

Hall - Journal 2 - What is Creative Nonfiction (CRF)

Kristine R. Hall

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Dr. Londie Martin

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***“Ay, si yo pudiera volar.” I think during Covid we can all relate to the mother in Cofer’s short creative nonfiction piece, Volar.***

**What is creative nonfiction? (CNF)**

To be honest I had to look outside the reading this week to get the answer. Yes, we had readings that showcased creative nonfiction work but none of them actually described what CNF was enough for me to make a firm understanding of the concept. I found the article “What Is Creative Nonfiction?” by author, Lee Gutkind, which defines creative nonfiction as “true stories well told.”

He states, “In some ways, creative nonfiction is like jazz—it’s a rich mix of flavors, ideas, and techniques, some of which are newly invented and others as old as writing itself. Creative nonfiction can be an essay, a journal article, a research paper, a memoir, or a poem; it can be personal or not, or it can be all of these.”

Which made me recount the story “Suspended” by Harjo where she describes a vivid moment in her life,

“I became acutely aware of the line the jazz trumpeter was playing (a sound I later associated with Miles Davis). I didn’t know the word jazz or trumpet, or the concepts. I don’t know how to say it, with what sounds or words, but in that confluence of hot southern afternoon, in the breeze of aftershave and humidity, I followed that sound to the beginning, to the place of the birth of sound. I was suspended in whirling stars, a moon to which I’d traveled often by then. I grieved my parents’ failings, my own life which I saw stretched the length of that rhapsody. My rite of passage into the world of humanity occurred then, via jazz. The music made a startling bridge between familiar and strange lands, an appropriate vehicle, for though the music is predominantly west African in concept, with European associations, jazz was influenced by the Creek (or Muscogee) people, for we were there when jazz was born. I recognized it, that humid afternoon in my formative years, as a way to speak beyond the confines of ordinary language.”

Gutkind goes on to say, the words “creative” and “nonfiction” describe the form. The word “creative” refers to the use of literary craft, the techniques fiction writers, playwrights, and poets employ to present nonfiction—factually accurate prose about real people and events—in a compelling, vivid, dramatic manner. The goal is to make nonfiction stories read like fiction so that your readers are as enthralled by fact as they are by fantasy. The word “creative” has been criticized in this context because some people have maintained that being creative means that you pretend or exaggerate or make up facts and embellish details. This is completely incorrect. It is possible to be honest and straightforward and brilliant and creative at the same time.

“Creative” doesn’t mean inventing what didn’t happen, reporting and describing what wasn’t there. It doesn’t mean that the writer has a license to lie. The cardinal rule is clear—and cannot be violated. This is the pledge the writer makes to the reader—the maxim we live by, the anchor of creative nonfiction: “You can’t make this stuff up!”

### Does “digital nonfiction” (DNF) simply mean: CNF + Electronic Tools = DNF?

I want to say yes because most of us receive our day to day information via the internet, however, when using the term “digital” the user needs to realize the term covers ALL digital forms of communication not just computers and smartphones.

### Or is there more to it?

In “The Fourth Genre” article by Root & Steinberg; Mary Clearman Blew was quoted “The boundaries of creative nonfiction will always be fluid as water.” The article continues to state, “throughout the various forms of creative nonfiction, whether the subject is the writer’s self (as perhaps in personal essays and memoirs) or an objective, observed reality outside the self (as perhaps in nature essays and personal cultural criticism), the reader is taken on a journey into the mind and personality of the writer.”

I think to make a coherent piece of digital nonfiction the electronic tool in which the reader will be receiving the information should play an intricate part in the design. When I read the short creative nonfiction stories (Cofer & Harjo), I enjoyed them, but a part of the process seemed lost. Here I was reading a short story from a scanned PDF section of a book which was fine for teaching purposes I suppose, but as a consumer I would have rather have read the stories from an actual book with text then in a digital setting.

### What are the main features of creative nonfiction?

In Tim Brown’s Ted Talk on Serious Play in 2008, he tells the audience, “You can be serious and play. So to sum it up, we need trust to play, and we need trust to be creative. So, there’s a connection. And there are a series of behaviors that we’ve learnt as kids, and that turn out to be quite useful to us as designers. They include exploration, which is about going for quantity; building, and thinking with your hands; and role-play, where acting it out helps us both to have more empathy for the situations in which we’re designing, and to create services and experiences that are seamless and authentic.”

