreed about the extent to which that rearrangement and the act of rearranging itself were similar or dissimilar to reality. White (1973) supposed that narrative was an artistic representation of reality — useful in

understanding reality but fundamentally different from it. White also suggested the time found in narrative was a tool that individuals could use to advance their political ends, however dubious. Carr (1986) proposed that the process of creating narrative was, in fact, nearly the same process that occurs when people process reality, which makes it more similar to reality than not. In general, Ricoeur's (1983) views stand between White's and Carr's.

The previous chapter detailed the instances in which time was used in the twelve stories studied. The findings were divided among the three research questions. This chapter seeks to bring those many, various findings into conversation with one another in order to see the big picture of how authors use time in these stories. Additionally, the ideas and concepts depicted in the previous chapter will be placed alongside the ideas and concepts presented in Chapter 2 in order to identify significant similarities or differences and deepen the conversation.

### **Finding Time**

Interpretation aside, one thing is clear: Looking for the concept of time in feature stories is no unicorn hunt. When this research was being designed, one possible outcome considered was that writers would rarely address the concept of time or, when writers did, would give time a diminished role. In the end, the opposite was true. Throughout each story, multiple statements about time were made, whether the writer made them intentionally or unintentionally.

Additionally, no overarching or all-encompassing concept or theory of time emerged from a single story or from the stories collectively. Descriptions

and understandings of time, such as the economy of time or the reliance of clock time, were frequently invoked, even relied upon, but none was held up to be a true pillar of reality, like gravity. A sweeping, cohesive theory of time was not expected to be found. That expectation was accurate as none of the 12 stories conveyed any coherent theory about time. In fact, one takeaway from the findings section is that in many instances, writers seem to be acutely aware of the time they use and where that description falls short.

The examples of the calendar that was cut up and rearranged in *Swingers* and the man who lost track of clock time in an elevator in *Up and Then Down* demonstrate the author's awareness of both the usefulness and the shortcomings of any given language of time. In each of those cases, the particular language of time is shown to be a blanket that doesn't quite fit over everything: For the most part it keeps things covered, but there are always elements that remains exposed. In other words, the languages of time commonly used in these stories are shown to be good enough — authors do not hide the limitations in the languages of time, but neither do authors try to correct them.

Together, these observations support a social construction of time similar to Berger and Luckmann's description and provide deeper insight into the way time works in narrative. By relying on any given language of time while at the same time pointing out the shortcomings or flimsiness of the construct, the writers show that time is just that — a construction. The writers know that the particular shape and contours of the time language they use to help readers navigate the story will crack under pressure. Yet, the writers also acknowledge

that the construction's imperfections do not take away from the usefulness of the construction; without a shared construction of time used to convey ideas about time to one another, authors and readers would be even more puzzled.

Realizing that time is constructed is not the end but the beginning of this discussion. The use of time in these stories also reflects Berger and Luckmann's (1966) assessment that language does more than just transmit data. Language enables people to organize information, find patterns and assemble categories — even if the information used to do this is a construction rather than a deductive truth. It is in those operations where meaning is assigned and worldview construction can take place. Here, the twelve feature stories studied bring together Berger and Luckmann's (1966) ideas with those of the narrative theorists, in particular, White (1973) and Carr (1986).

### **History and Point-of-view**

Berger and Luckmann (1966) described *what happens* when we talk about time. In sum, the “symbolic universe” helps to order history and arrange a frame of reference for the future, both of which enable people to transcend their present-bound, finite existence (p. 95). The stories studied provided examples of the way in which authors are able to “order history” and refer to the unknown future. The stories illuminated the *how this happens* White and Carr describe.

With regard to history, the stories studied reaffirm White's theory that writers construct the past to show something other than chronology. On a structural level, plenty of straightforward examples of the story jumping out of sequence exist (In *The Long Shadow of War*, the main character's narrative

jumps among the 1970s, the early 2000s and the mid 2000s. In *Underworld*, the story of the coal mine at present is peppered with pieces of miners' biographies, geologic history of the mine and other segments of noncontiguous time). These patterns show that chronology wasn't followed. But on their own, these out-of-order sequences don't show that writers actively pursue something other than chronology — they just show that writers don't follow chronology. To find the pursuit of something else, one must look to where the stories ended in relation to where they began.

