

WHEN IT GETS UNPREDICTABLE: GONZO JOURNALISM

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People from generation to generation have asked themselves the same eternal questions with the only one difference of putting all these questions in a different order. My generation and in particular the thinking part of it has come up with the question: are we evolving or are we regressing?

No surprise that the main topic of this discussion in different sphere is the changes in people's life. In my article I am going to discuss these changes in terms of journalism as a sphere reflecting our life.

We say: "Modern literature looks unimpressive comparing to the one of XIX-XX century". We say: "Progress has radically changed our lives, and it has raised the level of quality of living". And each of these views can be challenged. It is clear that literature and life quality are very different when we compared them with the ones from the 60s. Journalism, like other areas of our society and culture, is in constant motion. Another question is if journalism evolve or it is stopped developing? That leads us to the topic of my article which is a style of contemporary journalism - Gonzo.

I will quote a brief description, which vividly describes this trend: "This journalism has no rules, it does not comply with the canons; the shape often doesn't correspond the content, and the content has no connection with the topic". The term "Gonzo" was first used by Bill Cardoso, the editor of the American Journal "The Boston Globe", after he read an article in magazine "Scanlan's Monthly" in 1970. This article was "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved" by American journalist Hunter S. Thompson. Thompson was send to Kentucky to write about horse racing. However the journalist was shocked with the atmosphere on the tribunes more than interested in the hippodrome. The public consisted of the drunks and hooligans changed Thompson's point of view.

The article received a lot of feedback and the editor called it mad, broken, wild, which is the meaning of "gonzo". Cardoso used this term which means in South Boston Irish slang the last man standing after an all-night drinking marathon. According to another version it was a corruption of the French Canadian word "gonzeaux", which means "shining path", although this is disputed.

But despite mostly negative feedback of the public Thompson became instantly famous. On the wave of his popularity in 1971 journalist wrote a book that became a Bible for Gonzo journalists "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream". These events caused the appearing of a new trend in journalism - gonzo journalism.

Thompson felt that objectivity in journalism was a myth. Gonzo journalism has now become a bona-fide style of writing that concerns itself with "telling it like it is", similar to the New Journalism of the 1960s, led primarily by Tom Wolfe and also championed by Lester Bangs, George Plimpton, Terry Southern, and John Birmingham. In fact, gonzo journalism is considered a sub-

genre of new journalism. Thus, classical journalism appeared to have a rival. This trend was moving eastward, first it came Europe, and in the 90th it settled in Russia.

The basic principle which lays in gonzo foundations was proclaimed by Thompson: objective journalism does not exist. The very phrase "objective journalism does not exist" is puzzling.

Any journalist will tell you exactly that the objectivity is one of the most important principles of journalism, like professional honor and accessibility. This is the second principle of "International Principles of Professional Ethics in Journalism" approved in Paris in 1983: "The foremost task of the journalist is to serve the people's right to true and authentic information through an honest dedication to objective reality whereby facts are reported conscientiously in their proper context, pointing out their essential connections and without causing distortions, with due deployment of the creative capacity of the journalist, so that the public is provided with adequate material to facilitate the formation of an accurate and comprehensive picture of the world in which the origin, nature and essence of events, processes and state of affairs are understood as objectively as possible".

In the case of gonzo journalism we have no right to follow the same criteria that we use to analyze a classic journalistic text. So we should understand in what style the text was written. Here is a simple example.

If we consider the classical review of the recently released movie or a published book, we will surely find a short description, basic characteristics, references to previous work, brief analysis of the main problems and we often find edict to read, watch or listen. If we take a review in gonzo style, it can even be composed in only one sentence "your book is rubbish – all copies should be collected and thrown into the trash bin".

Gonzo journalism is a subjective journalism. The journalist doesn't hide, he becomes intact with his work. There is no need to hold on to the facts, author view, a specific individual is the important. It is possible to say that the journalist expresses his point of view, but mostly he imposes it on audience. Gonzo journalist doesn't ask expert opinion, doesn't involve scientists and statistics, doesn't use reputable sources. Also he isn't a conductor for the public, he is a protagonist, who conveys his thoughts, feelings, emotions, using only his own experiences and feelings.