I believe the main features of CNF is bringing creative storytelling to an audience via digital multimodal communication to share human expression through the electronic combination of sound, image, word and movement.

### Which features do you enjoy most in the writing you encounter, perhaps in your own writing?

I tend to like writings that envelope me in the story. I was so intrigued in Cofer’s *Volar* and Water’s *Fast Food* because of the language barrier. I didn’t know what a Kike was in *Fast Food* or the phrase the mother spoke at the end in *Volar*, but I found myself longing to know and immediately looked the words up after reading the stories. For me it would have to be the word is the main focus, because both authors pulled me into their stories so much that I longed to know exactly what was spoken.

### Which features do you find most challenging to reproduce when you sit down to write?

I sit down and start writing with enthusiasm and after a few pages, maybe 10 to 20, I start to lose focus and no longer know which way to take the story, so I guess maybe imagery and word.

Based on what you have read/heard in the texts above (and perhaps drawing from things you've learned in other nonfiction courses), how would you classify Nicky Case's "Coming Out Simulator"?

I think the game was odd, I felt like the author set the player/reader/audience up from the beginning. As if the by creating the simulator the audience was also in the wrong for how the game played out.

Is it nonfiction or fiction?

Who knows? The concept looks to be true, but from elementary school we are taught that fiction is fantasy (fake) and video games are also fake. If you want me to take a guess, I'd say its nonfiction because of the adult content.

Is it a true story, an untrue story, something else entirely?

To me it felt like when a movie starts and the beginning you read "based on a true story" but in actuality it has only a smidge of truth, but since you (the audience) weren't there you can't possibly know what part was fact and what was fiction.

In her video text, Hidalgo advocates for a Cultural Rhetoric's approach to memoir (which is just one type of CNF). What is a Cultural Rhetoric's approach, and why does she think it's a good idea?

In our reading this week, Alexandra Hidaglo states,

"Memoir has long had a place in Rhetoric and Composition classrooms and scholarship through literacy narratives and other writing assignments and publications that spring from the author's past. Furthermore, the digital era has turned memoir into a daily practice for many of us. Whether we are blogging or microblogging through Instagram, Facebook, and other social media spaces, we're often working within the memoir genre. Anyone who has spent time visiting these spaces knows that they are brimming with records of our personal lives.

Blogging and microblogging often takes place without much thought being given to how those we are portraying alongside us will feel about the images and anecdotes we post, not just today but a decade from now. Besides applying to more traditional memoirs, the *Cultural Rhetoric's approach* I am proposing here can help us craft a more ethical and communal blogging and microblogging presence. It can also provide new ways of envisioning literacy narratives and other personal genres in which students and scholars represent their lives.)

*Cultural Rhetorics isn't just concerned with story but with "how a story is told, how a person's experience is honored"* Alexandra Hidaglo believes by Remembering Together, Creating Together, and Editing Together we can begin to shift away from the traditional image of someone telling their story in isolation and replace it with one of communal, constellated storytelling.

Which features of this approach seem most interesting or useful to you?

I think coming together as a group or community to retell a story from the past is amazing, yes you have to deal with different visions and people's reactions and recounts of the story, but the result would be a tapestry full of emotion and memories.

**What did you think about Hidalgo's choice to publish her scholarship as a video instead of a more traditional academic essay?**

I didn't care for it. As the listener/audience I felt disconnected to what she was saying and had to go back and read the transcript to grasp what she was trying to convey.

**What did you think about the kinds of images, sounds, and videos she included?**

I felt it all was a little disjointed. Like I was having to put the pieces all together.

**How did they connect to the story she was telling with her spoken narration?**

The narration was dull and monotone. I'm a pretty creative person, and generally like videos, but if I had to listen to this presentation again, I'm sure I'd fall asleep.

Resources:

Cofer, J., (1996) Volar. In Short, A Collection of Brief Short Creative Nonfiction, W.W. Norton & Company Publishers, Judith Kitchen and Mary Paumier Jones, Editors

<https://www.creativenonfiction.org/digital-storytelling>

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Lamott, A. (1995). Bird by bird: Some instructions on writing and life. New York, NY: Anchor.

Root, R. and Steinberg, M. (2012) The Fourth Genre, Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction, Michigan State University, 6 ed., Pearson Publishing

Waters, J. (2014) Fast Food. Iss. 47/Fall 2014 Brevity Magazine

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