Although these stories do not make a strong case for the political urgency in narrative that White described, the chronology of the historical events that constituted these stories was indeed subject to reorganization to suit the writer's ends. Zooming out from the stories, one can see that central to the thesis of each story lies a time-based problem. As discussed in Chapter 5, the thesis of each story can be distilled to the subject(s) of the stories facing a discontinuity in time. The writer then sought to explain the missing sections or reconcile the broken parts.

The reconciliation found in these stories warrants further discussion for multiple reasons. First, half the stories had an identifiable brokenness that the narrative sought to reconcile. These twelve stories are not necessarily representative of all magazines (a larger sample might very well yield a fewer percentage of stories like this), but the number of times reconciliation appears as a narrative goal is certainly notable. Second, in some of the stories, such as *Sgt. Wells's New Skull* and *Prairie Fire*, the narrative ends without reaching

reconciliation. In the eyes of ASME judges, the writer's undertaking is apparently more important than the outcome, at least in this regard.

The idea of seeking narrative reconciliation is perhaps most interesting in *The Long Shadow of War*. In that story, the main character, Ison, was caught between two different times (a past war and the present). The frontline on which his inner battle was waged was a particular memory from Vietnam. The author inserted her own narrative, in which she mentioned her persistent pursuit of that memory, which Ison kept hidden. The story ends with Ison revealing the story to the writer, but the writer, following the Ison's wishes, keeps the memory concealed from readers. This action stretches out and magnifies the many layers of narrative. At once, narrative reconciliation was reached, but it also wasn't. Ison's inner self, the true focus of the narrative, was reconciled through counseling. The writer's oft-stalled pursuit of Ison's memory was satisfied. But the reader being left in the dark is all-too apparent. An argument could be made that reconciliation was not completely achieved, that the reader has become part of the narrative, or, rather, the narrative's scope grew to include the reader. This blurring of narrative boundaries is also seen in *The Last Abortion Doctor*, where the reader is purposefully brought into the story and made a character by means of the author's use of pronouns and verbs. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's pursuit of narrative reconciliation as discussed in Chapter 2 at first might seem lofty, even a bit magical, but similar processes can be seen at work in the ways expressed above.

Addressing a central problem, the narrative telos, is the true “end” toward which the narrative arc aims. So, while the stories are not obligated to defend chronology, as White suggested, the stories nevertheless end up finding their purpose or reason-for-being in time, though not a time associated with chronology.

On a closer level, the ways in which writers use time within the stories show the ability and willingness to step outside of the present. As described by many scholars in Chapter 2, being situated in the present is not like being attached to a track as a train car is, with perspectives being limited to either forward or backward. Instead, writers often use or imply the use of the future-perfect present Carr describes as well as other outside-the-narrative-present tools. *Countdown to a Meltdown* provided the most obvious example of a future-perfect perspective: Using it was the point of the whole story. Other methods, such as inserting the author’s personal narrative or hypothetically placing the reader in the narrative present, resulted in similar results — viewing the narrative present from another perspective.

The instances in which the author steps outside the narrative third-person present provide the strongest concrete connective tissue between the theories of time in narrative and the theory of time as a social construction of reality as described in Chapter 2. Seen as tools of narrative or constructions used to tell a story in a magazine, these narrative devices don’t attempt to define time or establish one interpretation of temporality. At the same time, however, it’s not hard to imagine someone integrating similar types of outside-the-present

narrative perspectives into his or her own reality (i.e. viewing reality from a future-perfect position, occupying the role of narrator in his or her own life, etc.). In other words, although the time found in these feature stories on the whole don't answer and rarely even address the age-old questions about time, the stories suggest a great deal about ways people ought to use time despite time's vagueness. The stories suggest that by using narrative tools, people can learn to step outside their present-bound existence to examine reality from a perspective less strapped by the clock. The stories also give examples as to how the theories of Carr and Berger and Luckmann work hand-in-hand to best explain how time is used in narrative

### **The What and the How of Time**

Investigating "structural time" — that is, how time was used on the macro level to organize the story as a whole — yielded the most findings in this study. That reflects the concepts outlined in Chapter 2 in that *how* time was used and constructed was discussed more at length by the authors than *what* implications a particular use or construction of time might have. In the section above, the *what* and the *how* were viewed together in order to see the connections between various authors in Chapter 2. In this section, the two will be considered apart from each other.