The main figures of speech which involved in gonzo text are hyperbole and litotes (exaggeration and understatement), sarcasm, dialogues. Profanity is very common in gonzo journalism. These figures are primarily intended to create an atmosphere, and only then for a particular image or effect. Gonzo journalism doesn't correspond to the usual ethical rules and doesn't support tolerance.

Unlike the New Journalism, gonzo never claimed to be an art. Gonzo journalism has always been tough and daring. Despite its apparent simplicity and accessibility, gonzo journalism has its own difficulties. And if in the classical journalism problem is situated in the content, the gonzo complexity lies in the form of presentation. Most gonzo works are in particular genres of

information presentation like a report. Another popular genres are notes, comments and correspondence. Analytical genres are not so popular and difficult in exploitation in gonzo, but you can find articles or reviews in this style. Beside there is also a widespread belief that gonzo journalism and blogging is an identical things. However, we should understand that gonzo is a style and blogging is a form. A gonzo journalist earns money for their texts, and a blogger doesn't.

The purpose of gonzo journalism is similar to the new journalism: presentation of increase reliability of the material. This idea really had to be realized in the 20th century, based on the course of history: Worlds wars, Cultural Revolution, global industrialization, global mechanization. The main obstacles of the journalism development were ethics and policies of publications. It is not a secret that every media has its own traditions, own style and own rules. In this case it doesn't matter if we consider them to be good or bad.

Often it becomes a problem. Is it possible to publish this information or not? Is it worth reading or not? It isn't a rare case when journalists are dismissed after writing junk articles. And it is quite common when journalists offend someone's feelings. Gonzo journalists have a dream of getting rid of it, as in the 60tieth culture got rid of moralistic and puritanical views on things. Culture interpreted the freedom of love, freedom of choice, freedom throughout. Journalism also wanted freedom.

But what is this freedom indeed?

Scientists stated that the level of media had lowered substantially. And it isn't only about literacy or accuracy. One of the most important missions of journalism is focused on the shaping public opinion. Journalism must induce a person to act, motivate him, and give him life values. However, gonzo journalism, despite its friendly and smiling face, isn't competent to give a person any new sense of life. Gonzo journalism isn't a constructive journalism. It is rather disputable area. Propaganda of false values leads to a crisis of generations, to his wandering search.

Gonzo's never put an aim to create something new. This trend primarily fights for truth, albeit in a pure form. And now question is reaching the next level of discussion: is it possible to understand the high language of journalism (publicism)? Gonzo journalists tried to explain in simple and effective form, that white is white and black is black. Now people are far-far away from that time when an important role in decision making on in controversial things belonged to satires, pamphlets and essays written by greatest writers. Audience of such writers was well educated. And the 20th century is the century of middle class, of middle dreams and middle education. The language of gonzo is the language of middle class, understandable for crowd.

So Gonzo journalism can be certainly considered as a vulgar cheap press, where author primarily amuses himself. But we should be remembered that journalism is more oriented to the average reader. Therefore, the author isn't flattering because of his selfishness. He ridicules people who generate these situations, in particular the middle class. Gonzo journalism has something in common with the decadence in literature, which was broken by bourgeois class. "Lost" artists did not engage in polemics and began to depict the world which humble situation, obedient bourgeoisie, who considers the norm situation. And only the effects of the grotesque, the opposition, literally

make people feel disgust. The same effect can be observed in gonzo. The author wants us to feel disgusted by what is happening.

And now we can find the main mistake of gonzo. Gonzo assumes that the reader would conclude disgusted and would find the way out from difficult situation. And it's easy to make a conclusion that this idea doesn't work. Audience makes wrong decisions.

The main disadvantage is that gonzo does not give any salvation. It can only blame, castigate and raise questions. Unfortunately, Gonzo cannot answer, it's not in its competence.

Back to the question above: does journalism evolve or it regresses? The answer is possibly positive. During this time, journalism has made significant progress in terms of reliability. Freedom of expression is significantly changed our world. Another question is that developing our life we forget to develop our souls. Therefore, for all these innovations, we just have not grown up. Reading any journalistic text, classical or gonzo, first and foremost you need to think and analyze, understand what are you reading, the purpose of these words. And do not believe propaganda, whether it is objective or subjective.