The authors in the feature stories studied did not "define" the language of time they planned to use before proceeding to use it in the setting of their particular story. Instead, the relationship between the language of time used and the story actually worked in the other direction. Throughout the stories, a story's

setting and particular circumstances actually informed how time was used or discussed. Time doesn't make the story; the story makes the time. For example, military and medical scenes used extremely precise language of clock time, sometimes down to the minute; in other scenes, authors found it sufficient to paint time with broad brushstrokes of days, weeks and months. In stories where characters seem to escape clock time, the setting seems to drive the discussion of time. The characters that escape time are able to do so because of the unfamiliar setting they find themselves in — a jail, an elevator, a jungle. In stories about children who do not meet traditional expectations of children, the writers examine time in terms of age expectations. In short, in the stories studied, authors don't define time — they use it.

### **The Variable of Time**

To this point in the discussion, two major threads have emerged from the findings. First, in these 12 feature stories, time is malleable and used purposefully to advance a narrative end, which is frequently a time-based dilemma. Second, at a more micro level within the stories, the subject matter at hand informs the language of time used. These two broad threads are the primary findings of the research questions and also help broaden the theories and concepts discussed in Chapter 2 to include the field of journalism.

Woven together, those two threads show something deeper about the relationship between the author and what he or she writes. Looking at the two threads side-by-side, the author appears to have greater latitude in determining the structure of the story's timeline than he or she does in determining the

language of time used within the story. As discussed in the section above, the particulars of a story have significant influence on the language used while the story's central thesis is a dilemma that the author identifies and pursues on his or her own accord. As a result, the overall structure of the story is more of a variable than the language of time used within the story. This idea is interesting because it goes against a plausible assumption that the events of a story must prescribe some sort of inherent structure while at the same time statements about how time works are fuzzy and are therefore up to the author's direction.

This idea strongly suggests that the authors of these stories are in many ways similar to White's historian. The events themselves transform into vehicles that the author can use to serve his or her pursuit of narrative resolution. The authors use story to advance an idea (actively) rather than to convey or describe an order of events (passively). This sense of purpose behind the story makes the author an agent of the narrative not unlike the characters in the story itself.

Because this study seeks to identify how writers use time in narrative, it is important to consider how this observation informs authors' use of time in the story (rather than focusing on the role of narrator in narrative). To that end, the facets of temporality most worth pursuing in terms of an author saying one thing or another as a character within the narrative of the feature are the problems that the author takes up in the story's thesis. Whether the author uses the language of the economy of time or precise clock time in the story is a decision made by and large by the subject matter. The instances where the writer makes decisions — the way in which the problem or dilemma of the story is captured and pursued — is

where a variable lies and where the most can be learned about a particular author and what he or she has to say about time. In more practical terms, identifying a disconnect in time in a story's thesis (such as the pre-/post-injury dichotomy in *Sgt. Well's New Skull*) can highlight the large, structural decisions a writer used (such as inserting the author's own narrative or telling the events in reverse order) to help resolve the problem. Identifying the many isolated statements about time within the story (i.e. time is "spent," time repeats itself, etc.) seems more likely to be a product not of the author's volition but of the subject matter he or she was given.

The significance of the observation is this: Instead of approaching time as a subject (wherein qualities are assigned to it and lines of distinction are drawn around it), time should be approached as a tool, and the use of it should be viewed as a skill. The ramifications that the backward timeline of *The Things That Carried Him* might have for the meaning of time are less important than what the use of that backward timeline is able to accomplish in terms of resolving the dilemma the author has singled out. Rather than attempting to create a dictionary definition of time when reading, it would be more advantageous to create a user's manual.

Although the methods observed in the stories and described above do not make a strong case for political urgency as White defined it, in using time as a tool, the authors do introduce a power dynamic to the narrative. In fact, tools generally speaking are used in order to execute something with power otherwise unattainable. The form the authors used (narrative) and the form's supposed

capacity to reach outside the events and *do* something (reconcile things that are broken, discover things that have been lost or forgotten, etc.) appears to be taken for granted by the authors. By advancing the idea that narrative can “do” these things (and by rarely probing the soundness of the assumption), the authors using their position of authority to further an intellectual stance.

Similarly, by defaulting to conventional languages of time (economy of time, linear time), the authors use their position of power to reinforce a particular way of talking about and thinking about time. The authors varied in the way they used time, but they unequivocally stood under the same larger umbrella — the Western notion of temporality, which suggests that time is linear, time is spent on things and that narrative can be used to address and fix narratives from the past that are broken.

In sum, these stories show that time can be seen as a tool in both the construction of reality and the construction of narrative ends. Discovering how bending time or skipping time, for example, advances a narrative to a particular point is not only practical, but it also informs the theories in Chapter 2 and extends them to the field of journalism.

### **The Reality of Feature Stories**

The various scholars in Chapter 2 had much in common. The one issue left unresolved at the end was the issue of narrative and reality. The scholars disagreed about the extent to which narrative and reality are similar or dissimilar. Unfortunately, the twelve stories studied did not settle the dispute. However, they deepened the discourse by illuminating particulars of the issue and provided

a more nuanced approach to understanding the problem than simply asking, “which theorist is right?” Although this study is not primarily designed to address narrative and its relation to reality, the topic becomes important when considering what readers ought to make of the way in which authors use time in their stories.

In the feature stories studied, it became clear that two "realities" are in play. The first reality in play was the past reality of the event(s) the story was about. In many of the stories, the writer was embedded within the unfolding events for some if not most of the narrative (*The Long Shadow of War, Underground*). However, there were always major elements of the narrative in which the narrator was not present. That is true in almost all journalistic stories. Journalists typically “cover stories,” which means that a story-in-progress is a precursor to coverage. As such, the first reality in play — the reality of the event itself — can be called the present of the past, including the present that the journalist-as-historian attempts to “uncover.”

The second reality was the reality of the event as remembered, constructed and written. It is not only the writer who constructs the story; the writer uses the stories constructed by the story’s subjects, too. Together, these stories become a reality, too. They exist in real life (the magazine) and they become a part of reality for anyone who reads them.

Determining the ultimate relationship between reality and narrative is impossible because a person must always occupy reality at all times. People cannot get outside reality in order to observe it and see how it compares to

narrative. However, that doesn't mean questions about reality aren't worth pursuing. These twelve feature stories suggested that the reality of an event as something remembered is itself a type of reality that, at the very least, people frequently encounter. Even if a particular narrative overlooks something in the past's present, the past itself will not return to correct it: Only another narrative can counter. As such, it seems helpful to advance the understanding of narrative as Carr suggests. White might be right in suggesting that reality in the past is unlike a narrative about the same reality. However, Carr's suggestion that narrative is like reality seems worth pursuing if only because the reality of experiencing past *exclusively* through narrative is such a prevalent way of engaging other realities. People exchanging narrative with one another is a reality while people exchanging realities is not.

With regard to worldview construction, this study shows that authors reinforce Western ideas about time and suggest that readers can "do" something with their own narrative much like the authors did with their story. Again, this research did not assess if and how readers incorporated what they read into their worldview, but the tools used by authors (molding the past, viewing a future-perfect present, etc.) are made to be viable ways of, among other things, understanding the self and addressing problems. One story might not change a person, but over time a person who reads feature stories in magazines might well assume that narrative is the lens through which one must make sense of reality. Additionally, narrative's apparent capacity to be a force of change or power is one conceivably easily subsumed into many person's worldview.

Like the use of time itself, narrative might not be broad enough to capture and convey every facet of reality. However, narrative's widespread use and acceptance, especially in journalism, makes it an attractive option for capturing and conveying large amounts of meaning for many people. Narrative is the mediator not just between inner consciousness and outer reality but also a prime mediator and negotiator people use with others (and with themselves (*The Long Shadow of War*)). The media, which act as a main thoroughfare on which people interact as they construct their own realities, use narrative to make sense of reality. Making sense of narrative is worth pursuing. This study helps show that writers, at least the twelve in this study, say little about how time operates. At the same time, the time in their stories is bent, skipped, sped up, slowed down and turned backward in the name of a larger narrative purpose.

### **What This Means for Journalism**

This study, while drawing literature from multiple academic fields, is nonetheless primarily concerned with journalistic writing. The findings in chapters 5, 6 and 7 and the discussion in this chapter engage with the concepts and ideas of journalism scholars found in Chapter 2.

Schudson (1986) recognized that journalists often write about stories in the past, and so can be considered a type of historian (p. 87). Schudson (1986) also stated that time is often inconsistent within a given story. The inconsistencies he identified were largely grammatical and frequently seen in the different tenses used in headlines, captions and body text (p. 89). This study

expands the list inconsistencies in stories to include the deeper, structural elements of the story.

This study also reinforces and fleshes out Schudson's (1986) description of feature stories. In his description, he states that feature stories are "timeless," and are focused on "what is considered eternal or universal in human affairs (p. 106). To that idea, this study adds that feature stories are indeed timeless not in the sense that feature stories are without time but that they are not bound or constrained by time, whether time is understood to be the order of events or the universe's behavior.

A few of the time-management methods Schudson (1986) briefly mentions can be identified in the stories studied and are given more consideration in chapters 5-8 of this study. One method, describing "the past as if it were the future" was seen in a variation in *Countdown to a Meltdown*, in which the future was described as if it were the present (Schudson, 1986, p. 95; Fallows, 2005). Another method observed in the stories studied was a variation of the subjunctive voice Schudson (1986) references. Effects similar to the effects of the subjunctive mood, "which is a grammatical mood that expresses supposition, desire, hypothesis, possibility, etc., rather than state an actual fact," were seen, among other places, when an author wrote as if readers were subjects the story *The Last Abortion Doctor* (p. 106; Richardson, 2009).

The findings of this study also have theoretical implications for another journalism scholar, Lippmann, also cited in Chapter 2. Lippmann (1991) suggested that writers construct a "pseudo-environment" to convey a reality to

others. Elements of that understanding can be seen in the various scholars used throughout this study and also the findings of the feature stories studied.

## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

### **Overview**

This study was designed to explore the time found in feature stories. The 12 stories studied used time frequently. The stories strongly suggest that the writers were able to impress their creative/narrative vision onto the ordering of events in the timelines within the narrative while the language of time used in the story was driven largely by the subjects/content itself. Generally, the language used reinforced traditionally Western notions of time. Additionally, the writers seemed to have a self-awareness about the limitations of any given definition or use of time. In the end, the time constructed by the writers is less a force of nature or defined entity than it is a tool or vehicle used to advance an idea, which is determined by the author. Each story could be distilled to a time-based problem, and each author sought a time-based solution to that problem. While, strictly speaking, the authors likely did not consider the time-based implications their stories might have on the social construction of time, the complex story structures suggest that story order was addressed in detail during the writing process.

### **Importance**

The concepts used in this study, such as time, narrative and the social construction of reality, are big, nebulous ideas. As a result, revisiting why this

study is important within the specific context of journalism is important. First, time is a basic element of story. Journalists use story to convey the reality of an event or series of events to a wide audience. A better understanding of how journalists construct reality by using time is of theoretical importance, especially in terms of the inner workings of narrative, a prevalent form used in journalism. Narrative is not the only method available with which to tell story, but it is the prevalent form nonetheless. Exploring the assumptions narrative rests upon is essential to understanding narrative, particularly narratives found in journalism.

This understanding also brings journalism, particularly long-form feature writing in magazines, into conversation with related academic fields, such as history and literature. Magazine journalism is but a small slice of the media world. However, many of its characteristics, such as its periodicity, its longer production schedule, the physical space that can be devoted to one story and a tradition of making collective understanding for a society show that the medium of magazine journalism is particularly conducive to the particular messages found in the form of these narratives. It would be difficult to readily find stories “outside time” in a newspaper or on a nightly newscast. Given that magazines can support this kind of storytelling like few other media platforms can, the particular medium becomes closely associated with the form of the message. On a practical level, examining the basic element of narrative in magazines can provide journalists with better insight into the craft of writing, especially when the conditions are right for this kind of storytelling.

## **Practical Takeaways**

Journalists might have no interest in thinking about which particular version of time they present in the stories they write. Nevertheless, journalists who care more about practicing journalism than the study of journalism can still benefit from the findings of this study. The 12 stories studied were selected because they received critical acclaim. Understanding the inner workings of time and narrative in these stories might help other journalists better understand and improve their own writing.

To that end, the practical takeaways of this study can be divided into two categories: things writers did and things writers did not do. First, writers demonstrated significant leeway in ordering the events of their stories. Journalists, for whom general professional guidelines such as objectivity, accuracy and truthfulness are just vague enough to put the practice of actively reorganizing events into question, can go forward with the understanding that, at least in the case of these stories, the practice was widespread and acceptable. Of course, that isn't to say that journalists have full discretion. Journalists would also benefit from identifying the narrative goal of their story and organize events in a way that pushes the story toward that goal while also not detracting from the reality of the events that happened. Discerning a narrative goal or the point of the story should not be a new concept for journalists. However, identifying a goal or thesis based on time might be unfamiliar. The narrative of each of the 12 stories could be synthesized into a time-based problem that the writer sought to resolve through explanation or reconciliation. A practicing journalist might find it

beneficial to think of his or her story in a similar light. Using this perspective, the writer might understand the story differently.

This research also demonstrated instances in which writers did not take such liberties with other time-based decisions. Broadly speaking, the writers refrained from claiming or suggesting that time worked in a particular way. Even in the longest stories that needed the most narrative support, no definitions or claims about time that seemed to carry through the story were made. When statements about time were made, they were generally traditional/familiar constructs and were driven by the content or the subjects rather than the writer. Here, journalists might consider pushing against convention. Journalists are always in a place of relative power (he or she decides what gets written), and to consider what ideas and constructs they are propagating with regard to time would at least lead to more thoughtful decisions and, possibly, additional outlooks on the subject.

Order of events aside, writers led readers through the story with a series of time pegs. These time pegs were frequently a combination of a reference to clock time (i.e. a specific date) and an event-based reference (i.e. something a person was doing). Another time peg frequently identified was the use of relative time (i.e. describing something as coming before or after another event). Although technically the writer's decision, the type of time pegs used were rarely strayed from, which made them appear to be a function of convention.

## Limitations

This study was designed to discover ways writers construct time. Because the meaning of time is socially constructed, the concepts presented by writers with influence and large audiences might bring about change in an individual or, over time, society. However, this study does not seek to examine reader responses to discover how they incorporate these constructions of time into their worldviews, if at all, after reading magazines. Discovering what magazines are producing is the first step in studying, among other things, how the final product is being received or incorporated into readers' ways of thinking.

These 12 stories are not necessarily demonstrative of the media or even magazines: This project is a purposive study designed to begin to discover how time is socially constructed by industry leaders and trendsetters. The findings from this study apply only to the magazines studied. A study of other magazines to determine what happens across the media landscape would be beneficial but falls outside the time constraints of this study. Additionally, following one author through the entire process of researching and writing a feature story would help gain insight into how writers come to the decisions they do.

Last, this study does not seek to prescribe a way in which time ought to be portrayed in feature magazines. As Chapter 2 shows, time is an elusive concept to begin with. This is an exploratory study — not a normative study — that simply seeks to find both *what* is being presented and *how* writers present it. Discovering what magazines are producing is the first step in studying, among other things, how the final product is being received or incorporated into readers'

ways of thinking. Because this topic is studied infrequently in the field of journalism, this study is more of a beginning than an end.

### **Future Research**

This area of study could benefit from further research. This study was designed to be an exploratory study, which opens up doors to many more ideas. This study examined a limited number of stories. Doing similar research on shorter stories, stories that have not received critical acclaim, stories found in magazines of different genres are just a few places to explore whether the findings of this study can be applied more broadly or whether they are limited to a narrower scope of story type.

Research on the production end might also be considered. Stories, especially feature stories, are not built in a day. The process of writing and editing a story brings countless changes after the original draft. Although the writer might not remember every decision or conversation about the process, examining the approach taken by him or her and how the story became structured during the writing process might yield valuable insight into why the final draft is the way it is.

Last, researching what, if any, effect various time constructs have on readers would be worth pursuing. This, admittedly, would be a difficult study to design, but would be beneficial were a feasible research design created. A better understanding of the ways in which people recognize the social constructions of time around them and are affected by the constructed time in the narratives they consume are just a few unanswered questions that might be pursued.

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